

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS EXHIBIT VISITS NORTHERN FLORIDA
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On Oct. 14, a bustling crowd of dozens of curious and interested onlookers converged on the first day of the "Treasuring the Future: Children's Rights and Realities" exhibition, hosted by the Jacksonville, Fla., SGI-USA members and co-sponsored by the Avenues Mall. Children quickly surrounded the exhibition's panels to observe and interact with its many displays.

The grand opening took place with a number of community dignitaries and co-sponsors who were highly supportive of the exhibition. Jacksonville City Councilman Lake Ray presented a Mayoral Proclamation making the date "Children's Rights and Realities Day."

Keynote speaker Dr. Duane Dumbleton, president of Florida Community College at Jacksonville-Kent Campus, observed: "[This exhibition] gives us a chance to focus one more time on one of the most essential elements not only in the history of the planet but in the future of the planet.... You only can serve at your current level of awareness. What does this obligate us to do? To know more, to understand more, to try to find ways in which we can be of more service to this world of humanity."

SGI President Ikeda, in his message for the opening ceremony stated, "I sincerely hope that this exhibit will become a significant milestone to further awaken people to the importance of children's rights and the dignity of human rights."

A group from St. John's Country Day School donned headbands with the South African flag to entertain us with a lively choral performance. SGI-USA Senior Advisor Fred Zaitso thanked the Avenues Mall and commented, "I hope this exhibit will strengthen dialogue among children and those who visit the exhibition, and that it will expand the message of peace and hope in this wonderful community of Jacksonville."

In related activities during its 16-day stay, passers-by were entertained in the mall stage area by the Edward Water College's nationally renowned concert choir, the International Peace Performers, which included refugee children from eastern Europe and a choral group from nearby Paterson Elementary School.

The media took note of the exhibition with two newspaper articles, a TV segment on opening day and coverage of the grand opening by the community-oriented public radio show Jacksonville Exchange. This coverage, along with the high pedestrian flow in the mall, in excess of 20,000, generated tremendous community awareness of the SGI-USA and the exhibition.

Two satellite panel discussions concurrently held at the University of North Florida placed a local as well as national focus on challenges facing children. The first, on the theme "Overcoming the Culture of Violence, Its Impact on Youth in the 21st Century," was co-sponsored by the local United Nations Association chapter. The audience viewed SGI-USA Youth Peace Committee's Victory Over Violence exhibit, setting the tone for an in-depth look at passive violence.

The other panel discussed the state of foster care in Florida. Both forums reached surprisingly similar conclusions. Cathryn Goldman, a panelist from the State Attorney's Office, said: "It's imperative for each of us to take responsibility for every child. Whether or not they look or talk like us, they are still our community, in the broad sense, our world's children. Until we look at them as our own, we're not going to be living up to our

potential.”

The preparations for this event began about eight months prior to the exhibition’s arrival. At that time, local members started having regular meetings to help create an activity that would be remembered and well received by both the members and the viewing public. We sought out interested people and started brainstorming for ideas.

Little by little the final plan of action emerged. Volunteers wrote letters, made arrangements and contacted participants. We even designed, made and distributed posters with a version of the exhibition logo that was personalized for Jacksonville. Our excitement began to build as the big day approached.

It was obvious that this activity made an indelible impression on the many parents and children who witnessed it. Hyontea Jardine noted: “I thought the exhibit was an eye-opener. It made me aware of what children go through these days. I’m taking a nutrition course, and prior to seeing the exhibit, I wasn’t aware that we could end world hunger with so little money compared to the amount people spend on cigarettes, and thought it was astonishing.”

For more information on this story, please visit the Florida Region’s Web site at www.sgi-usa-florida.org and click on the Children’s Rights section.