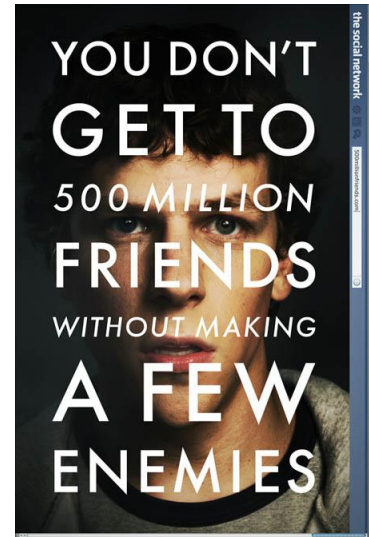




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## Facebook, *The Social Network*, and Cyberbullying

What do the film *The Social Network* and cyberbullying have in common? Let's look past the very obvious Facebook connection. It's there, and it's important, but the more interesting similarity is how people overreact and craft meaning out of nothing.

It makes sense when you consider the current climate: news media and popular culture are obsessed with social networking and especially Facebook. It was big news earlier this year when Facebook reached 500 million users, and Mark Zuckerberg was even awarded *Time's* Man of the Year distinction. Is it any wonder, then, that anything having to do with Facebook will get extra attention?

*The Social Network* is certainly garnering plenty of attention. It's dominating the end-of-the-year lists of best films, and seems poised to dominate the upcoming awards season, including the Oscars. The film is ostensibly about Mark Zuckerberg and the founding of Facebook, but many critics and audiences alike have seen it as something more. They think it must be some sort commentary about the way we communicate in today's world.

Leading the charge in crowning *The Social Network* as some sort of statement piece is Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone*. He boldly stated that the film was "about the nation of narcissists we've become, reshaping who we are on Facebook." He and others have called the film *ironic*.

The problem with this line of thinking is that it's desperately wrong. *The Social Network* is not so much about social networking and Facebook as it is about founding a company. It's a carefully crafted study of relationships and how events can lead to bruised egos and betrayal. The same film could have probably been made about the advent of technologies that led to the first telephone.



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But Facebook is big right now. It's in the news. It's all around us. Some critics made the very human mistake of thinking that *The Social Network* had to be about something more than it appears to be. They didn't have to look far to make certain conclusions. (And to be fair, the film's official theatrical trailer encourages this line of thinking, devoting time to establishing the significance of Facebook in the present.)

Interesting, because I see the exact same thing happening with cyberbullying. Enter a conversation about cyberbullying and it won't be long before you hear some sort of commentary about what the behavior represents. It usually comes across as a more intelligent version of "Kids and their technology these days!" But every instance and example of cyberbullying is held up as some sort of commentary about how we communicate in today's world.

But just like the critics who think that *The Social Network* is some sort of commentary, they're wrong. Cyberbullying is not new behavior. It's old behavior, bullying, done in a new way. It's important that we understand something about cyberbullying, but it's not exactly a new strand of human behavior.

We need to see things for what they really are, but it's as if the presence of cyber-technology clouds our brains and won't allow us to see the simple truth. It makes us think that things are more complex than they really are. It tricks us into thinking that *The Social Network* and cyberbullying are something completely new and some sort of commentary on the way we live today.

They're not. *The Social Network* is a good movie about founding a company, and cyberbullying is bullying behavior. End of discussion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here's what you can expect in this month's newsletter:

**The Director's Cut:** Thom reflects on what we commonly refer to as "those calls."

**Team Spotlight:** Two of our newest teams at Poland Regional High School and Noble High School hit the ground running!

**Activity Ideas:** We want all of our schools to be safe and welcoming places. What message does your school's entryway communicate?

**Pop Culture Winners and Losers:** Some definite opinions on several advertising campaigns and some rare wishy-washiness on several films.

**FA Issues:** On hiatus this month.



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**Relevant Resources:** A statewide group that wants to talk about issues related to people with disabilities? Great! And an intelligent forum for issues of discrimination and prejudice? That's great, too!

