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Finding Solutions Newsletter

VOLUME 11 Number 2



THIS IS WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING!: THE STORY OF REACH AND TEACH...

By Craig Wiesner

It was the day before the bombs began falling on Iraq, and we had just spoken about Afghanistan at Palo Alto High. Having traveled to Afghanistan in June 2002, we had promised we would carry stories home with us, telling them far and wide. We'd done about 40 talks, and planned for this to be our last, given a new war looming. Through story-telling, pictures, and poetry we had brought realities of war into the classroom.

The students had been riveted, asked wonderful questions, some cried. As we headed to our car afterwards a young man came up to us, saying "I don't know what you do for a living now, but this is what you SHOULD be doing." Moments later, he was gone. We never got to know his name.

My name is Craig Wiesner. Until that day, my partner Derrick and I had been running a successful technology education company. When a call came out of the blue in April 2002, asking us to be part of this interfaith peace delegation, we had no idea how profoundly it would change our lives.



One of the most powerful stories we tell is about Narisula, a boy who nearly lost his arms and legs to a cluster bomb. We'd sat in the rubble of his home as he told his story. At one point, he left the room, coming back moments later only in his underpants to show us his terrible wounds. "I usually charge people to take pictures," he said, "but you're really here to help my family so you don't need to pay." This eight year-old was the family's only breadwinner.

Later, when he had dressed, he seemed so sad, his eyes lacking any sparkle. Trying to find the child in him, I asked what games he liked to play outside. "I don't go outside, something might hurt me. Besides, all my friends are dead."

About this issue...

What an exciting issue! *This issue is devoted to articles about **Finding Solutions**, showing what people are doing and providing ideas about what you might want to do!*

*Craig Wiesner (pg.1) explains how he transitioned from running a successful technology education company to founding an organization dedicated to **educating for change**.*

Our last issue was devoted entirely to an article by Dr. Stephen Bezruchka on "A Prescription for Improving Our Nation Health Care." We are pleased that colleagues of Bezruchka (Andrea DeVoght, Alison Eisinger, Linn Gould and Liz Mogford) agreed to take the story to another level (pg.2).

Karen Dolan (pg.3) describes the Cooking For Life: Youth program, which provides at-risk youth with hands on nutrition and cooking skills.

The Bullis School in Potomac, MD launched the first of what will be an annual hunger awareness week at the school. Jim Roumell (pg.4) leads us through the planning and execution stages.

In answer to the many questions we have received dealing with an approach to take with very young children, Dagmar Serota (pg.5) offers Good Cents for Oakland—an approach to engaging children in community service.

Wrapping up this issue is Martin Fergus (pg.6) asking—what more can we do about hunger? Bread For The World may have an answer. Fergus provides us with action steps that all of us can take to help alleviate hunger in our country and world.

A lot to digest.

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At that moment I wondered why I was there. What could one person possibly do about all the pain and suffering, especially his? One small idea came to mind. I taught Narisula Tic Tac Toe, which he could play with his cousins, indoors. Soon he was giggling, smiling, not just the family breadwinner but an eight year-old boy again.

A few days later when we saw him again, he waved a paper in the air shouting "TIC TAC TOE" with a huge grin. Telling his story when we returned helped create U.S. compensation funds for Afghan and Iraqi war victims, making a difference for him and tens of thousands like him.

As we drove home from the High School that day, the idea for Reach And Teach was born. We would use our passion and talents to weave peace and social justice into people's lives. Today we create and distribute books, games, puzzles, music, kits, and curriculum for people of all ages who are curious about the world around them and want to make a difference. We've built up an amazing collection, partnering with non-profits, publishers, teachers, religious leaders, parents and children. We focus on key themes like anti-bullying, non-violent conflict resolution, protecting the environment, and treasuring diversity. With war still raging in



Iraq, one of our key goals is to continue our work in educating people about the true costs of war.

