



BARNSTABLE COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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TO: County Commissioners; Assembly of Delegates

For the past nine years, students from all of Barnstable County's high schools have been invited to attend the Human Rights Academy sponsored by the Barnstable County Human Rights Commission. For the past three years, all the middle schools in the County have also been invited to attend. In 2014, fifteen schools sent teams to the fall session, where they learned about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and about empathetic listening and community building through "Get Empathy Now!" training (GEN).

The teams then returned to their schools, with the assignment to design a project of their own to address a human rights issue and to educate and involve their peers. In April 2015, teams were invited to gather again to report on their projects. Here is the report from the attending schools.

Human Rights Academy 2014-15: A Report of Projects

Barnstable High School, Ms. Pam Silva, Advisor: The BHS Human Rights Club meets once a week after school. Some of their projects are on-going annual events; others occur as interest and opportunity arise. In the fall, they took part in the Big Fix organized by Housing Assistance Corporation. They raked leaves and cleaned up the yard of an elderly couple in Yarmouth. The Gingerbread House fundraiser is held in December and welcomes kids and parents to make a gingerbread house, for which the group provides materials and prizes. Money raised (\$350) benefited Homeless Not Hopeless. They also made and distributed bag lunches for people at the NOAH Shelter, an event that inspired one student to purchase 75 winter coats to be discreetly made available to students in school who needed them.

Meanwhile, substitute teacher/field hockey coach Ashley Bishop introduced the HR club to Flying Kites Orphanage in Kenya, where she volunteers. The team collected gently

used books and movies that Ms. Bishop took with her to the orphanage, bringing back stories and photos to share with the Human Rights club. The club has also supported Angel House for some time and sponsors an afternoon of bowling for the resident women and their children. In response to the devastating earthquake in Nepal, students worked under Ms. Silva's guidance to raise money to help.

The club also works to educate the high school about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with a poster project for Human Rights Day (December 10). They attended the Human Rights Day breakfast where they heard Jaime R. Williamson, chair of Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, discuss the state of affairs in Massachusetts as well as her own personal journey. They enjoyed a visit with Barnstable's Town Representative to the Human Rights Commission, Ms. Theresa Santos, who inspired the club to learn about and become part of the Great American No Bull Challenge.

Cape Cod Academy, Mr. Larry Brown, Advisor: With a very active advisor, the CCA HRA team was able to mount another terrific Cape-wide talent show in February: *Shelter from the Storm*. Preparation includes scouting talent at other schools and involving the wider community. Mr. Brown reaches out to businesses for sponsorships. Companies like Cape Air, Cape Cod 5¢ Savings Bank, and others pledged their support, enabling the students to raise \$15,000 at the concert. The funds benefited eight charities addressing needs of the homeless and of veterans. Their coffee houses, featuring mostly CCA students, raised another \$2,000, which helped rebuild a residential unit at Safe Harbor and supported the global Free the Slaves movement. CCA's Pink Ribbon Club raises money for the Cuda Center for women who can't afford treatment for breast cancer. Their donation to Cuda was \$3,000 this year, raised through bake sales and a Dancing for a Cure event. In addition, the HRA team had \$9,500 left from last year's efforts which was also distributed to charitable organizations. In total, the students of CCA presented \$28,000 to charities across the Cape this year. They are always looking for new talent for the *Shelter from the Storm* concert, which may move to April in hope of better weather.

Cape Cod Tech, Ms. Pat Policastro, Advisor: Two groups combined this year at Cape Tech to make up their Human Rights Academy team. Be the Change and the Gay-Straight Alliance joined to work on a variety of projects. One focused on animal rights, with the students collecting sheets and blankets for the Animal Rescue League shelter in Brewster. They worked with a health class to collect Jeans for Teens, jeans for homeless teens. They go to the Food Pantry weekly to provide whatever assistance is needed. They sponsor a monthly "Hats for Hunger" day, where anyone contributing money or a non-perishable food item is allowed to wear a hat in school. They are working on a food certificate program to support the Homeless Coalition and are structuring, with the administration, a camp-out to raise funds for the Homeless Coalition. In April, they observed the Day of Silence, to educate their peers about the silencing impact of bullying against LGBT students. They also attended a multigenerational gathering of LGBTQ friends and allies at the Orleans Senior Center.

Falmouth High School, Mr. Bill Mock, Advisor: The Human Rights efforts at Falmouth High are carried out by a couple of different student groups. The Model UN club wanted to increase interest and involvement in the election process, so they made weekly informational announcements during the fall about issues in local and state elections. They also produced posters about the issues and brought in two candidates for a candidate forum. Then they held a mock election in the high school and compared their results with the general results. The Community Action Network (CAN) attended specialized training following the fall HRA training in "Get Empathy Now!" They met with guidance counselors about the CAN and several other faculty members attended CAN training in May. The FHS CAN will begin work in earnest in the fall.

The HRA students also formed a relationship with a women's learning center at a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut. The students were shocked to learn that the camp has been in existence for 67 years. They donated textbooks and raised funds through an alternative gift fair in December. They are doing an art exchange with students and women in the refugee camp, sending a camera and art supplies to the center. They will exchange photos with the women, and each group will turn the photographic portraits into drawings or paintings. They have realized just how difficult it is to get an education while living in a refugee camp and want to continue to build the relationship they started this year. Among their plans is a coffee house to be held at the Woods Hole Community Center to raise funds for the Palestinians living in Beirut.