**Upcoming Events:** Here comes Martin Luther King Day!

Brandon Baldwin – Newsletter Editor, reachable at [brandon.baldwin@maine.gov](mailto:brandon.baldwin@maine.gov)

*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.*

**Bill Schneider—Attorney General**

**Thomas A. Harnett—Director, Civil Rights Education & Enforcement Unit**

**Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator**

**Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator**



## The Director's Cut

*A monthly column from our Director, Thom Harnett:*

### When the Phone Rings...



Like many children, mine often ask me what I do all day at work. (Though it seems a little ironic to me that the older they get the less they ask me the question.) Sometimes, on days when I have been in court, talking to students, or conducting a training event, that question is easy to answer. On other days the answer might be less clear. On many days a significant amount of my time is spent on the telephone. I field calls from superintendents, principals, teachers, school board members, and other people directly connected to a school or a school district. Those calls cover a range of topics including Maine's Civil Rights Act, civil rights teams, discipline and harassment policies, and incidents that have occurred in schools. On most occasions, those questions have a clear, or at least a pretty clear answer. I feel good when I can provide helpful information and know that I have assisted somebody with solving a problem or working through a thorny issue.

The harder calls... strike that, the *hardest* calls are from the parents. Speaking to a parent who feels that their son or daughter is being deprived of their right to receive an education due to the actions of others and the lack of action by some can be excruciating. When a parent calls you, often in tears, their pain comes right through the telephone line. Unlike the calls I described earlier, in these instances, when the call ends I sometimes feel as if I have done nothing to assist somebody with solving a problem or working through a thorny issue. In an instant, things that I often say, such as *every single student in Maine has the absolute right to go to school in an environment where they feel safe, valued, welcome and respected*, seem like platitudes. In that moment I am struck with the realization that the mere fact everybody has a right to be safe in school does not mean that everybody is.

When I receive a call from a parent, I am never the first person they have called. Some have called friends, elected officials, and private lawyers for advice. All have called their child's school. Some have dealt with every level of personnel in a school district from the bus driver to the classroom teacher and all the way up to the superintendent. The specific details of these calls are not important here; suffice it to say that the calls cover all of the categories under the Maine Civil Rights Act: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, gender, physical and mental disability, and sexual orientation. Though the specifics are not important, the commonalities that run through all of these calls are.

When I talk to parents on the telephone I hear certain things over and over again:



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- “My child no longer wants to go to school. He is afraid.”
- “She always loved school but something has changed.”
- “He tells me they call him these awful names all of the time.”
- “When my daughter asks for help they tell her to ignore them and it will stop. But it never stops.”
- “I have talked to the principal but he said this is how kids act and talk. It has always been this way. Your child is too sensitive.”
- “Please tell me what to do.”

I could go on and on. The parents that call me tell me that they have met with their children’s teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and sometimes even superintendents. To a person they tell me that although promises are made about things changing, nothing happens and things do not improve. They are at their wits’ end.

Please do not get me wrong. I know that there are schools and principals that do their very best to make their schools safe and take issues of harassment seriously. However, the parents that call me do not have kids in those schools. I hear from too many people who provide precise details regarding the failure of schools to address serious issues of student on student harassment. The price these students and their families pay can be pretty high. We have all read or heard stories from other states where students have committed suicide because of how they are treated in their schools. Many of us might think “Well, I’m glad that never happens here in Maine.”

Think again.

The other day I received a call from a mother of a middle school student who returned home from work and found her son hanging from the rafters in the basement. Can you imagine the horror? What went through her mind in that moment? Fortunately, though he was in critical condition for days, her son survived. But her child almost ended his life because he was being taunted in school by other boys who thought he was gay or thought it was funny to direct taunts about sexual orientation his way. Despite asking for help from his school and providing them with descriptions of these events, their son felt nobody was taking him seriously. Granted, this is an extreme example, but it demonstrates the serious harm that can result when issues of harassment are not taken seriously.

When I receive calls from parents I provide whatever advice I can that I think will help. I encourage them to keep at it, to document incidents of abuse and meetings with school officials, and to provide as much support as they can for their children. I tell them to ask school officials for a copy of the school’s harassment policy and to ask them if the



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school is following those policies. I sometimes tell them about the Maine Human Rights Act and how that law makes it illegal to discriminate against students seeking an education. Schools that are aware of conditions that create a hostile environment for some students but do nothing to address those conditions and that environment can be liable under Maine law.