Recently, on my way to Congressman Lantos' office to discuss the situation in Darfur with his staff, I passed a group of children playing bang bang shoot-em-up. A mother called to her son to stop playing so rough. He didn't stop and she looked frustrated. I told her about a book we distribute called "Playing War." Some kids decide to play war on a lazy summer day, but one of the new kids, Sameer, has really lived through a war. By sharing his stories, he helps his friends understand what war really means and they decide to play something else. Sameer reminds us of Narisula, especially when he explains that his buddies needn't try to collect so many pine cones as grenades. "You only need one."

Perhaps we only need one more child to choose peace instead of war and that one book will have made that choice possible. After all, it was just one young man who steered us onto this path with a few passionate words. We hope some day he'll see what we are doing now and be pleased. Thanks to him, we like to say Reach And Teach is *educating for a change!*

Craig Wiesner is co-founder of Reach And Teach. He can be contacted at craig@reachandteach.com



TEACHING HEALTH EQUALITY TO KIDS...

By Andrea DeVoght, Alison Eisinger, Linn Gould, and Liz Mogford

What is the prescription for improving our nation's health? Dr. Stephen Bezruchka's solution is to produce a caring and sharing society from "womb to tomb" (KIDS article, Winter 2006). The prescription includes the development of economic, social, and political policies that will reduce inequalities because evidence shows that egalitarian societies are healthier societies.

Several years ago, Bezruchka and his colleagues from the Population Health Forum (<http://depts.washington.edu/eqhlth/>

[pages/about.html](#)) started introducing these ideas in a few Seattle middle and high schools. In the summer of 2005, four of Bezruchka's colleagues took the next step – forming the Population Health Project (PHP) to educate youth and adults about the structural conditions that affect health, and to promote social action leading to equity for all. The PHP focuses on developing, teaching, and disseminating a population health curriculum for secondary school students. The curriculum engages youth in learning about links between social justice and health equity, and is using this knowledge

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KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE® FINDING SOLUTIONS NEWSLETTER
A PROGRAM OF WORLD HUNGER YEAR (WHY)

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to become strong advocates for social change.

The population health curriculum moves health education beyond a narrow focus on individual behaviors to one that teaches students about how health is produced in a society through collective actions that benefit groups of people as well as individuals. PHP's lessons, discussions, and assignments provide students with tools for understanding how health and inequality are measured, and how health is related to inequality and to other social determinants. Issues of community health and social well-being are framed in terms of *civic engagement*, emphasizing the importance of taking action to make positive social changes. PHP employs civic engagement activities, which may include writing letters to elected officials, raising public awareness about important issues through art, or planting a community garden.

Last year PHP designed and piloted a series of lessons about food security to complement and expand upon existing health and nutrition lessons. This year two additional curriculum modules were developed and piloted. Andra DeVoght developed a semester-long course on Global Health and Art Activism, co-taught with an art instructor. This

course addressed the root social and political causes of world health issues through art activism. Linn Gould developed and taught lessons which introduced the concept of environmental justice and addressed the disproportionate impacts of environmental contamination on low income and minority communities.

The PHP is working to develop a population health curriculum teachers' manual. The manual will provide an introduction to the concepts and measurement of inequality and health and will include modules on civic action; food security; globalization; environmental justice; social cohesion; urbanization; early childhood development; health system policies; employment; and immigration. PHP believes that if it can educate U.S. youth to think critically about and respond to connections between local and global economies and the health of societies, they will be better prepared to be well-informed, active participants in our democracy.

Andra DeVoght, PT, MPH; Alison Eisinger, MSW; Linn Gould, MS, MPH; and Liz Mogford, MPH all live and work in the Seattle area. They can be reached at pophealthproject@gmail.com. You can also visit their website at www.populationhealthproject.org



COOKING FOR LIFE: YOUTH—PROVIDING AT-RISK YOUTH WITH HANDS-ON-NUTRITION AND COOKING SKILLS...

