

## Practice Makes Peace

### Project Summary:

*Practice Makes Peace (PMP) was a grassroots, volunteer-driven summer camp opportunity open to elementary and middle school students in Detroit during the summer of 2009. PMP used the fun of sports to empower young people in metropolitan Detroit to peaceably resolve conflicts and to build bridges between the city and the suburbs.*

Practice Makes Peace took place at two locations, with the first half of the summer at Glazer Elementary School in northern Detroit. Following the end of summer school at Glazer Elementary, PMP moved to the shared campus of Maybury Elementary and the Latino Mission Society in southwest Detroit. This way, PMP was able to reach youth in two distinct, historic Detroit neighborhoods.

At Glazer Elementary, located in a predominately African American community, 85 campers joined 80-90 high school volunteers for five weeks of skill building through sport. Due to an outpouring of community equipment donations, PMP was able to redirect funding reserved for equipment to fieldtrips and food. The campers, or "little buddies", were paired one on one with a high school volunteer, or "big buddy", who came to PMP through a partnership with local non-profit Summer in the City (SITC). Each day, buddy pairs worked on a particular set of sport and conflict resolution skills. The curriculum encompassed soccer, football, basketball, baseball, kickball, tennis, hockey, and more. Each week, the curriculum highlighted a different theme within the context of several sports, including team work, leadership, communication, goal setting, healthy diet, the importance of exercise, problem solving, respect for self and neighbor, and environmental responsibility. Friday field trips, which connected to weekly themes, were a camp favorite and included such Detroit landmarks as Belle Isle, the Detroit Science Center, and the Detroit Zoo. The camp included a visit from metro Detroiter and former pre-Olympic handball player Marty Greenburg, who introduced the campers to what quickly became a new favorite sport. At Glazer, setting the ground rules was a major challenge. Many of the campers had never participated in a structured form of physical education and were not accustomed to games with rules. Establishing a "classroom" atmosphere within the camp context provided an added challenge. However, with the commitment and example of the high school volunteers, and the leadership of the counselors, PMP's campers were excited to learn and play. Incorporating a consistent, overarching theme into each warm-up activity, skill session, and game allowed the campers to explore a positive message in contexts both on and off the field.

For the last weeks of summer, Practice Makes Peace moved into Maybury Elementary and the Latino Mission Society in the predominately Latin American community of southwest Detroit. There, 40 campers and 40-60 volunteers used everything from kickball to tennis to practice peace through conflict resolution, health and exercise, and environmental responsibility. Friday field trips included a field day which brought together youth from both northern and southwest Detroit for a day of friends, fun, and food. Local environmental non-profit, The Greening of Detroit, collaborated with PMP in bringing its educational Camp Greening program to the youth of southwest Detroit. Camp Greening used the local environment in the neighborhood's Clark Park to teach the campers about the biology behind functioning ecosystems as well as the need for environmental stewardship. The language barrier in this Spanish-speaking neighborhood presented a challenge at Maybury, as the majority of volunteers and staff speak only English, while for many of the campers Spanish is their first language. This barrier became a fun way to explore the different cultures at PMP, as counselors, volunteers, and campers worked together to learn both the Spanish and English words involved in different sports, games, and skills.

Thanks to partnerships formed this summer with Detroit Public Schools and local non-profit Summer in the City, PMP's success building peace in collaboration with the youth of metropolitan Detroit will continue into the summer of 2010. Summer in the City has agreed to incorporate the camp into their project areas. The principals of Glazer and Maybury Elementary look forward to the return of this successful program next summer. After seeking out the needs of PMP's partner schools, the camp's sports equipment was provided to both schools for their use during the academic year. These schools gain the benefit of a quantity of quality equipment and in turn provide a secure place for PMP to house it until next summer. In addition to the campers' growth, the volunteer and counselor "kids at heart" gained as much as they gave through PMP's work this summer.

### **Practice Made Peace:**

In these ways Practice Makes Peace has fulfilled its mission to build peace through play among the youth of Detroit. Peace means empowering individuals and their larger communities with the skills to create a healthful, just, and promising way of life. This involves working on individual skills within a vision for benefiting the larger community. PMP provided a safe and supervised environment for Detroit youth who may otherwise not have been positively engaged this summer. The camp created a dynamic space that allowed youth to explore the physical and emotional skills necessary for peace. Campers learned a wide range of technical sports and conflict resolution skills, on themes ranging from problem solving, goal setting, and teamwork to health and wellness, exercise and environmental responsibility. These are skills for life both on and off the field and will continue to benefit these young people into the future. PMP worked with high school volunteers from across metropolitan Detroit to provide role models to the elementary school campers. At the same time, volunteers gained a greater understanding of the challenges facing the city of Detroit and its youth through their work. Building bridges between individuals and communities in the city and the suburbs will empower southeast Michigan to seek the larger goals of community harmony and peace.

Practice Makes Peace has helped me to better understand the complexity of issues affecting my city and the young people of the region. Growing up in a high-income community, I never appreciated how vital an education is to a positive future, nor did I comprehend the full power of education to build bridges. The PMP curriculum was developed in cooperation with teachers and social workers in several Detroit elementary schools. Because of this, I better grasp of the local impact of macro-scale economic and social structures, something vital to my understanding of the world as a geography student. My experience this summer helped me to recognize the positive ripples that interpersonal relationships and grassroots actions can generate at all levels, from the individual to nation.

*This project engaged youth at all ages from the city and the suburbs of Detroit in building a common vision of peace through sports. Working with other young people of all ages has taught me the power the youth have to be leaders and examples of peace now and in the future. -Jen Rusciano, Colgate '10*