The parents that I talk to are never really interested in laws and lawsuits. They simply want their kids to be able to go to school and learn; not a lot to ask. Their children tell me that they just want someone at the school to listen to them, to take them seriously, to fix it, to care. We owe this to our youth.

And when we give our youth what they are owed, and our schools become safe and welcoming places for all, maybe I won't get so nervous when the phone rings.

## Team Spotlight:

### New Teams Taking Action



#### Poland Regional High School

The civil rights team at Poland Regional High School, just resurrected for the 2010-2011 school year, is off to a great start. They recently conducted a school-wide survey in an effort to learn more about their school's climate. Survey participants were simply asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements.





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Here are several samples:

- Students in my school would feel comfortable reporting harassment, bullying, and racial abuse to school officials.
- Teachers in my school actively work to create a safe and welcoming environment for every student.
- I've heard a student tease or ridicule another student.

The survey questions originated from the Teaching Tolerance website. Students were active in choosing the questions and some selective rewording. (Rarely will you find a ready-made survey that completely suits your needs!)

The team took survey results, created bar and pie graphs for visuals, and shared the results at a recent staff meeting. This is a highly effective way to introduce your civil rights team to staff by demonstrating the clear need for students in addressing issues of school climate. It makes the team relevant.

The data also serves as a rejoinder to anyone who thinks "We don't have those issues here." The information is an eye-opener.

The Poland Regional High School team used the survey results as an introduction to their next activity, where they led staff in examining the use and effectiveness of the school's harassment policy. Nice work! They showed a problem and then presented one piece of the solution. The meeting created a dialogue between staff and students, and energized the team to the point where they were "buzzing with excitement," according to the team's faculty advisors.

At the start of this school year we presented our five expectations of school civil rights teams. The work Poland Regional High School is doing right out of the gate shows how interconnected these expectations are. Their school survey identifies issues in the school (expectation #3). The survey itself and the sharing of the results with staff help the team announce their presence (expectation #2). The use of the survey results in introducing work with the harassment policy is addressing a school issue (expectation #4). And of course they're coming together as a team while doing all of this (expectation #1). Poland High School's civil rights team demonstrates that as long as your team stays active and focuses on the school, you'll meet our expectations.

Special thanks to advisors Nancy Hall and Heather Manchester for sharing their team's many accomplishments with us, and of course for their work in facilitating and advising!

The original Teaching Tolerance survey is available at:

[www.tolerance.org/activity/examining-your-schools-climate](http://www.tolerance.org/activity/examining-your-schools-climate)



And yet another survey tool... Kitty Mitchell at Sebasticook Valley Middle School was kind enough to share her positive experiences with the Million Voice Project. The Million Voice Project uses survey data to identify conditions for student success in school. You can learn more about their eight identified conditions and sign your school up to take their survey. They will tabulate the data and give your school a complete report. Check 'em out:

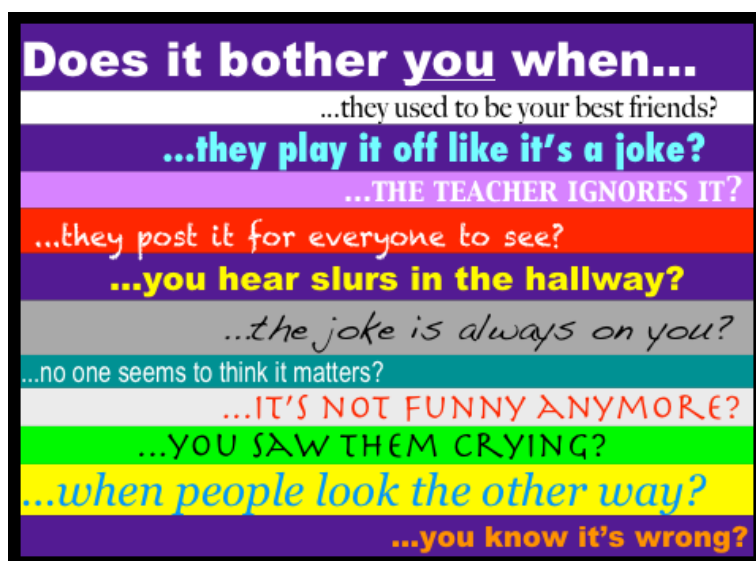
[www.millionvoice.org](http://www.millionvoice.org)

## Noble High School

One of our newest teams, just one month old, is doing some great work at generating publicity. This can be a daunting challenge for new civil rights teams: How do you get students to join something when they don't really know what it is?