By Karen Dolan

Many of us can remember a time during our childhood when we tied on an apron and stood on a chair in order to help a parent, grandparent, or caregiver in the kitchen. It didn't matter if the recipe was chocolate chip cookies or chicken noodle soup, as kids, we enjoyed the experience of being around food, spending time with family, and learning new skills in the kitchen. And as children, we probably didn't realize that such experiences would provide us with the skills and confidence needed to prepare meals on our own later in life.

Unfortunately many children in today's world, especially children in families with limited resources, are less exposed to such valuable experiences. In our "constantly on the go" society, families are pressed for time and often choose frozen foods or convenience meal kits over homemade meals. Family and Consumer Science classes, additional opportunities for youth to learn cooking skills, have also seen a decline as many schools have made such classes optional for students. This means that many youth are growing up without the skills and knowledge needed to prepare healthy,

nutritious meals on their own.

Cooking for Life: Youth, a program offered through a collaboration of the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (VTCECH) and University of Vermont Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), is working to reverse this trend by offering hands-on cooking and nutrition classes to low-income youth. The six-week program empowers youth, ages 11-14, to choose and prepare healthy, affordable dishes by increasing their nutrition, shopping, and cooking skills. Since the program began in 2001, over 60 series have been offered to over 700 at-risk youth in Vermont and the program is continuing to expand in 2006.

Instead of directly recruiting participants for classes, Cooking for Life: Youth works with host agencies such as after-school programs, youth centers, and Boys & Girls Clubs, to offer the program in their community. Jaime Comtois, a 4th grade teacher and after-school coordinator at Coventry Village School, says: "Cooking for Life: Youth is a tremen-

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dous asset to our school. Our school has 80% of students on free or reduced lunch and many of our students come from homes where eating healthfully is not affordable. Cooking for Life: Youth teaches different life skills that the students will use to help them make better choices with their dietary needs.”

During each 2-hour session, a local chef and a nutrition educator present the Cooking for Life: Youth curriculum to a class of 12-15 participants. The theory-based curriculum was developed by dietitians at VTCECH and EFNEP and uses a variety of innovative strategies to meet lesson objectives. Each lesson covers one or two age-appropriate topics such as: MyPyramid, Calcium, Body Image, Fruit and Vegetable Intake, Food Safety, and Sugars. Through the curriculum’s hands-on approach, participants not only learn what is needed to eat healthfully, but actually learn how to do it.

And the learning doesn’t stop when the class ends. At the end of each class, participants are provided with a bag of ingredients as well as a binder with recipes and handouts. With the ingredients in hand and the experience from the classroom, participants are sent off to make the recipes at home for their families. This additional opportunity reinforces the lessons learned during the class and encourages families to try new

foods together. For families with limited resources, bringing home ingredients also allows for an opportunity to try a new recipe without the risk of wasting food or time. As one student put it: “It was a really good thing to bring home the food. A lot of times kids learn how to do things, but don’t have the stuff so they never try it. Our family got food to make some of the things again”



In order to measure the full impact of Cooking for Life: Youth, a pre/post evaluation tool is used to assess food-related knowledge and behavior changes of participants. Results from evaluation analysis indicate that program graduates are better equipped to choose and prepare healthy meals and

snacks. Student evaluations include statements such as “This class has made me start to eat more fruits” and, “Cooking for Life taught me how to make healthier choices.” Reaching youth at an early age with positive nutrition messages, as well as lessons in cooking, allow youth to form healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime.

Karen Dolan, RD is the Program Manager for Cooking for Life. She may be reached at kdolan@vtnohunger.org. For further information about this program and the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger please go to their web site at www.vtnohunger.org.



THE BULLIS SCHOOL SCORES BIG WITH FIRST HUNGER AWARENESS WEEK...

By Jim Roumell

When my daughter Nina was accepted into the 8th grade class at The Bullis School in Potomac, MD I was ecstatic. Bullis is an independent school situated on a beautiful piece of property with small classes and plentiful resources. Its campus is akin to a small college. What a terrific opportunity for her, I thought.

