

CHICAGO YOUTH REACH FOR THE SKY
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The Parable of the Little Parrot came to life with the Chicago Youth Division Culture Festival, "Reach for the Sky," as 300 youth performers converged in an energetic, inspiring display of unity Aug. 14 at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, Ill.

Youth took responsibility for the performance from start to finish. They planned and directed the performance, designed the set and costumes, wrote original songs and filled the auditorium for the show.

The theater group enacted the Buddhist parable about a small parrot, who, in the face of danger, risks everything and never gives up to save her friends in the forest. Instead of flying away and saving herself, she shows determination and courage by dousing a raging forest fire with tiny drops of water.

"We chose the story of the little parrot because it was about the determined efforts of one individual who actually saved her entire community," says Anne-Marie Akin, who helped produce the show and recruited many of its participants. "I think that in this difficult time in our history, it is really hard to feel that we as individuals can have any impact in society. We wanted to give courage to the youth of today—so that they will have confidence that their actions can make a difference.

"On a deeper level," she continues, "I believe that the story of the little parrot is the story of SGI President Ikeda. It's the story of Mr. Toda and Mr. Makiguchi as they challenged the Japanese military regime. And it's the story of all SGI members as they struggle valiantly in their communities to create peace. We set out on our journey toward this performance with the goal of each person deepening his or her understanding of the mentor-disciple relationship. Each of us, as we struggled and overcame obstacles and negativity over the last six months, had the opportunity to share in President Ikeda's struggle."

Between acts, performances by band members, rappers, dancers, and African drummers complemented the storytelling. Backstage, the Soka Group, Byakuren, directors and people movers helped hold the performance together.

All the youth involved in the festival encountered obstacles and challenges as they prepared for this event. Like the little parrot, though, they never gave up.

They used their involvement in the culture festival as a tool to deepen their faith and further their practice and understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

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