

February Peer Networking Meeting Minutes  
**Promoting Healthy Youth Relationships**  
February 17, 2010

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **BUSTED!** The Philadelphia Youth anti-tobacco program, sponsored by **The Council of Spanish Speaking Organizations**, is hosting a “Night in Hollywood.” They are looking for youth performance groups for the talent show, which will be held March 24<sup>th</sup> from 5-8 PM at the organization’s premises at 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Fairmount Avenue. Groups must register by February 26<sup>th</sup>. Contact: Aunnalea Grove, (215) 627-3100, ext. 252, or by email at [aunnalea.grove@elconcilio.net](mailto:aunnalea.grove@elconcilio.net).
- The **OSTRC** distributes a Newsletter on the 1<sup>st</sup> business day of each month. To advertise a job opening, event, publication, or other staff resource, please send your item to Katie Derickson, [kder@sp2.upenn.edu](mailto:kder@sp2.upenn.edu).
- The **Mazzoni Center** provides free professional development services for staff of OST programs on creating safer, more welcoming, and more inclusive climates for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) youth and families. Contact: Allison Buehler, [abuehler@mazzonicenter.org](mailto:abuehler@mazzonicenter.org), 215-563-0652x251. Website: [www.mazzonicenter.org](http://www.mazzonicenter.org).

PANEL PRESENTATION

**Kay Brennan, M.S.S, Program and Training Coordinator, Peaceful Posse**  
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Key Brennan is the Peaceful Posse Program and Training Coordinator, an initiative administered by the Physicians for Social Responsibility. In her work at the Peaceful Posse, Ms. Brennan has developed and managed the Peaceful Posse Training Institute; developed training curricula; provided structured supervision, group observation, and Peaceful Posse Group Leader training and consultation; developed a marketing plan for the Peaceful Posse Training Institute; and been a Peaceful Posse Group Leader for 2 girls’ groups in Kensington. Prior to her employment at the Peaceful Posse Program, Ms. Brennan worked at the Presbyterian Children’s Village: as Supervisor of Prevention Services, Staff Training Coordinator, Foster Parent Training Coordinator, and Clinical Social Worker. Before that, Kay Brennan was employed as a Foster Care Social Worker at the Children’s Aid Society of Philadelphia. Ms. Brennan received her B.S. in Psychology and Biology from Eastern College, and her M.S.S. in Clinical Social Work from the Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.

- The goal of Peaceful Posse is to reduce aggressive fighting behavior.
- This is done through developing relationships with adults and peer mentoring groups.
- Peaceful Posse has trained consultants and group leaders.
- The program is currently being researched by the University of Pennsylvania.
- Kids who enter the program are struggling socially and emotionally, and feeling isolated.

- The programs provide positive connections with adults in cases where children do not have these connections a lot of the time, mostly due to their behavior.
- It meant a lot to the kids, that the group leaders were there every week. Consistency is important – the group leaders were there for them every week.
- Kids are looking for relationships, but their behavior often pushes adults away.
- When you are able to develop a respectful relationship with a kid, they start talking, instead of being obnoxious.
- Kids that can talk about their feelings have a reduction in aggressive behavior.
- The Peaceful Posse has what they call teachable moments, when kids talk about stuff that is going on. Try to facilitate conversation so that kids can share experiences.
- The Parent Posse – parents are also struggling to raise kids today. The environment is not conducive to providing info we want to provide to kids.
- It is easy to say lets run an afterschool program, but what are the important ingredients in such a program? One thing for Kay – how do we remain connected to parents?
- Parents don't know what their kids are learning. Peaceful Posse has parent-child groups, in which parents and kids learn skills in the same set, together.
- She wants a heterogeneous group of kids.
- Kay has developed a skill list of leadership skills that can help hard to work with kids look at themselves in a different way.
- Adults have to model these traits and skills all of the time, not a do as I say, do as I do thing. It is hard for teachers and afterschool workers – things happen, stress happens.
- Active parenting is a program from when Kay started. The program talks about the difference between thriving and surviving. Survival is good, but limited. Thriving is a chance to go beyond that. Kids only thrive when they have positive connections to adult in their lives.
- Listening partnership is a training with teachers in public schools – teachers need a lot of support. Creates peer support groups for teachers. Adults need to be able to talk about their feelings just like kids. Listening partnership – partner with someone you work with, agree on a time to talk. One person talks about what is on their mind, the other just has to listen, which is often difficult, giving someone you complete full attention without interruption.
- In all programs, people feel different when they feel like they are being heard. It creates a supportive bond.
- Adults have to be the ones that are calm cool and collected to be able to do the programming. When continuously pushed by aggressive behavior from kids, they start to lose it, and a negative power struggle happens.
- You need to be able to listen to kids. Separate their stuff from yours and don't react, just listen. Principals look at the Peaceful Posse program as turning kids from trouble makers to leaders.
- Kay created a rubric – steps to achieving skills.
- Positive role models are important; behavior management and impulse control are difficult skills to develop.

