

The Impact of the Center – Beyond One-Day/Weekend Events

“So what is it that the Center does?”

We get that question a lot – and I am not always sure about the best way to answer it.

It is tempting to be swayed by those who talk about having an “elevator speech” – that I only have a three-minute window of time in which to communicate the core of what we are about.

From that perspective, it might seem that the best we can do is to share about our annual Social Justice Conference with Youth, or the Culturing Compassion weekend retreats that we do, or the workshops and presentations we offer to youth and educators.

But our programs and services are not just meant to be one-day or one-weekend events. They are meant to be catalysts for processes of further learning-and-action; and our role as on-going collaborators and encouragers is essential.

This issue of our newsletter highlights several stories of such learning-and-action.

In most cases, the idea for the process was generated by young people themselves; on occasion, by an adult who works with them. In all cases, the young people involved have been central participants.

The process reminds me of a driver’s education instructor, accompanying someone, but not making their decisions or controlling their actions; or of a midwife, paying careful attention to the cues of the life emerging from another, but not being the one who gives birth.

They are some of the stories – but there are many others.

And we are confident that, like the proverbial iceberg, we only know a fraction of the stories that are taking place.

“So what effects does the Center have?”

We get that question a lot, too – and I am not always sure whether the answer we have is the one that people expect.

Education, and non-profit work in general, is often driven by requests for observable, measurable results.

We certainly can provide data that begins to address that question – about the number of participants in our conference, retreats, workshops, and presentations; about the rankings and comments on the evaluations that they turn in; about reports we receive about their subsequent learning-and-action.

But there are deeper stories to share – out of minds, hearts, and spirits shaped by continued wrestling with questions, and responding with integrity and courage to the insights and visions that emerge.

This issue of our newsletter concludes with glimpses into two such stories.

We know of many others – and trust that there are still more of which we are unaware.

We offer these stories as an invitation to those who have such stories, to share them – with others, and with us.

Such sharing invites all of us to, borrowing a phrase from the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, imagine “the future waiting to be born.”