

**GANG SYMPOSIUM HELD AT NEW YORK CULTURE CENTER
'DON'T GIVE UP ON US'
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“What can we do for our children?” must have been the question many participants had on their minds during the annual Gang Symposium “Red, White, and Blue...Colors of Inner-City America,” held for the first time at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center on Oct. 18. This annual event was sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies. More than 200 people attended, most of them case workers and social workers representing more than 50 social youth agencies in New York City.

The symposium opened with the SGI-USA Youth Peace Conference’s nonviolence promotion video *Quest for Peace*. Afterward, Paula Miksic, on behalf of the SGI-USA, welcomed all the participants, most of whom were not acquainted with the SGI. “It is my sincere wish that today’s dialogue will create the solidarity and the will to take action that will manifest the roots of our common humanity,” she said, “for the sake of one young person and for the sake of peace.”

Leroy Jordan Jr. delivered a powerful lecture on the history and background of gangs in the United States. Mr. Jordan, a certified gang specialist, violence prevention educator and substance abuse professional, opened his speech by telling the audience: “Why I am here this morning is because I have four children. And I stand for children, every day of my life.” He continued: “I also stand before you as the father of a recently murdered son. So this work is personal.”

Cathy Sally, assistant principal at Erasmus Hall High School of Humanities and the Performing Arts in Brooklyn, was one of the many who were inspired by Mr. Jordan’s lecture. “I have been to workshops on this subject that nearly put me to sleep,” she said. “But today I was completely captivated.”

Five teenagers who had gang-related experiences gave a panel presentation. The teens presented experiences and answered questions from the audience. The quick and eloquent answers by the teenagers often impressed the adult audience and made them eager to ask more. The dialogue between them ranged from asking practical advice such as “How can I prevent my daughter from joining a gang?” to just simply “What can adults do for their children?”

Often the answers were very simple and direct. “Don’t give up on us,” said Daniel Styvacent, “and just love us.”

Atiba Joseph, a teenage representative from the SGI-USA, stressed the important role of parents. “My mother was always encouraging me,” he said. “We need someone always telling us we can be somebody.”

Brian Moriarty, coordinator of the symposium and the Federation’s Youth Services Network, gave a great deal of credit to the SGI-USA for the success of the event. Referring to the SGI-USA members, Mr. Moriarty stated: “They are the nicest people I have met in my life. They are energetic, very involved and committed.”

Sean Grover, a program administrator with Brooklyn Psychiatric Centers and SGI-USA member who helped facilitate the symposium, commented: “We all felt refreshed by today’s dialogue. The kind of collaboration that took place here, between the SGI-USA and the Federation’s Youth Services Network, is crucial to nurturing and developing a culture of peace.”