- When parents support each other in parenting groups their anxiety goes down – they start to listen to their kids instead of trying to control them. As parents we think we always know best. By listening to kids, and taking the opportunity to decompress—that's what they need. Parents need the opportunity as well. When conflicts are not resolved, they just keep happening over and over again.
- Find a way to engage the kids that really aren't doing well. This is a hard task to do. We all carry our own stuff. Kids are good at pushing buttons; it is the reality of human nature. We all have a retaliatory component.
- With these programs we see differences, we see kids making differences. With a peer mentoring group, kids develop safety and trust. Sharing experiences is important – kids feel understood, learn skills.
- When they go home, they may not continue to practice the skills, but the addition of the mother-daughter, mother-son groups has helped to continue the use and practice of these skills at home.

**J. Mason, Bryson Educational Specialist, Attic Youth Center**  
**mason@atticyouthcenter.org**

J. Mason is a highly engaging Black/Gay/Trans/Queer facilitator and performer in Philadelphia. Having done work as an educator since his/her first job as an assistant instructor, Mason has been conducting trainings on various topics for over 10 years. Combining multiple learning styles, a social work model, and the sheer sense of joy invoked from sharing information, Mason believes that in order for an audience to internalize the information you are presenting, they must understand how it affects them and the networks they are a part of personally. Holding a B.A. in Multicultural Relations from Arcadia University, Mason is currently serving as the Education Specialist for The Bryson Institute of The Attic Youth Center. To date, Mason has trained thousands of providers and community members on various issues concerning LGBTQIA youth in spaces such as church communities, elementary schools, domestic violence shelters, medical agencies, juvenile justice organizations, foster care programs and others as part of a quickly growing list of expertise.

- In friendships and relationships LGBT youth have difficulties on two fronts – they often have to deal with stigma, and they also often have no models for healthy relationship.
- The Attic works with spaces where kids come from to talk about issues so that people can adequately respond. They work with students at schools, etc on how to manage relationships between LBGT youth and straight identified youth.
- At the center, they give the kids a voice. Young people often don't have a space to be who they are. We just don't want LGBT youth thinking of themselves as LGBT youth, they also have other qualities.
- At what point, what situation do we intervene? In Philadelphia 30% of LGBT youth experience violence in the home – everyday is an intervention.
- Being involved in other organizations makes it clear that we are trying to create safe spaces.

- There aren't really ways to model healthy relationships for youth, but create opportunities – think outside of the box, outside of the conversation.
- As adults we have a hard time meeting kids where they are – that's very important.
- As far as resources that are available for staff – Listen has a harassment guide – how do deal with harassment at school, etc.
- There is no one particular style that works best with managing stigma and harassment / contention. Use what you are good at.
- Mason has a coworker that is good at being a disciplinarian – that's what she uses. Mason uses joking – that's what he/she is good at.
- Roles of parents and families – we work at a confidential site where a lot of kids aren't out to their families, so it is a little more difficult to find adults in the kids lives to model healthy relationships.
- Outsource – find adults in the community that they can connect to for this purpose. Tell kids that if you are in a relationship, there are certain things that you should still expect, even if you are in an LGBT relationship.
- You are going to come into contact with LGBT youth daily – claim it, talk about it.