The Noble High School civil rights teams went with a series of provocative questions, all beginning with "Does it bother you when...?" A small group of students committed to starting the civil rights team completed that question with civil rights-related issues relevant to their school experiences. The questions were put on posters with information about the next civil rights team meeting and plastered around the school. More than twenty students showed up for their first meeting.

The "Does it bother you...?" question is more than just a publicity stunt, though. The students who showed up for that first meeting had a clear reason for being there and a starting point for their civil rights team education. The theme is also one they can return to throughout the year, offering a framework for their communications and initiatives.







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To that end, the team has a website with a direct link from the Noble High School page. Their site features a compilation of all of the “Does it bother you...?” questions. They are also creating team patches with the question.

Thanks to the small horde of seven advisors (yes, seven!) for their work in starting a team at Noble High School. The kids are off to a great start, and we look forward to hearing what they can do to address some of the issues that bother them in their school.

You can see the Noble High School civil rights team website at:

<http://server2.noble-hs.sad60.k12.me.us/~dparr/CRSJ/Welcome.html>

## Activity Idea: First Impressions of Your School



“You never get a second chance to make a first impression.”

Realtors seem to know this better than anyone. Turn on your tv and watch one of the many shows featuring home improvement for the purpose of upping a home’s sale price. The realtors and design experts always highlight a home’s curb appeal and the first impression prospective buyers will have when they approach and open the front door.

I visit a lot of schools around the state, and I usually get a feel for the school climate almost immediately upon stepping inside. What you see when you first walk into a school building has an effect on how you view that school. There are certain things you can just *tell* about a place based on your first impression.

Thom and I often repeat that school should be a place where all students feel safe, valued, welcome, and respected. (In fact, we repeat it so often that it’s almost become the Civil Rights Team Project’s unofficial motto.) Two simple questions worth asking, then:



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- What effect is your school's entryway having on students and visitors?
- Does it communicate that everyone should feel safe, valued, welcome, and respected?

Here we have a simple activity that will help you and your civil rights team analyze the entryway to your school and think about the first impressions it helps create. We'll then move on to what you and your team can do to improve that all-important first impression.

## **The Activity:**

Ask your team this simple question for an optional pre-activity primer:

- How do you think new students feel on their first day at a new school?

Discuss. When finished, tell your team that they're going on a mini-field trip. Make sure they each have something to write with and something to write on. That's all they need to know.

Now go outside the school on a mini-fieldtrip. Approach the front entrance to the school. Stop.

Tell your team that you want them to imagine that they are visitors or new students to the school. They have never set foot inside the school before.

They are about to enter for the first time. For this activity, we will silently enter the school, stop, and look around for one minute. At the end of this minute, we will write down everything that we notice.

Remember: you have never been to this school before. You are simply going to look around and then record everything you have noticed.

(Do it.)

When finished, go back to your meeting place. Using a white/black board or chart paper, record their observations on a group list.

When this list is finished, ask:

- What first impressions does our school give off? (Refer to the list!)
- How do you think visitors and new students feel when they enter our school?

And of course, the action piece of this activity could, and should be:



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- What can we do to make our school's entryway feel welcoming?
- How can we communicate to all students that they should feel safe, valued, welcome, and respected here?

We think that this is a good activity for every single civil rights team in the state. It is a great opportunity for your team to get creative. It can be a small project or a major initiative, involving just your team or others.

## Pop Culture Watch: December

The Pop Culture Watch is where we offer our opinions on what's going on in popular culture from a civil rights perspective!



### You Know What Would Sell Some Cupcakes? Blackface!

Go watch this. (No, don't. Because you can't. It has been removed.)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR7raIRW3Uc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR7raIRW3Uc)

But here's what you would have seen...

Hop hop cupcakes!

Duncan Hines, what were you thinking? Hip hop cupcakes seem like a dumb idea anyway, but black frosting? *And* the bug eyes? *And* the thick-lipped mouths? This looks suspiciously like a blackface minstrel show. You just racialized cupcakes. Cupcakes!

