

Prep for Peace: Summer Peace Program
Yonkers, New York, United States of America
Rui Gui, United States, Sarah Lawrence College
Sharon Holiner, United States, Sarah Lawrence College
<http://www.facebook.com/PrepForPeace>

The goal of our project *Prep for Peace: Summer Peace Program* was to use the philosophical and pedagogical approach towards education as prescribed by our private liberal arts college and bring it to a community without the same social and economic privileges we and many of our classmates have access to. A good progressive education is like high-grade fertilizer; it is possible for vegetation to grow without it, but its presence - along with ample sunshine and water - makes it far easier for plants to thrive.

The \$10,000 grant we received from the Davis Projects for Peace was the only monies used to execute the *Summer Peace Program*; no other fundraising efforts contributed to this project. Fortunately, we were able to use the existing infrastructure of the summer youth camps in our community organization, Iglesia San Andres. By sharing such equipment as church vans and allowing us to use one of their buildings to hold our camp, Iglesia San Andres spared us substantial programming costs.

The *Summer Peace Program* was held every Monday through Thursday from July 9th to August 16th. On average, we met with students from 11:00am to 4:00pm. The camp was held in St. Paul's, a beautiful old church building located in downtown Yonkers, NY, that is led by Madre Yamily Bass-Choate, the vicar at Iglesia San Andres. Every week we explored a different educational theme through lessons on history, literature, music, art, science, and current events. One day out of the week was devoted to attending a field trip associated with our theme, in an effort to place our intellectual and creative inquiries within a greater context. Each day our students were given between 1 and 2 hours to work on their personal projects. These projects were their opportunity to learn and create anything they wanted to, and were inspired by the concept of conference work Sarah Lawrence students write each semester. On August 16, the last day of the program, we held the "Personal Project Museum" where our students showcased the work they created during the program.

As with any community-oriented project, especially one focused on children and youth, we experienced some unanticipated difficulties. Throughout the course of the summer we were forced to change the way we presented information to accommodate different learning styles and backgrounds. We had to remain constantly aware of conflicting perspectives as a result of our different socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. One particular student was absent for at least a third of the program for family reasons beyond her control. An unexpected difficulty was with parents, many of whom spoke only Spanish and had very tight work schedules. In spite of these setbacks, we found that all-in-all the program was a success. While some of the students had difficulty creating a project they were interested

Prep for Peace: Summer Peace Program
Yonkers, New York, United States of America
Rui Gui, United States, Sarah Lawrence College
Sharon Holiner, United States, Sarah Lawrence College
<http://www.facebook.com/PrepForPeace>

in and others had difficulty managing their time, the mistakes they made throughout the six weeks were as vital to their education as their many successes. For us, as administrators, the fact that many parents were not able to or did not want to participate actively in this program was frustrating. Due to these things, we learned to adapt and be more flexible. We recognized that it was important to maintain consistency for the parents and to place the safety of our students above all else.

The main beneficiaries of *Prep for Peace: Summer Peace Program* were the ten students who participated in our program this summer. However, in community-based work benefits never simply stop at the first tier. We saw how parents benefited by having somewhere to send their children over the summer. Siblings, cousins, and friends all benefited second-hand from the students' experiences and by attending the "Personal Project Museum" and celebration at the end of the program. Madre Yamily Bass-Choate and her church benefited from an addition to the programs they could offer the community. Though we will likely not have the extensive funds we had access to this year, Iglesia San Andres has already begun plans for the second year of the *Summer Peace Program*. Future middle-school students will benefit because the structure and idea now exists, and the community has the motivation to carry the project forward.

The dictionary defines peace as a state characterized by a *lack* of violent conflict, fear of violence, and hostility. This is an extremely passive description. We believe that peace is not simply the *lack* of these negative aspects. Rather, it is the *presence* of freedom, empathy, and tolerance that create peace. Much of what is wrong in our world results from fear and ignorance, the antithesis of peace. The best way to combat fear and ignorance, and as a result many of our world's most serious issues, is through education. We believe our work this summer has contributed to peace because it has influenced ten bright young people to work towards understanding what that concept is and promoting it. It has encouraged these young people to educate themselves on important issues, to fight for their civil rights and those of others, and to empathize with the experiences and live stories of those vastly different from them. It has challenged these young people to think for themselves, and to infect those around them with a thirst for knowledge and justice.

This program has definitely changed the way we think about how we as individuals can influence the world in which we live. Though we have often participated in community and volunteer work in the past, this is the first time we were given the autonomy to make decisions for a project of this scale.