

# THE TORCH

## CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

April/May 2008

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans



### The Director's Corner

**By Thomas Harnett, Director, CRTP**

April 11, 2008 was one of the more significant dates in the growth and development of the Civil Rights Team Project (CRTP). On that day Brandon Baldwin joined us as the first and only full-time employee of the CRTP and we were thrilled to welcome him to our team. As many of you know, both Debi Lettre and I also work in the area of Civil Rights enforcement. Having Brandon in this newly created position will greatly strengthen the CRTP and make us much more able to serve you and respond to your individual needs.

Late last year, the CRTP began a process of looking for a talented individual who could fill a variety of roles and meet a variety of needs. We began our search for a person who had experience in schools to serve as a statewide school coordinator for all schools with civil rights teams and to work in the area of curriculum development. After a lengthy process that included consideration of over 80 applicants, we were fortunate to find and hire Brandon Baldwin.

Brandon comes to us after teaching at Lawrence Jr. High School for many years. Debi & I are excited about Brandon's addition to our staff and we know that you will be as well when you have the chance to work with him. Brandon has written a short article in this issue of *The Torch* to let you know about the work he will be doing.

Please feel free to contact Brandon just to say *welcome* or about any matters

concerning the Civil Rights Team Project. If you are planning events at your school or with other schools in your area that could benefit from workshops for students definitely get in touch with him. As time goes by, you will learn more about Brandon and his skills and I am certain that you will find him to be a valuable asset and resource.

As we approach the end of the 2007-2008 academic year, I want to thank you and all of your team members for the work that you did to make your schools safer places for all students and all others who enter your school. I wish you well for the remainder of this year and look forward to seeing you and your students in the fall. However, please remember, if you are having any events before school lets out that involve the members of your civil rights team, please feel free to contact Debi Lettre, Brandon Baldwin or me so that we can help and participate in any way that makes sense to you.

Be well and have a great summer.



### What Does the Schools and Curriculum Coordinator Do?

**By Brandon Baldwin**

I recently wrote a memo introducing myself to all of you, and I have been quite pleased with the response so far. Many of you have contacted me and welcomed me aboard the Civil Rights Team Project. I have also been lucky enough to get out around the state and

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visit some of you in your schools. The first month on the job has been wonderful and rewarding already, and I can't wait for the next school year to start (as unpopular as that sentiment may be for those of you about to enjoy a summer vacation).

In my initial memo there was one issue I didn't effectively address: what exactly do I do, anyway? Let me tell you something about what I've been working on so far, which will give you some idea of what to expect in the future. My main project right now is creating a significant online presence for the Civil Rights Team Project. We're investigating several options but our ultimate goal is to have a user-centered, interactive web presence for faculty advisors and civil rights team members. It will facilitate communication between the CRTP and its member schools, but also allow for collaboration and sharing between all of you. We envision a statewide network of civil rights teams and resources: the magic of the annual state convention available at your fingertips, on demand. If everything goes according to plan, we will have something up and running at the beginning of next year.

I have also been working on updating and expanding the resource list you have in your toolbox. There is a wealth of quality material out there for you to use, but you first have to know about it. I'm spending a lot of time with young adult literature, films, and websites, looking for materials that could benefit you and your teams.

Finally, I'm creating materials for use in presentations and lessons. I already have several appearances planned before the summer arrives, getting out to your schools and presenting and working with students.

Of all the things I'm working on right now, this excites me the most, as it provides the opportunity to see what's going on with your teams and in your schools.

In the future I'll of course be working on the pre-existing resources and events that you already know and love: the toolbox, fall faculty advisor and student trainings, and the annual statewide conference.

So to return to the original question of what I do, the answer is everything and anything, as long as it helps you and your teams. I'm here to serve as a resource for you: someone you should feel comfortable calling on. Think of it this way: you know all those things you want to do with your team, but you just can't seem to find the time or maybe the inspiration to plan it? Let me help. I can find the perfect film clip, send you a relevant short story, or design an interactive lesson plan for you to use with your team. I can come and meet with you, your team, or your school. I want to get out around the state and see what's going on, and help you do it even better.

