

Leaders Take Center Stage Calling for Education Reform

Erin Gruwell and Melinda Jennis, two leaders on opposite ends of the United States, took center stage at the Pathways for Exceptional Children Conference on November 17th in Montville, New Jersey. Erin Gruwell delivered a powerful speech calling for an end to teaching to just the test scores. Ms. Gruwell, who is the President of the Freedom Writers Foundation based out of Long Beach, California, has become a national figure as a result of her work in teaching high school students who most considered "un-teachable." All 150 of her students, who were kids characterized by involvement with gangs, drugs, and violence, graduated from high school. Many were the first in their families to graduate, and some have continued on through college to pursue graduate and doctoral work. Gruwell gives credit to her students who she claims taught her the importance of "teaching to the child and not the test." One of her Freedom Writer students, Maria Reyes, also came to the conference to share her story. She received a standing ovation from the audience for her work and dedication in advocating for educational reform.

Melinda Jennis, President of Pathways for Exceptional Children, spoke on similar topics and advocates for an end to the 70% unemployment rate that plagues the

disabled population. She also talked about the irrelevance of test scores in teaching many students with disabilities, and that self-sufficiency and better employment should be our most coveted outcome. Many parents of children with disabilities spend 15-18 years advocating for bare minimums in education and spend thousands of dollars on therapies and tutors, only to watch their children leave the educational system to join the unemployment line, ultimately remaining largely dependent on them after they graduate. Historically, state grants and increasing legislation have not translated to better employment outcomes for the disabled. Jennis challenged Governor Corzine to not only do more to reform special education,



(Left to right) Allegra Stout, high school senior, presenting the Pathways Lead Mentors Social Change Project; Maria Reyes, Speaker, Freedom Writers; Renée Cleaves, Special Education teacher, Paterson, NJ; Erin Gruwell, President, Freedom Writers Foundation; Melinda Jennis, President, Pathways for Exceptional Children

but also to look at how communities where these children live can do more to provide additional support through mentoring and recreation after-school programs.

At the conference, Erin Gruwell generously offered a full ride scholarship to Renée Cleaves, a special education teacher who is determined to change the lives of her students at John F.

Kennedy High School in Paterson, NJ. The scholarship

enabled her to attend a five-day training session at the Freedom Writers Institute in Long Beach, California. Ms. Cleaves has just returned and approached Pathways for assistance in implementing the Freedom Writer methodology in her resource room, where she teaches high school students with special needs. Pathways, now a statewide organization, understands the difficulties that even a more affluent town such as Montville Township has in educating children having disabilities. In comparison, the issues facing special education teachers in urban inner-city areas seem almost insurmountable. Pathways plans to visit Ms. Cleaves in Paterson to assess how to best help her achieve her goals and dreams for her students.

The Pathways conference did much to deliver hope and inspiration to many who came to Montville from as far away as Baltimore, Maryland. Pathways would like to thank all of our volunteers and speakers who helped make the day one to remember!!



"Magic of Reading" a story of success!

Pathways has entered into our third six-week session of the "Magic of Reading" program. It has now grown to almost 30 children ages 4-7 who have been identified as high-risk for reading difficulties or have been classified as needing special education. This after-school program offers "direct instruction" and plenty of hands-on activities designed by seasoned instructors. It also gives parents formalized

training each six-week session that teaches them how to strengthen reading strategies and how to build on the appropriate selection of books for reading at home. The children also get to make a special visit to The Chelsea during one class per session.



This offers the children an opportunity to read books to the seniors and act out a small play in front of the whole group. One of the seniors, Uncle Al, played storyteller as all the children sat and listened, enthralled. Everyone enjoys the

time together. The "Magic of Reading" program has grown at such a fast pace that Pathways is now looking to hire a fourth teacher. If you are interested in becoming a teacher or enrolling your child in the program, please email Debi Jarvie, Program Director, at magicofreading@inbox.com.



HOW BULLYING MAKES YOU
FEEL

bad



By Brandon

Kids Inspire Change Corner:

The Pathways "Kids Inspire Change" class took place once a week for six weeks during October through November for children ages 8 and up interested in journalism and photography. Using all types of software and computer technology, the children designed anti-bullying posters

and wrote articles from interviews they conducted with reporters from two newspapers. Each month in our newsletter, we will feature a special project from this class. All the children did a wonderful job and are very excited to have their work published in our newsletter!

Recreation Programs:

PATHWAYS "MAGIC OF READING" PROGRAM

This program helps to develop phonologic awareness, phonetics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension reading skills. Ongoing sessions run for six weeks with 45-minute classes meeting twice a week. Children may enter at the start of any session. Mentors attend the classes and act as reading buddies. Parent trainings are conducted by the teachers to help parents select appropriate books for their children and encourage reading at home. Your child does not have to be classified in special education for this program. It provides extra early intervention to help any child age 4-7 who is struggling with reading to become a successful and motivated reader. Next session: Every Tuesday/Thursday starting Jan. 22, 24, 29, 31, Feb. 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21 & 26. Choose one of

two consecutive time slots: 3:30-4:15pm or 4:15-5:00pm. Located at Montville Township Public Library Pio Costa conference room, 90 Horseneck Rd. Pathways members: \$150; nonmembers: \$170.

LEARNING THROUGH LIFE: "CAREERS IN THE WORKS"

This program will begin by helping the kids isolate their skills and interests, then be a springboard for them to start exploring different careers. The kids will research jobs and develop a map to chart their way toward achieving their goals. The class will look at disability and how to understand modifications that kids may need to advocate for. It will provide self-discovery and advocacy skills, exposure to filling out applications, building resumes, and how to successfully navigate through the interview process. Technology skills will be incorporated throughout the session, plus a field trip to explore some job options chosen by the participants. This class for ages 10 and above will meet on Thursdays, Jan. 10, 17, 24, 31 & Feb. 7 from 5:00-6:00pm at the Pio Costa Auditorium, 90 Horseneck Rd., Montville. Pathways members: \$55; nonmembers: \$65.

PATHWAYS BASKETBALL TEAM

The kids will learn about the rules and skills associated with the game of basketball and have fun socializing together with their mentors. Children ages 3-7 will play from 9:15-10:00am, ages 8 and above will play from 10:00-11:00am on Saturdays, January 5, 12, 19, & 26. Located at ValleyView Elementary School gymnasium, 30 Montgomery Ave., Montville. Pathways members: \$20; nonmembers: \$30. To reserve a team t-shirt, you must register by January 2, 2008.

These programs are run under the authority of the Montville Twp. Recreation Dept.



What a child needs to be exceptional.