

THE TORCH

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

April 2007

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans



**MAY 7TH IS ALMOST
HERE!**

Registration forms for the **Civil Rights Team 2007 Statewide Conference** were mailed out during vacation week and should have been received by everyone by now. Even though there is no limit on the number of students you can bring this year, it is still true that “the early registrant gets the workshop.” In other words, the sooner you get your registration form in, the greater the chance that all of your team members will get the workshops of their choosing.

**The deadline for registration is
APRIL 27TH.**

This is an extremely tight timeframe for everyone this year, so get your team members in to choose their workshops as soon as humanly possible. When it is completed, fax your form back to Debi Gray at the number on the form. Debi's life is made much easier if only one person fills out the registration form, in either blue or black ink, and in very legible, clear print.

The line up of workshops is great and everyone will have a workshop with world musician Shamou and two of his band members on the role music has played in civil rights movements. We hope we have included something of interest for all of you over the course of the day.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on May 7th at the Civic Center!

FROM THE DIRECTOR: Now More Than Ever

By Thomas A. Harnett, AAG

Director, Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Unit

Maine Attorney General's Office

As we approach the end of the school year and another year of the CRTP, one only needs to take a look at the news to be reminded just how important the work of the project and the efforts of faculty advisors and students are in today's schools and society. Sadly, the last few weeks have provided too many illustrations of how critical is it to instill in our youth and in our communities the unwavering belief that every single person deserves to be treated with respect and that all students and all persons have the absolute right to feel safe, valued and welcome for who they are. When that core value is ignored or violated too many people get hurt and our community and shared humanity suffer and are sometimes completely shattered.

In early April, nationally syndicated shock jock radio and television personality Don

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Imus launched into a tirade directed at a group of student-athletes, the members of the Rutgers University women's basketball team. The women of Rutgers had just completed the most successful season in school history finishing second in the NCAA basketball tournament. Any sense of pride and accomplishment these young women felt was abruptly wrestled away from them by the words of Mr. Imus and his crew.

Even though Mr. Imus did not know a single member of the team or anything about them, he thought it was perfectly acceptable to direct a venom-laced attack at these scholar-athletes referring to the mostly African-American team as a group of *nappy-headed hos* and *Jigaboos*. With his incendiary racist and sexist words, Mr. Imus forced the Rutgers women to ask *Why us?* and left them unable to revel in their remarkable season.

When Mr. Imus was confronted with the ramifications of his behavior, he resorted to the tired schoolyard excuses of *I was just kidding around; I was just trying to be funny*. However, we learned once again that those excuses do not fly and that words alone, even unaccompanied by threats or physical violence, can and do inflict real pain.

What made these comments even more despicable is that they were uttered on April 4, 2007, 39 years to the day after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. How tragic is it that the anniversary death of one of the world's most celebrated champions of civil rights was marred by such hateful and harmful language? Clearly, we have a long way to go to reach Dr. King's dream of *judging*

people by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin, or in this case their gender as well. Just remember that every time you or one of your students stands up and challenge the hateful words of others, we move closer to Dr. King's dream and reject the actions of Mr. Imus and others who find it fair game to get a laugh at the expense of others.

On Monday, April 16, 2007, in a tragedy of unspeakable proportion, Seung-Hui Cho, a 23-year-old senior at Virginia Tech, opened fire killing 32 people before taking his own life. While, we may never know what mental health demons Mr. Cho was battling, one thing we do know is that his years as a middle and high school student were marked by his being teased, taunted and harassed due to speech difficulties and other aspects of his personality. One of the many *what if* questions we may never know the answer to is could this tragedy have been avoided if someone had extended a hand of friendship rather than the painful barbs of dismissive language that might have led to his isolation and exacerbated his emotional downfall?

Closer to home, just prior to spring break a student or students at Lewiston High School thought it would be *funny* to put a piece of ham in the lunch of a Somali student. Placing a pork product, a substance considered unclean and vile to those who practice Islam, was a cruel and senseless act that shattered any feeling of community at this school. As one Somali student remarked, once this happened *I no longer felt safe in my own school*. Yet again we see that seeking humor at the expense of others by mocking who they are is anything but funny. We can and must do better.

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So, as we approach the end of the school year, remember that the work that you do with your students is so important. And remember that on days when you might feel like you are knocking your head against the wall trying to get others to acknowledge and accept the fact that their words might be hurting others and that those words should be examined and acknowledged as the weapons that they are, you are in the right and you and your students are doing all that you can to improve our schools, the educational experience for all students and members of the school community, and society as well. Just remember that those efforts and that hard work are needed *Now More than Ever*.

Thank you for all that you do.

Thom

RUMORS



Rumors. Every school has them and every school has kids who suffer as a result of them. They are difficult to stop once they get started as nothing takes on a life of its own quite the way rumors do. The question here is, why are we in

the Civil Rights Team Project talking about rumors? Because unfortunately spreading rumors, as well as gossip, is a very powerful and effective way of isolating and humiliating students to the point of making school a dreaded place to be every day for those who find themselves the frequent subject of rumors and gossip in their school.