Maybe this was intended to be... cute? At some point, though, someone has to get to speak up and suggest that maybe, just maybe, this might be problematic. The problem isn't just that this video was created, but that it was allowed to see the light of day. It took a lot of people's approval and ignorance to get this out there.

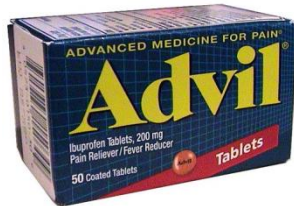




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Just 30 minutes after I started writing this, though, the video clip vanished. Enough people spoke up and called attention to this disaster that Duncan Hines responded.

Word of advice, though: figure these things out beforehand. It will save you time, money, apologies, and face.



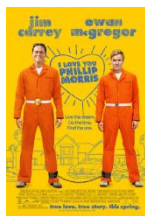
## Hey, Duncan Hines! More Like This!

Multicultural advertising really shouldn't be difficult. And Advil's recent ad spot shows just how easy it can be.

A wide range of people get headaches and body pains. Advil shows this through a pastiche approach of different people holding a box of Advil. Rather than focus on one spokesperson, they rapidly cut pictures of many different people. Diversity made easy, and diversity done right.

There's a good chance you've seen it already, but check out the ad here:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPa7ltzJXXQ&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPa7ltzJXXQ&feature=related)



## Well, What Took So Long?

*I Love You Phillip Morris* isn't in any Maine theaters, but it's on its way. It has been a long journey. The film has already shown overseas but has had difficulty seeing the light of day here in the U.S. It has had several distributors, a re-editing job, and multiple delays for its release date.



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Why? Because it's about the romance between two gay men, played by Jim Carrey and Ewan McGregor. Hollywood just struggles with mainstream pictures depicting homosexuality; they seem a bit uncomfortable with it.

Well, get over it, Hollywood. *I Love You Phillip Morris* may or may not be any good, but it's certainly good to finally see it released.



## Should We Be Laughing at This?

*Four Lions* is a British satire on terrorism. Finding humor in this subject matter is bold. But does it work?

I certainly think so. The film portrays a group of would-be terrorists as bumbling and misguided. Their grasp of Islam is shaky and selective. Their desire to blow themselves and others to bits doesn't stem so much from their faith as from some pathetic need to belong to something and feel important.

It separates terrorism from religion. This separation is made more distinct by showing other Muslims in their everyday lives who have no interest in radical jihad.

And the film can be very, very funny. (Although the British accents are sometimes borderline incomprehensible for my American ears.)

So why the question mark and not a thumb up? Humor and especially satire is dangerous territory. You hope that everyone will get the joke and see how the film separates Islam and fanaticism, but worry that some might only see a group of Muslim terrorists.



## Relevant Resources:



Disability is one of the protected categories in the Maine Civil Rights Act. In speaking with students around the state, we know that students with disabilities are often targeted in our schools. We also know that *retard* and *retarded* are used regularly as insults and pejorative terms, often in ways that ostensibly have nothing to do with mental disabilities.

We want our students to understand the hurt they can cause when they target students with disabilities or use this insulting language. Anyone can deliver this message, but when it comes from people with disabilities, it resonates much more.

Speaking Up For US (SUFU) is a network of people with disabilities organized to give them voice. Rather than have someone speak for their interests, they speak for themselves as *self-advocates*.

Our introduction to SUFU came last spring when we had three of their self-advocates speak about their school experiences and the negative power of words like *retard* as part of a panel during our spring conference. Their voices were so powerful that we began looking for ways to increase their audience.

Here we go. SUFU has organized volunteer self-advocates who are ready and willing to come to your school for workshops or assemblies about their school experiences and prejudice and harassment based on disabilities. Volunteers are located in Houlton, Bangor, Ellsworth, Albion, Augusta, Portland, South Portland, Biddeford, and Sanford: they've got the whole state covered.

If your civil rights team has an upcoming event that would benefit from the voice of a SUFU self-advocate, we encourage you to contact SUFU Advisor Irene Mailhot, who will establish contact between you and a local volunteer. We think that SUFU self-advocates would be a valuable addition to any Diversity Day or civil rights event, and encourage you to get in touch with Irene.