There was some anxiety as well with Nina’s acceptance: would she somehow miss out on learning empathy towards those less fortunate by being in such a privileged environment that lacked the socio-economic diversity of her public school years? It was out of this concern that I joined Bullis’ Diversity Committee and the idea of doing a Hunger Awareness luncheon was born. Years ago I had participated in such a lunch on Capital Hill sponsored by then Representative Tony Hall, D, Ohio, and found the whole thing to be educational

and cool. The Diversity Committee thought it was a wonderful idea and said, “Go for it!” Thanks to Larry Levine and Kids Can Make a Difference, I was able to get all the tools and materials necessary to make a proposal to the school.

I quickly went into action thinking this was a pretty simple idea: kids would enter the lunchroom on the designated day and pick one of three color-coded tickets which would dictate what they would eat for lunch that day. Roughly 15% of the tickets would be exchanged for a first-world diet, another 65% would mirror the most common diet of a basic starch with some protein (rice and beans) and the remaining 20% would represent the diet of the world’s chronically poor (a bowl of rice). People began to raise concerns: some people will not want their kids to be hungry (a concern I had little empathy for), the kids playing after-school sports will find

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practice extra difficult that day, kids will fight over the coveted first world tickets (which of course is a wonderful teaching moment about how the real world in fact works), and so maybe participation should be voluntary, etc.

The Bullis School is run by a socially-conscious Headmaster, Tom Farquar, and supported by wonderful teachers who are committed to ensuring Bullis students do in fact learn about the world around them, its many challenges and their role as responsible actors who have a moral obligation to engage such pressing issues as hunger. Fortunately, I soon found two school “insiders” willing to help. Jennifer Galambos (middle school principal), and Amy Jones (lower school principal), provided the necessary support and credibility to make it all happen. Jennifer came up with the good idea to have the first year be a single meal of rice/beans for everyone to reduce some of the logistical complications.

In the end, our Hunger Awareness Day turned into a week’s worth of activities. It was kicked-off by a speaker from World Hunger Year (WHY) and one from a local food bank who addressed the entire school at its weekly Monday as-

sembly. The lower school conducted a food drive all week. Wednesday was the actual rice/beans lunch and the school donated \$500 in estimated savings to hunger causes. The kids definitely talked (and some complained of being hungry!). Everyone involved was happy with our first year’s results and there seems to be little question that we’re off and running and an annual event has been born. It took one and one-half years from conception to event.

The hunger awareness luncheon was a small endeavor. I wondered, what is this really accomplishing? But when I think of different things that hit me and stuck as a child, they’re often little nuggets that occurred incidentally and randomly. What if one student who participated decided to get involved (professionally) in solving hunger? More likely, what if three students decided to volunteer at soup kitchens periodically? What if a handful of students choose hunger as place to contribute some of their charitable funds when they are older? And what if a few students simply look at a hungry, homeless man or woman, with a little more empathy the next time they pass one?

Jim Roumell is the proud father of Nina and Jordan. He may be contacted at jroumell@roumellasset.com.



GOOD CENTS FOR OAKLAND: ENGAGING CHILDREN IN COMMUNITY SERVICE...

By Dagmar Serota

In April 2005, I founded a non-profit organization called Good Cents for Oakland, based in Oakland, CA. Good Cents for Oakland’s Penny Roundup Program teaches school children that they can make a difference in Oakland through age-appropriate curriculum and penny drives known as Penny Roundups.

Our program is not about the money children raise. It’s about empowering children and teaching them that they can make change by being aware and informed about community issues and by being involved by talking to others and asking their help.

I decided to develop two programs for younger children, one focused on homelessness and one focused on hunger. I believe it’s never too early to begin talking about the effects of poverty with children if the discussions are age-appropriate. There are also few opportunities for parents with young children to participate in community service. I wanted to give these parents an easy way to talk to their children about important issues.