### **L'Erinne Capers, Healthy Relationship Program, Opportunities Industrialization Centers**

**[ecapers@oicofamerica.org](mailto:ecapers@oicofamerica.org)**

L'Erinne Capers began working for Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC) Healthy Relationships Program this past September. She received the opportunity to work for this program through AmeriCorps, through which she is still currently serving a year of service. Ms. Capers decided to join AmeriCorps immediately after completing her undergraduate studies at the University of The Arts, where she received her BFA in Animation/Film. When she arrived at the OIC Healthy Relationship Program, she saw a need to more effectively alert the community to this program. Thus, in addition to educating students about healthy relationships, Ms. Capers also focuses on creative marketing strategies for the program. Her hope is not to only enhance awareness of the program, but to also cultivate awareness about the importance of healthy relationships. Along with her coworkers, Ms. Capers facilitates the Keys to Healthy Relationships curriculum in schools and programs across Philadelphia, which helps students see the importance of healthy relationships and how these can benefit their everyday lives.

- The Healthy Relationship Program at OIC operates in schools in Philadelphia, OST programs, community programs, and churches.
- Healthy relationships – between and youth and a youth, and an adult and a youth – there are different roles.
- In youth-youth relationships, having one thing in common can make a friend.
- if a kid has low self-esteem, they can be taken advantage of. Promote high self-esteem, it is the main part in having a healthy relationship – you won't allow yourself to be taken advantage of if you feel good about yourself.
- In adult-youth relationships. It is not enough to have a common interest.
- Youth need to be able to trust adults. Get them to understand that you are there to help.

- Don't say that you know exactly what they are going through, or exactly where they are coming from, even if you think that you do.
- Build trust first, build respect – get them to see that you care about them in a caring, respectful, trustful way.
- To build trust, reveal something personal/private about yourself. This gets them to reveal personal and private information about their lives, parents, friends, etc.
- When you are talking to a student and trying to get them to trust you, it's like they can sniff out if you're not being honest or not there like you should be. They can sense when you are being fake, especially the highest risk students - they have been through systems and are the first to sense when you are not being real. Try to be as real and honest as you can be
- Basic principles of healthy youth-youth relationships – trust, honesty, what makes two people become friends. If one person is being taken advantage of – a follower – that relationship is not healthy. When one person feels like they owe another person something, when someone is holding you down or holding something against you – that relationship isn't healthy.
- In a healthy relationship two people allow each other to make their own decisions.
- Parents role in healthy relationships – explain to them the values that they have – talk to them about what their children are going through.
- Issues in the household are often revealed in issues that happen outside of the household. Kids may not be violent on the inside, but it is what they see at home. Try to get kids to understand that what their parents do may not be what everyone should do – parents teach students what to do through their own actions.
- The hardest part about a healthy relationship is having one with yourself. It is hard to go out and find someone to be there for you if you are not there for yourself. Having a healthy relationship with yourself is the first and foremost thing that needs to happen. It's hard to go out and find something that you don't see in yourself. You have to be what you want from other people. You have to love yourself for someone else to love you.
- We offer kids resources, programs, places they can go, people for them to talk to, we encourage self-esteem.

## QUESTIONS

**Q:** Kay – once you have given the tools to the children, they are going home and they aren't supported in using them. What I have learned over the years, kids are hungry for the right way – they do carry what we give them home, irregardless of whether they are supported or not. Sometimes they challenge their parents and family members. They are realizing that because their life is ahead of them – I have learned some things now, I am going to break the generational curse – I am not going to be like you, like this. They need to change up – in some cases they do carry what they are given home.

**Kay Brennan (KB):** it is important for programs to connect to parents – tell them what they are teaching, what is going well. Parents have their own stuff – give parents skills as well, help parents and kids to support each other. Looking at the simplest thing and

trying to find the positive can help to break the cycle of negativity, especially when they are younger.

**Mason (M):** Children are often going back and teaching their parents something, there is a lot of discussion. Just because their relationship with parents is bad now doesn't mean that you can't work on that and change it, it is not permanent. Take little steps – go home and say something nice. Remember that not everything your parents are dealing with is about you.