Monomoy Regional High School, Ms. Angelina Raneo Chilaka, Advisor: The Monomoy HRA team continued the work begun last year to foster a single community out of the two high schools that combined to make the new Monomoy district. "We wanted to create a more positive and community-friendly environment." Last year's work resulted in a new logo for the school that reflected both Harwich and Chatham. This year they focused on spreading awareness of global and local issues: LGBT support through their Gay-Straight Alliance, genocide, water, and their local school budget. They held a Cultural Fair, inviting students, staff, and the wider community to represent their cultures. Groups participating included the Cape Verdean community, the school's chapter of STAND, the GSA, and other immigrant communities. The fair included food, local dress, and music. The students also sponsored a Health Fair that provided information on safe, clean water, STDs, violence, and marriage equality. They joined with Nauset Regional High School to sponsor a speaker for Holocaust Remembrance Day. In response to their study of the situation in Sudan and Syria, they traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with their congressional delegations and lobby for legislation to end the situation in Sudan. They sponsored a Human Rights Week in the spring, featuring a different topic each day with petitions for students and faculty to sign in response. They have held blood drives, open mic nights, and coffee houses, and host a guest speaker every other week. They sponsored a Monomoy Leadership Olympics Night, where 140-150 students learned about leadership, how to reach out to students, and discussed their personal roles: Am I a leader or a follower? How am I a leader? How can I apply the skills I have?

The Monomoy Human Rights Academy group approaches every topic in the same way. They ask: *What is the issue? How can we get people aware of and involved in the issue? How can we fix the issue? How is this issue related to global issues, like water and sanitation?* To make a difference, they realized, they have to involve the whole school in a "ripple effect."

They summarized their work by encouraging fellow HRA teams to "Educate, Celebrate, Exercise your rights, Get involved, and Be a leader, not a follower!"

Nauset Regional High School, Ms. Lisa Brown, Advisor: Another very active group, the Nauset High HRA wanted to work in support of an anti-bullying culture in the Nauset Regional Middle School. Using the approach they learned in "Get Empathy Now!" (GEN) training, they visited the middle school, did some ice breakers with the students, observed the students at work and play, and took notes, in preparation for designing an anti-bullying program. However, they found that contact was difficult and sustaining the relationship a challenge, especially without support from the middle school guidance office, so they have been unable to develop this program for Nauset. However, they are planning to work with the Provincetown School on an anti-bullying program.

They decided to form a Community Action Network (CAN) based on their GEN training --- two in fact, one for students, one for adults. They attended a second student training in May at Cape Cod Community College and invited teachers they thought would be amenable to GEN to attend training in February. These teachers "loved GEN," per the students, and together they are working to make GEN training a requirement for every teacher, through professional development events.

An on-going effort at NRHS has been supporting the people of Haiti and Ms. Brown traveled to Haiti with a couple of students to spend ten days rebuilding and working on health care. The Nauset HRA also took part in the Silent Walk for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, in Wellfleet, and conducted a "cross the line" exercise with participants afterwards at Preservation Hall. Both the Nauset students and other walkers found this exercise profound and moving.

Provincetown School, Ms. Nancy Flasher, Advisor: The entire seventh grade traveled from Provincetown to attend the fall and spring HRA sessions in Hyannis. Following the GEN training in October, they decided to do a community-building project called "Our Provincetown Through Many Eyes." They went to the Council on Aging to interview community members about their histories in Provincetown and worked with an artist invited by the Fine Arts Work Center. All the information they gathered will eventually be transferred onto a web page.

Riverview School, Ms. Janet Hastings, Advisor: With four members (three from California and one from Brazil!), the Riverview HRA had an energetic year. They sponsored a big all-school Valentine's Day dance - which had to be held in the afternoon, due to a snow storm! They also continued their project in support of access to clean water in developing countries. As part of a Human Rights Day for the school, they raised funds

to purchase Wello Water Wheels [*information can be found at wellowater.org*]. These hollow wheels enable girls to transport large amounts of water from wells to homes without putting stress on their head and neck, and without multiple trips. The HRA team made a presentation to the school about water as a human right and provided an activity packet for groups to learn about the global water crisis. They also sponsored their annual Walk for Water, in which participants trek from the school to the beach and carry back a large container of water. There's nothing like actual experience to bring home the challenge for many girls around the world of providing water for their households every day. The club raised \$2,100 for clean water, supporting Water Wheels for 105 families in developing countries.

Sturgis Charter High School, Ms. Kate Dunigan-Atlee, Advisor: The Sturgis Passion Project Club allows students to follow their own passions to address topics like rare childhood cancers, gift baskets for cancer patients, cookies for oncology nurses, learning about Tay Sachs disease and supporting a local women's shelter. They spent several months this year learning about human trafficking. They discussed the fact that there are more slaves in the world today than at any other time in history and educated themselves on the way consumer behaviors impact modern day slavery. They decided to focus on coffee production, the world's second most traded commodity, and one that is often produced with forced and child labor, i.e., slaves. The club decided to advocate that Sturgis teachers drink only Fair Trade coffee, which ensures transparency in the production chain and prohibits forced labor. They involved the Parents Association and the Business Director of the school, and *voila!* Sturgis is changing the lives of modern-day slaves, one "cup of Joe" at a time. In the spring, the club hosted a Skype conversation with Kevin Austin, a modern abolitionist and founder of the Set Free Movement, to learn more about how non-profit organizations are working to end human trafficking.

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