

Stories that Unfold, Deepen Over Time

When people ask me how the Center got started, I talk about the numerous times over the years in which students took an issue and ran with it, and I did my best to keep up.

It is their passions, their actions, their lives that have given rise to the Center.

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Elizabeth Petheo, a 1997 graduate of Cathedral High School, is one of those students.

While at CHS, Liz was the student who first expressed interest in participating in JRLC's "Day on the Hill". (See earlier article, "The Story of a "Day on the Hill.") That interest created the opportunity for her, and about a dozen others, to be the first group of youth in Minnesota to do so. JRLC staff were impressed, and began to encourage youth from other schools and faith communities to participate, as well. (This year, there were over 100 young people, from several schools.)



(left to right) Katie Rothstein, Carol Dombrovski, and Liz Petheo visit with Bishop John Kinney at Day on the Hill, March, 1997 (photo courtesy of St Cloud Visitor)

While in college at the University of St Thomas, Liz interned with the late Senator Paul Wellstone, and the U.S. Department of State in Budapest, Hungary, working on the Human Rights portfolio.

After graduating in 2001 (with a degree in Russian, Central and East European Studies and Political Science), she accepted a position at the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA), during which she also volunteered with the New Tactics in Human Rights Project at the Center for Victims of Torture, and accepted a summer fellowship to work with the United Nations in Kenya.

Then came her completion of a graduate degree in sustainable international development from Brandeis University (2006), followed by work as a policy fellow in Washington DC for the Center for Victims of

Torture, and several months with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington DC think-tank.

Liz currently works as the Livelihood Program Coordinator with the American Refugee Committee in Northeast Sri Lanka.

“Much of my interest in social issues,” she writes, “came from my early exposure through opportunities like ‘Day on the Hill.’”

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Erinn Joyce-Hawkins, a 1995 graduate of Cathedral, is another of those students. On the surface, Erinn’s story may not seem as dramatic – but it is just as powerful.

Although her time at the College of St Benedict’s included a semester in Guatemala, her life then and now has been quite focused in central Minnesota. A large part of that focus are the three children that she and her husband Andy have. (She also spends time volunteering with Birthline, and has assisted in our Culturing Compassion retreat program.)

A while ago, Erinn sent an e-mail describing how her son Tommy, a second grader, had come home one day to explain that his class was beginning a project to, as he said his teacher put it, “help the poor people.”

“So I raised my hand,” said Tommy, “and asked, ‘Can’t we call them ‘people who are poor’, since they’re people first?’”

Erinn also shared that story at an open house gathering in December, 2006, of former and current students involved in the Center. While that gathering included stories from other students who were involved in work in other nations, and in programs like AmeriCorps and Teach for America in the U.S., it was Erinn’s reminder about the vital role of parents that the participants referred to most often in their follow-up reflections.