**KB:** Saying things is great – having something written is better, it lasts forever.

**Q:** In regards to affirming youth – I need to find ways to affirm youth but how to do it in minimum amounts of time with a large group?

**M:** Use what you are good at, take control of personalities. Separate the space from outside stuff. This is a space for everyone to be the same – give rules and guidelines and they will eventually give it

**K:** important to do a one on one thing to check in with kids every once in a while. May have to be after the program. Nurturing provides sense of open affirmation – we need to find places for us to receive affirmation and pass it on to kids. Adults have to be nurtured enough to nurture kids

**Q:** In regards to LGBT and stigma – if a kid comes to you and everyone is stigmatizing them, even adults, would your program ever intervene in a relationship like that?

**M:** Ask the kid, are there other people in the school etc that are supportive? Go to them first. Going to the school is the last resort – don't just work one on one, work in groups to enforce and support programs for school district. Sexual orientation is included in discriminatory acts. As an outside person he/she can make it more anonymous.

**Q:** CCP teaches about family counseling and youth in crisis, but LGBT issues are silent.

**M:** Get a few people together and talk to your teachers. You have to be able to serve all people, including LGBT populations – it is the teacher's responsibility.

**Nancy Peter:** Let's throw it out to the audience – when you see adults modeling unhealthy relationships, what is something you can do to intervene?

**Audience Member 1:** Kids can see it in staff and teachers, a negative culture. They say about staff members or teachers that they don't like the kids – as much as they say it doesn't matter, it does matter. They are saying it out loud – just because they say they don't care, doesn't mean they don't. What can I do as a worker, in a program that is in a school but not part of the school in which kids don't feel welcome. How can I work within the system of the school to change negative culture?

**Audience Member 2:** The climate was bad at a school that I worked in – what I did was copied the policy and has it there for the students to take. Everyone understood the policy. Handed it out at home and school meetings, posted it. It gave them an opening to talk about it – somebody knows what we are feeling. This slowly changed attitudes in the school.

**M:** Schools document everything. Someone comes in and looks it over – bring it to everyone's attention. Sometimes people don't know what they are saying is bad, they don't realize what they are doing.

**Audience Member 3:** A lot of teachers learn over the years. Teachers are often burnt out or very, very green. Go into schools and teach classroom management skills. Teachers don't know how to deal with abrasive behavior from students – a lot of teachers are afraid and don't know how to deal. Also help parents with how to reverse negative behaviors.

**L'Erinne Capers (LC):** Teachers set how the classroom should be . It is usually just a few students who act like that and there is a domino effect. You can have control – it is how you portray yourself – have confidence, you can control the classroom and you can gain respect.

**M:** What are the teachers saying?

**Audience Member 1:** Kids are just seen as problems. They don't respect adults. Poor behavior, and retaliatory punishing measures. The things they bring to train teachers, etc. aren't having much of an effect. Teachers can wait to get out of there, they are burnt out – there are layers and layers of problems. How is it possible to work with school staff, principal to uncover these layers?

**M:** is there collaboration possible? Get a project going something to get people to have different types of conversation about things.

**Audience Member 1:** The PSSA's are coming up. They are messing everything up. The attitude is let's just manage and get through the year.

**Q:** When you are working with homeless youth – LGBT esp. – relationship views are skewed. How do you building a new relationship model for youth?

**M:** Make expectations clear, don't overreact. Really listen and talk, meet them where they are. Process it with them and model what healthy relationships are. Workshops are a long process, a long learning process.

**KB:** It is important to check in with kids – at the beginning they often tell a whole bunch and then close up. It is important to check in with them to see how they are doing with things. Getting initial anxiety off their chest is only step one, it has to be an ongoing type of thing.

**Audience Member:** In society there is a message that it isn't my responsibility. As long as you teach youth that the reality is you will be rejected sometime and help kids to deal with this. All we do is plant the seed for change. we don't know when it's going to happen or if it's going to happen. Give them the skills that you can the best that you can – they may use them, they may not. Make sure parents get support – there is a lot going on. Kids do come to us, for whatever reason, just do what you can to give them tools and skills for them to succeed – whether it happens today, next week, next year, etc.