

**SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS  
NEW ORLEANS FESTIVAL BRINGS COMMUNITY TOGETHER  
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NEW ORLEANS CORRESPONDENTS**

More than 700 members and guests of the SGI-USA's New Orleans, Memphis and Gulf Coast Areas held their Family Youth Festival Weekend at the University of New Orleans, Aug. 4–5. The event was co-sponsored by the University of New Orleans Office of Multicultural Affairs and titled “New Horizons: Joining Hands in Hope, Harmony and Happiness.”

The weekend started with a Victory Over Violence event, featuring a panel discussion and artistic expressions by local youth concerning solutions to the epidemic of violence. Local art teacher Beverly Cook contributed artwork from her students depicting the violence they had experienced in their lifetime. Discussion ranged from youth related violence to the individual's responsibility to stand up against oppression of all types.

The Pep-Stars shared poetry and skits illustrating conflict resolution techniques and their hopes for a future free of violence. The Pep-Stars is a group of peer educators who use their personal experiences with violence to educate and enlighten other youth in their community.

Guests toured the VOV exhibition and signed the VOV pledge. “I was really impressed by what you, as Buddhists, are doing to work with your youth and help them to grow,” said guest Willie McGhee.

The next day's vibrant and joyous Family Youth Festival inspired laughter, tears and pride in the hearts of the audience and participants. The program included 19 performances, from skits to belly dancing. The unity and growth of the participants was evident with each performance. “The youth performers' preparation and caring for each other during the months prior to the festival led them to create strong bonds of friendship,” said Terumi Saito, New Orleans Area women's leader. “Their actual performances reflected the true unity that they had created.”

Dr. Mackie J.V. Blanton, associate dean of student life for multicultural affairs at the University of New Orleans, commented, “Guests to the event would come up to me and exclaim how exciting it was for them to experience the sheer joy they witnessed among SGI-USA youth and their families.”