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"PROMOTING PEACE AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE" LIONS-QUEST SKILLS FOR ACTION

by Rich Cairn

"It gives students a sense of power to actually go out into the community and make a difference. It helps to lessen their sense of frustration, and makes them less likely to strike out at others because of abuse or other violence in their own lives."

*Karen Musicaro, Religion Teacher,
Bishop Ford Central Catholic High
School*

Students at Bishop Ford Catholic Central High School in Brooklyn, New York have completed several violence-prevention service projects as part of their participation in the Skills for Action program. Seniors facilitated eight-week sessions to orient freshmen, including conflict resolution and role playing.

Students held multicultural awareness days to foster better understanding of a diverse school population which includes Hispanic, Polish, Russian, Haitian, Irish, Italian and African American students. Students also conducted a survey of 5th and 6th graders' attitudes about intimidation and violence, and then presented and discussed their findings to the younger students.

Skills for Action was developed by Quest International and Lions Clubs International in partnership with the National Youth Leadership Council. This unique high school service-learning curriculum offers teachers a complete step-by-step program to involve students in significant

service-learning experiences. Specific yet flexible lessons help students boost problem-solving, planning, teamwork, and organizational skills as they need them for projects. School, community, parents and students work together to nurture young people and address community needs.

"Young people are deeply troubled about the escalating violence in their lives and are determined to do something about it," says Sue Keister, Vice President of Programs and Development, Quest International. In *Exploring the Issues: Promoting Peace and Preventing Violence*, students learn conflict management skills and apply them in real-life contexts through service-learning. They research sources of conflict in their communities and discover who is already addressing violence through community agencies and activism: they work with these resource people on-site to help others avoid violence and learn to resolve conflicts peacefully.

As a result, they become local peacemakers — empowered and motivated to model peaceful behaviors and eager to contribute to their schools and communities. Keister emphasized, "This is the ultimate goal of violence prevention programs, and teaching others peace through service is the most powerful way to learn it."

Study of violence and peace at Bishop Ford included class speakers from organizations such as Pax Christi, and use of "Teaching Tolerance" curriculum. Speaker Warren Whitlock, a Bishop Ford

graduate and presently a Deputy commissioner in the Mayors office, spoke with students about their role in government to initiate changes in crime-ridden neighborhoods. He encouraged them to become active citizens by joining together with concerned neighbors.

Students spent a day at the internationally known, Maryknoll Community, talking and learning about cooperative learning and the interdependence of nations and people. Students each researched a specific question related to issues from gun control to gang violence. Study of the history of gang violence in America helped put current problems in perspective. Students were also able to discuss personal experiences such as how it feels to be perceived as gang members when they're really just hanging out with friends.

The study of violence raised many issues which might have left students feeling even more hopeless without the experience of taking those issues head on, according to teacher, Karen Musicaro. "The combination of the in-depth materials on violence with direct service making peace really made a difference."

Working Toward Peace and Skills for Action, available with training and technical assistance, are available from Quest International, P.O. Box 4850, 1984 Coffman Rd., Newark, OH 43058-4850 (800) 837-2801. ▲