So give me a call or write me an e-mail. I look forward to working with all of you.

Brandon Baldwin Telephone: 626-8548,  
email: [brandon.baldwin@maine.gov](mailto:brandon.baldwin@maine.gov) )



### REMINDER!

**If you would like certificates of recognition for those students who participated on your team this year, please email Debi Lettre the names**

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of your team members at your earliest convenience. Debi's email address is [debi.lettre@maine.gov](mailto:debi.lettre@maine.gov).

 **We want**  
**YOU!**

**MAKE MAY YOUR  
MONTH TO RECRUIT  
FOR NEXT YEAR!**

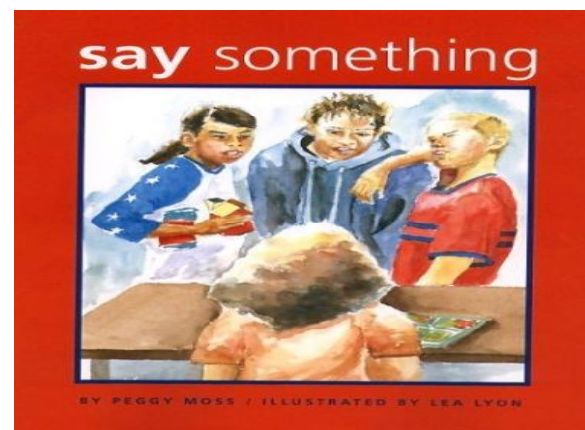
**PROJECT:** Visit a lower grade and introduce students to the Civil Rights Team Project through an explanation of the mission of the CRTP, team building activities or a book reading with follow up discussion (ES, MS, HS)

**Objective:** Spark an interest in the Civil Rights Team in lower grade students who will be in your school next year.

May presents a good opportunity for upper grade students to introduce the Civil Rights Team to students who will be attending their school the following year. It is never too early to recruit new members by sparking an interest in the

project and what it is trying to accomplish. Many students will be relieved to know that there is a student group interested in the issues that CRTP teams tackle every year. Get students thinking about what contribution they can make to that effort even before they arrive at your school in the fall or become old enough to join the team.

Some great ways to introduce the team to elementary grades is to select a book to read and then conduct follow up discussion about the issues the book raises.



A good book for this activity is *Say Something*, by Peggy Moss. *Say Something* even includes the appropriate discussion questions at the

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end of the book that can be used to get students talking about the issues that are the focus of the book. It is a short book with a simple, yet effective message. *Say Something* is available in many libraries and can be obtained through interlibrary loan. It is also available through Tilbury House publishing company and local booksellers.



Another great elementary school book to use to introduce younger students to the CRTP is *Hey, Little Ant*, by Maine author Phillip Hoose. "To squish or not to squish", that is the question posed in this charming children's picture book. The rhyming debate that goes back and forth between a tiny ant and a boy itching to crush it makes for a perfect performance piece for students of any age. Here is an excerpt to pique your interest: "Hey, little ant down in the crack. Can you hear me? Can you talk

back? See my shoe, can you see that? Well now it's gonna squish you flat!

The book does not dictate the choice the boy should make and leaves the reader with the question: What should he do? An engaging discussion on empathy and tolerance can be built around what the decision should be and why. *Hey, Little Ant* is available in many libraries around the state and can be ordered from local booksellers.

High school students can visit their local middle school and conduct a variety of team building activities to demonstrate how easy it can be to get diverse groups of students working and talking together to solve any number of different types of problems. The purpose of using team building exercises is to introduce discussion about social boundaries and how easy it is for people to stay within their own group without considering the possibility of friendship with a much wider range of people. There is a huge variety of team building activities available on the web, in your Tool Box and in issues of *The Torch*.

