

NEW YORK YOUTH MAKE INROADS IN VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE

The impact of Victory Over Violence—the SGI-USA nationwide youth activity to address violence—has certainly been far-reaching. Equipped with the VOV information packet, video, pledge forms bookmarks and pins, more than 1,700 districts have sponsored unique meetings promoting topics of discussion about passive violence, statistics, personal experiences, gang violence, etc. One message is clear: The SGI-USA youth are determined to make a difference.

A metropolis of nearly 8 million people, New Yorkers are no stranger to violence. “In fact, New York City has one of the highest rates of releases of parolees,” says Lois Litvin, the Youth Peace Committee coordinator in New York. “There seems to be a culture of violence and tension that is cultivated here. Ironically, I heard New York is rated as one of the top 10 safest cities in the U.S. I think it’s because people are so aware of the potential for violence. Because some violent incidents occurred that really hit home, the YPC of New York initiated the VOV information packet and video to try to address the issue.”

To kick off last August’s Victory Over Violence campaign, the New York youth division sponsored a preparatory meeting on Aug. 3, to demonstrate how to use the VOV information kit and video. Denise Royal, the former YPC coordinator gave a background on the VOV campaign, followed by encouragement. More than 100 youth leaders broke the ice by taking part in the Treasure Hunt Activity. “It was a fantastic opportunity to learn about what we had in common, as well as some of our differences, but most of all it was just plain fun!” said one participant. Overall this event was a real confidence booster and a perfect way to distribute the videos and information packets. Everyone got revved up to host their own meetings within their local SGI-USA districts.

According to Lois, the members have since reported the many creative ways that they’ve used the information kits and videos to promote dialogue, both in the SGI-USA and in the community. For instance, district leader Christina Mulligan from Newburg Renaissance District in Upstate New York reported that members set up an SGI booth in at a local fair in Newburg, where they shared information about the SGI and Victory Over Violence, answered questions and collected over 100 signed pledge forms.

“So many youth have been reporting to the YPC the many successes of the VOV meetings that have taken place throughout the five boroughs and Upstate,” continues Lois. “They have been visiting areas in New York supporting meetings and in the community. One women’s division member, who is a public school teacher, was so encouraged by the video that she shared it with her principal. Together they’re working on getting it approved by the local Board of Education in Queens to use it to promote a school campaign against violence. Similar things are happening in a Long Island school.”

On a more personal note, Lois, who works as an industrial hygienist for the United States Department of Labor—Occupational Safety Health Administration. Her supervisor acknowledged each employee’s community activities. Over the past three years she regularly shared with her boss her excitement about her involvement as a YPC and SGI-USA member.

Lois gives lectures on workplace violence and other related issues, which was one of her main focuses in graduate school at Hunter College. Recently, she showed the Victory Over Violence packet and video to her boss and co-workers. It seemed to be a natural fit.

Her boss was so impressed that he sent a copy to the regional office administrators with the objective of incorporating it into the region's WIDER (Workforce Involvement Diversity Enhancement Recognition) Program, a program designed to unite management and workers in morale building and creating a more humanistic work environment. Additionally, the video addresses and supports the initiatives of United States Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman—particularly her goal to ban the use of child labor globally.

As a result of her efforts, Lois received the 1999 Public Service Recognition Award for her outstanding contributions to the community from the U. S. Department of Labor on June 30. "This award is a result of a joint effort of my Buddhist sponsor and fellow co-worker, Alba Quiñones—who also was commended. She always nurtured me and encouraged me to do more. My job is very challenging, but the training I received in the SGI has been so valuable. It's taught me that doing kosen-rufu means doing my best at work—it's not separate for me."

Currently, the New York Youth Peace Committee is working with the Junior High and High School Divisions to create an exhibit and symposium as a continuation of the Victory Over Violence activities.

— *STEPHANIE CELANO*