PBS Kids has developed an excellent resource for educating students on the hows and whys of rumors and gossip spreading. The link to the series of articles and hands on activities is <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/rumor/s/index.html>. Once you get to that site, you can click on the following topics for specific information about each:

Did You Hear?

What the Words Mean

Different Types

Why Do People Do It?

Why It Hurts?

Why It's Wrong

Breaking The Chain

When The Rumors Are About You

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Each of these mini lessons builds upon the previous one and is well-written in kid friendly language with appealing graphics. This is a very good resource that speaks directly to kids that you and your team members can easily adapt into an effective educational piece for members of your school community. Among other things, the site also includes an interactive Rumors Control game and an online Rumors Quiz, both of which are fun and help to reinforce the important points on this topic. In addition, if you have a school web site, this would be an excellent site to include as a link.

MORE RESOURCES FOR GAY STUDENTS AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT THEM



No Longer Alone: A Resource Manual for Rural Gay Youth

GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) has assisted in the production of yet another good resource for those seeking

to support the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning students in their school community, most especially those living in rural communities.

No Longer Alone: A Resource Manual for Rural Sexual Minority Youth and the Adults Who Serve Them is a 23-page manual developed by Christopher Stapel that utilizes a lot of constructive research material from GLSEN. The manual, which was developed to assist adults interested in supporting rural gay youth in helping to create safe places for them, can be found at <http://www.ruralgayyouth.com/>.

The following is a description of the manual:

GLBTQ youth live in virtually every city, town and village in the nation. Nearly every school serves GLBTQ children and every teacher guides and instructs them. While some underlying assumptions about sexuality and gender are implicit in these assertions, these statements indeed reflect the reality that thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people spend their childhoods, and often adulthoods, in rural communities. The 2000 Census reveals that same-sex couples live in over 99% of United States counties. Gay and lesbian people are not alone in rural communities. This being the case, it is peculiar that the vast majority of programs for GLBT young people are in metropolitan areas. While all gay and lesbian students face tremendous challenges, rural students go noticeably underserved. The purpose of this resource manual is to assist concerned adults in creating safe environments for rural gay youth.

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The manual, which is in downloadable form, contains useful information for students, teachers and social service providers as well as information on additional resources. GLBTQ students who are feeling alone, isolated and unwelcome in their communities will particularly benefit from the encouraging first person narratives from other students around the country that are found in the Student section of the manual.



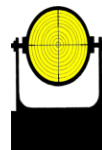
The most recent segment in Teaching Tolerance's ABCs series is *The ABCs of Sexual Orientation* in which it examines [anti-gay discrimination](#) and offers a 5-part plan to help schools create inclusive environments. Click on the links below for more information about how you can help to make your school a safer place for gay and lesbian students.

- [Facts about Anti-Gay Discrimination in Schools](#)
- [April 18: The Day of Silence](#)
- [5 Steps Toward Safer Schools](#)
- [Overcoming Roadblocks: "I believe homosexuality is a sin."](#)
- [Resources for Every Grade](#)

Teaching Tolerance is always a reliable resource and provides information on a variety of topics over the course of each school year. If you have never visited its site, you are missing out on an incredibly valuable resource designed for and by educators. To visit Teaching Tolerance, go to www.tolerance.org.



- For more resources to assist making your school a safer and more inclusive place for gay and lesbian as well as bisexual, transgender, and questioning students, GLAD (Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders) has issued a helpful publication on the legal rights of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning) students in Maine. This publication is available online at http://www.glad.org/rights/Rights_of_LGBTQ_Youth%20in_ME.pdf. It provides an extremely comprehensive explanation of the legal rights that LGBTQ youth are entitled to under Maine law. It also includes a resource section with listings of support organizations, legal and political resources and some excellent publications. If you have a Gay/Straight Alliance at your school, please pass this link on to the advisor in the event he or she is not aware of this valuable resource.



SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS: NOBLE VI

This month's spotlight school is Noble VI located in Berwick in York County. Noble VI is made up of all of the region's 6th graders (plus a group of 5th graders from Berwick, who arrived after the

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school was named). The Noble VI civil rights team is made up of just sixth graders and is led by first time advisors Sarah Muller and Janet Fader.

Noble VI has had a very busy year this year. According to FA Fader, "The spirit of cooperation with this group has allowed us to accomplish so much this year. It has allowed them to accomplish a lot in short periods of time." The Noble team meets once a week during a lunch and recess for one hour and members are willing to stay after to school when they need to in order to work on a project.

So far this year, the team has done the following activities and projects. They read the book *Say Something*, by Peggy Moss, to lower grades and talked about the importance of standing up for other people. In December, they celebrated Holidays Around the World and created a packet of information on various holidays.

They also sponsored a Mix It Up lunch with a Mardi Gras theme during which

the Noble High School jazz band played and beads were sold, the proceeds of which they sent to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Students were all given a number and sat at the table with the corresponding number and answered questions prepared by the team. Team members felt that the presence of the jazz band and availability of the beads made the affair really fun and festive. Everyone danced with masks and their beads during the lunch. The team helped to create enthusiasm for the lunch ahead of time by using a clever advertising scheme. Team members made "mixed up characters," with heads, middles and feet that did not go together, and put them up around the school to advertise the upcoming Mix It Up lunch. According to the team members, this proved to be a great way to get kids in their school excited about the event.