Our Program teaches children why homes and food are im-

portant to us physically as well as emotionally. Each week, the children participate in a “penny circle time”, create an art project, read books and sing songs all related to either homes or food. The children learn that pennies can become “Good Cents” when they’re used to help others. Throughout the program, children bring in their pennies and add them to the classroom jar. Each penny collected provides an opportunity for parents to discuss the importance of homes and food for everyone.

The program begins with a week about helping. The children listen to stories and watch puppet shows about helping. The children then draw pictures to illustrate the story they heard or to show what they think helping means.

The Hunger Program then turns to the importance of different types of food to our bodies. We show the children the new Food Pyramid, but only to demonstrate that we need all types of food to be healthy. We ask the children to name different types of grains, fruits, vegetables, meats, oils and nuts and show them these foods so they can see them for themselves. We talk about how each food group helps our body and have

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the children create a healthy snack or “Stone Soup” together.

Once the children understand how foods affect their bodies, we talk about food as part of our lives. Food is almost always present on important occasions, family dinners, birthdays, celebrations of all kinds. The children create a feast of their favorite foods (on paper) at circle time and read books about foods as part of celebrations.

In weeks four through six, the children talk about what it might mean to be hungry. What would happen to our bodies if we didn’t have grains, fruits and vegetables or protein? The children learn about how the Food Bank helps others. They then decorate small porcelain bowls we call Empty Bowls. The children keep the Empty Bowl as a symbol of all the empty bowls in the community. The children also create a “Neighborhood Letter” that they use to tell their neighbors that they are collecting pennies, or Good Cents, that will be donated to the Food Bank. These letters explain why the children think it’s important to round up pennies. The children also participate in a small canned food drive so that they can present food to the Food Bank in addition to their pennies.

Finally, the children place their pennies in bank bags, send them off to the bank to be counted and celebrate their success by presenting a ceremonial check to a Food Bank representative. This year, one pre-k and one kindergarten class completed the Good Cents for Oakland Hunger Program, raising awareness about the issue of hunger with

these children, their families and their neighbors as well as nearly \$1,000 for the local Food Bank. One Preschool has participated in our Homelessness Program for the last two years and has raised over \$2,000 for a local shelter’s preschool serving homeless and at risk children.

I see the impact of both these Programs when I hear from parents who are amazed that their five year old recognized the Food Pyramid on a cereal box or announced that meat builds muscle and when their 3 ½ year old wants to send letters to the homeless children. Are these children too young to teach about the importance of homes and food or that they can speak out and tell others about the problems Oakland faces? I think the parents and teachers participating in our Penny Roundup Program would tell you that it’s not.

Good Cents for Oakland provides its Penny Roundup to Oakland schools at no cost and donates 100% of the childrens’ Penny Roundups to community organizations helping Oakland. We offer Preschool and Elementary School Penny Roundup Programs and will soon offer a Middle School Program. Over 1,000 students will participate in the Penny Roundup Program next school year. Good Cents for Oakland is a tax-exempt, non-profit organization and relies upon individual donations, foundation and corporate grants to provide its programming. For more information, please visit to www.GoodCentsforOakland.org.

Dagmar Serota is Founder and Executive Director of Good Cents for Oakland. She can be reached at Damar@GoodCentsforOakland.org.



WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO ABOUT HUNGER? BREAD FOR THE WORLD...

By Martin Fergus

Those concerned about the hunger problem sometimes feel overwhelmed and at a loss to determine how best to address it. All of us, of course, can volunteer at soup kitchens and food pantries or financially support organizations (e.g., Oxfam) that have excellent track records in addressing the needs of the poor. But as we read the headlines about hunger and AIDS in Africa and see poverty rates once again on the rise in the United States, a question comes to mind: *What else can we do about hunger?* This is precisely the question that led to the establishment, more than thirty years ago, of Bread for the World.

The story begins on the Lower East Side of New York City, where the Reverend Art Simon became pastor of Trinity

Lutheran Church in the 1960s. This was a time when hunger was gaining national visibility through President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. But Art Simon did not have to look to Washington, D.C., to discover poverty and hunger – it was all around him, everywhere in the surrounding neighborhood. Along with many other churches, Trinity reached out to provide direct assistance to those in need.

