

Tenth Annual Conference Reveals, Yields Vital Impacts

It seemed like a good idea ten years ago – bringing together youth, educators, and community resource people for a day of exploration of various peace-and-justice issues – but none of us involved in planning that first conference, in the fall of 2000, could have foreseen:

- the growth in numbers (our 2009-10 conferences [October for 9th-12th graders, February for 6th-8th graders] involved a total of over 450 youth)
- the geographical expansion of participating schools (from as far north as Duluth, as far west as Morris, as far south as Winona, and as far east as Hudson and Osceola, WI)
- the kinds of long-range effects on participants, as evidenced by our keynoters' sharing



Keynote speaker Micah Bot-Miller sharing about his journey of learning-and-action since first participating in the conference as an 8th grader in 2002.

Each of the keynote speakers certainly had significant stories to share about their personal journeys of learning-and-action; but our primary reason for inviting them was not to shine the spotlight on the stage, but on those who were sitting in the chairs.



Planning committee members lead small-group discussions at the beginning of the conference day

An array of workshops, ranging from issue-topics (e.g. homelessness, domestic violence, various forms discrimination, sexual assault, genocide, global warming) to strategies for action (e.g. nonviolence, art as a tool for social justice), gave participants the chance to explore issues about which they are passionate.



Discussion in a workshop on nonviolence

Today showed me that kids can make a difference; we don't have to wait for an opportunity or an adult to force us to do something. (student evaluation)

It was empowering to hear how local, average students could make such a great impact on the world for social justice. (student evaluation)

It makes you think it's more possible for kids my age to contribute. (student evaluation)



Student planning committee members: (L-R, Bottom row: Mariah Nix, Katie Galvez, Jeff Rueter, Kari Neutzling, Andezu Orionzi, Sarah Terwey, and Brody Hagemeyer. Second row: Elizabeth Petheo [keynote speaker], Ni'mah Warfa, Maddy Pesch, Laura Briese, Max Albrecht, Conrad Lenzmeier, Megan Schwegman, and Anni Johnson. Back row: Diana Elhard, Alex Generous, Kris Mastin, Kim Tran, Megan Holler, Nick Theisen, and Kevin LaNave)

Keeping in touch with the schools in the months since these conference days, we have heard of:

- the formation of a social justice club (*Sauk Rapids/Rice*)
- an ice-cream fundraiser for Kids Against Hunger (*Apollo HS*), a music extravaganza for Anna Marie's Alliance (*Tech HS*), and an Empty Bowls fundraiser (*Osceola HS*)

Peggy Palumbo (*Crosswinds*) recently wrote, "Some of our students have become instrumental in organizing a Hope for Haiti this summer – a hike/march through the park by our school, then a carnival-type atmosphere (crafts, games, Caribbean music, etc.) followed by a variety show (staff, students, and alum.) Thanks for providing inspiration!"

We can probably not even imagine the stories that will emerge during the next ten years!