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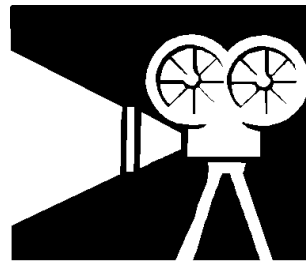
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High school students interested in leading a middle school discussion about a topic raised in a book could use excerpts from *The Misfits*, by James Howe. *The Misfits* tells the story of four best friends trying to survive the seventh grade in the face of all too frequent taunts based on their weight, height, intelligence, and sexual orientation/gender expression. Motivated by the inequities they see around them, they create a new political party during student council elections and run on a platform aimed at wiping out name-calling of all kinds. They lose the election, but they win the support of the school's principal for their cause and their idea for a "No Name-Calling Day" at school.

This book was the genesis for No Name Calling Week and it presents a lot of opportunities for interesting discussion on issues highly relevant to middle school students. This book provides a great example of why it is important to speak out about school climate issues that negatively affect a lot of students.



### NEW MOVIE by Maine Teens: **UNTOLD STORIES**

Project Aware is sponsoring a showing of *Untold Stories*, a dramatic movie made by Maine teens to raise awareness about bullying and harassment. In this film, the actors, known as The Project Aware Players, dramatize two stories about young people who are bullied and harassed by their peers.

The film will be shown on Wednesday, May 21 at the City Theater in Biddeford. The doors will open at 6:30 and the program for the evening will include conversation with young people and

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experts about the topics highlighted in the film. This program is free and open to the public. For more information, call 282-5568. You can learn more about Project Aware by visiting its website at [www.projectaware.net](http://www.projectaware.net).

Please make others in your school community aware of this unique opportunity.

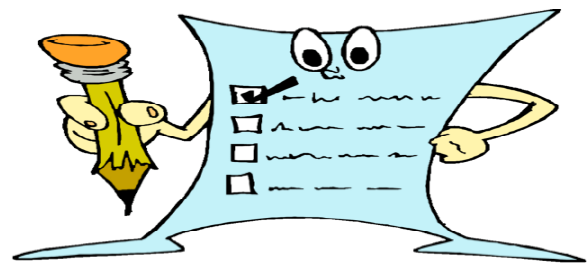


### THE PASSING OF THE TORCH

Thom Harnett described the hiring of Brandon Baldwin as a "milestone" in his article in The Directors Corner. For those of you who have been with us for a while, you know that the first issue of The Torch in January 2006 was one of the earlier milestones for the CRTP. We had long wanted to have better communication with the more than 200 teams located all over the state and a newsletter sounded like a good idea to us. Apparently you thought it was a good idea too,

because your response to The Torch has been overwhelmingly positive. With Brandon's hiring, the rewarding task of researching and writing future issues of The Torch will fall to him. I am incredibly proud to have contributed to the CRTP through many issues of The Torch and I have probably learned more than anyone as a result of all the material I have read in search of items that I considered to be Torch-worthy. However, the demands of my legal practice have made it increasingly more challenging to get new issues of The Torch to you in a timely way. So, I am passing The Torch on to Brandon knowing that he will bring his wide range of talents to the task and make it an even more useful resource for all of you.

### TAKE OUR SURVEY



### HELP BRANDON IMPROVE THE TORCH!

As one of his first tasks with the CRTP, Brandon designed a quick and easy survey that will help him find out what you like best about The Torch and how he can make it better. Please

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take a few minutes and fill out the online survey by going to <http://www.eSurveysPro.com/Survey.aspx?id=04d5a2ea-29ee-4bd8-b155-cab2476df64a&cid=af7ef8e8-795f-4568-8721-91a2072ab6f7>. The survey will only be available online until **May 30<sup>th</sup>** so **DO IT NOW!**



Thank you to those of you who mobilized to organize regional events after receiving notice that the CRTP annual spring conference was cancelled due to budgetary constraints. Your can do spirit is what makes this project so successful in so many school communities around the state.



### “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, that was just plain fun that you would like to share with other teams? Send your news to [Brandon.Baldwin@maine.gov](mailto:Brandon.Baldwin@maine.gov) with the subject heading: Newsletter item.

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*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 Lettre, Civil Rights Project Administrator**  
**Brandon Baldwin, Schools and Curriculum Coordinator**