She can be reached at: [sufucentral@sufmaine.org](mailto:sufucentral@sufmaine.org) or 1-877-207-4077





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And you can learn more about the good work SUFU is doing all around the state at:

[www.sufumaine.org](http://www.sufumaine.org)

\* \* \* \* \*

## Microaggressions

And now for something completely different...

It's great when you discover something that effectively taps into the great potential of the internet and uses it in a valuable way. The website *Microaggressions* is doing just that, offering people the opportunity to share their everyday experiences of prejudice in short form, or microblogging.

The end result is thought-provoking, frustrating, sometimes sloppy, and a powerful example of how the internet can be a democratizing tool for story sharing. Each of the shared incidents is its own story, but taken as a group, they show how prejudice has an accumulative effect. A comment here, an overheard joke there, an ignorant question... it all adds up.

Here's what *Microaggressions* has to say about itself:

*this project is a response to "it's not a big deal" - "it" is a big deal. "it" is in the everyday. "it" is shoved in your face when you are least expecting it. "it" happens when you expect it the most. "it" is a reminder of your difference. "it" enforces difference. "it" can be painful. "it" can be laughed off. "it" can slide unnoticed by either the speaker, listener or both. "it" can silence people. "it" reminds us of the ways in which we and people like us continue to be excluded and oppressed. "it" matters because these relate to a bigger "it": a society where social difference has systematic consequences for the "others."*

*but "it" can create or force moments of dialogue.*

We highly encourage you to check out the site. You may find some great posts and topics for dialogue with your team.

<http://microaggressions.tumblr.com>



## Upcoming Events:

### **January 17: Martin Luther King Storytime**

Augusta, Barnes & Noble, 9  
Marketplace Drive, 11:00 am

Children's event featuring stories about Martin Luther King and activities and crafts. For more information call 621-0038.



### **January 17: A Children's Celebration of Martin Luther King**

Brunswick, Bowdoin College, Moulton Union Main Lounge, 10:00 am-1:30 pm

Come join authors Charlotte Agell and Rohan Henry in this Bowdoin College Library event. Free and open to the public.

### **January 17: Youth Community Service Event**

Portland, Holiday Inn by the Bay, 9:00 am

Area youth have the opportunity to breakfast together and then perform community service in various locations. Sponsored by the Portland NAACP and the Maine Interfaith Youth Alliance.

To sign up, e-mail [volunteer@meiya.org](mailto:volunteer@meiya.org) or call 807-4283.

### **January 18: Martin Luther King Celebration with "Walk Together Children"**

Farmington, UMF, Merrill Hall, Nordica Auditorium, 7:00 pm, \$10 donations accepted at the door

Renowned actress Vinnie Burrows presents poetry, prose, and song chronicling the African American experience. Sponsored by the Maine Peace Council and the UMF Peace Activists in Training.

For more information on this event, call 778-7292.

For more information on Vinne Burrows and her work, visit [www.vinieburrows.com](http://www.vinieburrows.com)



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## **January 22: No Bullying Storytime**

Augusta, Barnes & Noble, 9 Marketplace Drive, 11:00 am

Storytime in the Children's Department featuring stories with a no-bullying theme. For more information call 621-0038.

## **January 24-28: No Name-Calling Week**

Has it really been eight years? Yes! GLSEN's eight annual "No Name-Calling Week" is coming soon. Their site features all kinds of great resources and ideas, too.

[www.nonamecallingweek.org](http://www.nonamecallingweek.org)

## **January 25: "Martin Luther King and the American Dream" Lecture and Exhibit**

Biddeford, University of New England, George and Barbara Bush Center Boardroom, 5:30 pm, free and open to the public

Frank A. Thomas, Senior Pastor of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, celebrates the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Followed by a photo exhibition and reception at 6:30.

For more information, call 602-2461 or go to:

[www.une.edu/calendar/display.cfm?customel\\_datapageid\\_298012=404737](http://www.une.edu/calendar/display.cfm?customel_datapageid_298012=404737)

## **March 2: End the R-Word Day**

Join the Special Olympics in an effort to end use of the words *retard* and *retarded*. For more information, visit their site at:

[www.specialolympics.org/spread-the-word-to-end-the-word.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/spread-the-word-to-end-the-word.aspx)

or

[www.r-word.org](http://www.r-word.org)