The team also made Quote Posters with quotes on them by famous people and hung them around the school. To go along with that activity, they had a bake sale and when someone bought a

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cookie, they also received a copy of one of the quotes printed on paper and folded up. The team also celebrated No Name Calling Week in January. On the last day of the week, everyone in the school got to wear a hat, but anyone who called someone a name during the day had to take off his or her hat. This helped to emphasize the point of how often we call other people names. The team did a survey after No Name Calling Week to gauge the effectiveness of what the team had done and received a positive response.

A daylong retreat at the high school with the Noble Middle School team was cancelled due to a snow day, despite a tremendous amount of planning by the FAs. Not to be foiled completely, the team had a retreat at their own school during which they did activities together, ate pizza and worked on one of their projects. To end their year, the team is planning on doing some "freeze action" skits in May on the subjects of nasty notes, cliques, and bullying.

Congratulations to Noble VI and FAs Sarah Muller and Janet Fader for a fabulously successful year. In the words of their FAs, "They are an amazingly great group of kids. They love seeing themselves as activists."

Anyone wishing to contact Sarah or Janet for more information about the projects the Noble VI team did this year can email them at sarah.muller@sad60.k12.me.us and jfader@sad60.k12.me.us.

RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT LIVING WITH DISABILITIES



The Hancock Grammar School Civil Rights Team has been working to increase their understanding of the

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experiences of people with disabilities. For teams looking to increase their awareness of what it is like to live with a disability, here is an activity that is simple, straightforward and effective.

Each Hancock Grammar School team member was asked to identify a person with a disability, interview that person and then report back to the team on the results of their interview. The interviews were structured, with the following scripted set of questions developed by the team.

1. What is your disability?
2. What are the biggest challenges you encounter?
3. How do people react to your disability?
4. Has anything positive come from your disability?
5. Are there any misunderstandings people have about your disability?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share with others about your disability?

This type of interview format is a great way for students to get information and to help break the ice of conducting an interview. Students can ask any number of follow up questions if they chose to, but they

can also just stick with their six question format if they are more comfortable with that.

Teams can use the information gathered from the six questions to make a big chart that sets out the answers provided by people with different disabilities. They can also have each team members make his or her own poster using the information gathered during his or her interview. In this way, teams can share what they learn from the interview with other members of their school community. Teams seeking to increase their understanding of disabilities may want to use this interview format and the questions developed by Hancock Grammar School, or they can develop their own set of questions.

Thank you Hancock Grammar School for providing information on this activity!

As a follow on to this activity, teams can publicize information about organizations that help eliminate barriers for “differently abled” people. For example, inform your community about the services provided by local organizations such as Maine Handicapped Skiing (www.skimhs.org) and Northeast Passage (www.nep.org). These organizations provide

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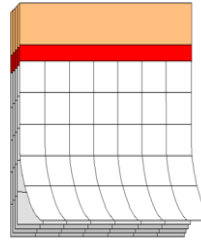
opportunities for adaptive snow skiing, water skiing, golf, handcycling, sled hockey and full contact (wheelchair) rugby. Another organization offering sled hockey, which uses a metal "sled" with runner blades on the bottom and two cut off hockey sticks with picks on one end for pushing, is www.mainesledhockey.org. These organizations prove day in and day out that having a disability, whether from birth or through disease or accident, does not automatically disqualify a person from participating in a wide range of exhilarating sports.



A goalie for the Maine sled hockey team

Also inform people about organizations like Cleveland, Ohio's *Dancing Wheels* (<http://www.gggreg.com/dancingwheels.htm>) a professional dance company that integrates able-bodied and physically disabled dancers into its productions. A quick internet search will turn up a multitude of similar types of organizations doing equally amazing things.

Showing what disabled people can do when given the opportunity can go far in breaking down the barriers that often exist between the able bodied and the differently abled.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

April 25th: Deadline to register for the Statewide Conference in Augusta. See your registration packet for more information.

April 26th: Regional Gathering for high school teams in the Greater Portland region. Deering HS, 3:30 –6:00pm. Each attending team member is requested to bring a dish with an international flavor for the potluck dinner. Attending teams are also asked to bring an ice breaker activity and/or the description of a successful project they would like to share. RSVP to Shana Paradis: parads@portlandschools.org.

May 7th: Civil Rights Team Statewide Conference, Augusta Civic Center.

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“Extra, Extra, Read All About It!”

Has your team just completed a successful project, read a great book, had a good fundraiser, listened to an inspiring speaker, seen a compelling video, or done something that was just plain fun that you would like to share with other teams? Send in a blurb to The Torch and we will include it in a future issue in a column dedicated to what’s happening around the State. Send your news to amy@maine.rr.com with the subject heading: Newsletter item.

This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a state-wide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

G. Steven Rowe --- Attorney General
Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights
Education & Enforcement Unit
Debi Gray, Civil Rights Project Administrator