As time went on, however, it became clear to all those involved that the problem was too large to be solved by local efforts alone. They came to understand that the effectiveness of their work was influenced, either positively or negatively, by decisions made in Washington, D.C., and concluded, as Art Simon once put it, that *the response to hun-*

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ger must “walk on two legs,” both direct service and citizen action to influence public policy. Discussions continued on the Lower East Side about how best to mobilize citizen action. The outcome was the founding in 1974 of Bread for the World as a nationwide citizens’ lobby against hunger, with Art Simon serving as its first president. Today Bread is a movement of 50,000 people of faith and 2,500 churches.

Each year Bread for the World carefully considers which issue to select for an “Offering of Letters” campaign, choosing specific legislation or other public policy action both for its impact on reducing hunger and for the likelihood of its adoption. The national staff informs Bread members of key decision points during the year, when they are asked to contact – by letters, phone calls or office visits – their members of Congress or other public officials. Through these efforts and the support of other groups that work in coalition with Bread for the World (e.g., RESULTS), it is not unusual for 100,000 letters to be generated to members of Congress.

And the good news is that these efforts bear fruit. A glance at Bread for the World’s website shows a list of significant legislative victories for poor and hungry people in which Bread played a lead or supporting role, including: increased funding for the WIC program and the food stamp program (1997), the restoration of food stamps for 250,000 vulnerable legal immigrants – children, elderly and disabled people – and increased aid for small-scale farmers and struggling rural communities in Africa (1998), debt relief to the world’s poorest countries enabling them to invest more in health, education and agricultural development (1999 and 2000), the largest funding in-

crease in decades in poverty-focused development assistance (2003), and a \$1 billion increase in funding for the Millennium Challenge Account and the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (2004). Still pending before Congress are the Hunger Free Communities Act, introduced in 2005, that would commit the nation to ending hunger in the United States and provide funding to local groups to end hunger in their communities, and the 2006 Offering of Letters campaign that seeks a significant increase in poverty-focused development assistance to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Bread for the World provides a practical way for average citizens to have an impact on domestic and international hunger. There is an “Action This Month” section in each newsletter, a link to “Take Action” on the website and the opportunity to subscribe to “Fresh Bread,” an email newsletter that provides up-to-the-moment legislative updates and action alerts. Bread for the World members also spread the word about the hunger problem through letters to the editor, op ed pieces and editorial board meetings. Bread’s partner organization, the Bread for the World Institute, carries out research and education on hunger. The Institute’s annual Hunger Report strengthens the anti-hunger movement through analysis of the causes and solutions of hunger.

To learn more about Bread for the World and how to become an effective citizen advocate against hunger, go to www.bread.org or telephone 1-800-82-BREAD.

Dr. Martin C. Fergus is Associate Professor and Associate Chair of the Political Science Department at Fordham University, Bronx, NY. He is a member of the KIDS Advisory Board, and has been a Bread for the World member and activist since 1976. From 1989-1994 he was a member of Bread’s national board of directors.

Call for articles...

You are the fuel that makes this newsletter go! Most of the articles published come from readers like you. Our job is simply to compile stories written by folks who have a passion for “making a difference” and want to share their journey with others. KIDS is about helping to make those connections.

If you are interested in writing an article for *Finding Solutions* please contact Larry at kids@kidscanmakeadifference.org.

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“If I were a teacher struggling to help students remain human in a sea of cynicism and self-absorption, I would grab onto this book as if it were a life raft and use it to bring my class to shore.”

*Joan Dye Gussow, Professor Emeritus,
Teachers College, Columbia University*



A Program of World Hunger Year

**1 Borodell Avenue
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The purpose of **Kids Can Make A Difference®** is to inspire young people to realize that it is within their power to help eliminate hunger and poverty in their communities, their country, and their world.