



Challenge Day

James S. Rickards High School offered adult volunteers from various walks of life (e.g., community, business, law, fire, college, unemployed) to assist with its October 2009 4-day Challenge Day events. You might have read Meredith Clark's "[Two Minutes Can Change Everything](#)" column in the October 9, 2009 *Tallahassee Democrat* newspaper and on-line recapping sentiments experienced by many if not all of the participants—students, staff, and volunteers alike. My commission aide and college intern came away as I did with deep self-retrospection of our assessments of ourselves as well as evaluating the telescopic and microscopic perspectives in which we've viewed and sometimes labeled others.

Baa, baa, black sheep,
Have you any wool?
Yes sir, yes sir,
Three bags full.

One for my master,
One for my dame,
And one for the little boy
Who lives down the lane.
—Author Unknown

One particular activity, "Cross The Line", brought home the fact that everyone in our session could be labeled as a "Black Sheep" due to one or more undesirable or disreputable experience(s) in our history. The series of scenarios presented helped us realize that some misguided and unwelcome dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors stem from repressed memories of loneliness, unhealed wounds of hurt, or the complexity of not being able to experience childhood as a child. All in all, just as the black sheep exhibited in the familiar nursery rhyme when questioned about his wool, we sought to aid the youth value their self-worth and extend it from within and on to others.

(Continued next column.)

Although the volunteer adults were to be facilitators to help the youth process what they were experiencing and utilize coping mechanisms, some of the youth took a commanding lead to comfort each other as well as offer support to the adults. That's what it was all about—increasing personal power and self-esteem.

[Challenge Day programs](#) aim to shift dangerous peer pressure to positive peer support and to eliminate the acceptability of teasing, violence and all forms of oppression. There were multiple "fun" activities; yet, it also was a serious exploration of sensitive issues such as violence, teasing, social oppression, racism, harassment, conflict management, suicide, peer pressure, alcohol and drugs. Quoting from Mohandas a.k.a. Mahatma Gandhi, we were admonished to "Be The Change" we desire to see, thus, allowing me as a facilitator to employ three of my own rapport building techniques.

- Be slow to judge!
- Demonstrate compassion / love.
- Speak "promise" into others – "I expect great things."

For me, the investment of time for this event was well worth the return. It was rewarding to assist and observe the reticent students, suspicious of us zany acting (*our instructions were to act abnormal to our usual nature of mature professionals*) adults, transform during the 7-hour day into youth more liberated and open minded to productive possibilities beyond their past. My vision is that many of these youth will do more than be mere bystanders, they will choose to actively engage themselves to improve their school, their community, their state, and their country.

Leon County Schools and the Department of Peace plan to keep the change alive. Become involved by contacting Dr. Cindy Landis Bigbie, @ (850) 216-2061 @ OPI@tallynet.com. Learn more about Challenge Day at <http://www.challengeday.org/>.

Change We Can Live With

Have you ever been locked-out of opportunity because of gender, race, age, physical features, culture, sexual preference, education, clothes, neighborhood, finances, a rap sheet, or just for making the “wrong” decision? Discrimination doesn’t discriminate. It can insinuate, incriminate, and intimidate.

Entrenched discrimination against the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community, systemic disadvantages for women and people of color, threats to the environment, impediments to the right to vote and many other problems are an invitation to design and execute innovative projects to improve the opportunities for all of our citizenry. These issues are monolithic and complex; yet, the City Commission took a giant step to address providing domestic employee benefits to LGBT couples.

At our [October 28, 2009, City Commission meeting](#) (see item #8), City policies were modified for domestic partner benefits and expansion of protected classes. The City Commission authorized the following:

- Include sexual orientation and gender identity as a protected class for the purposes of the City’s Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policies and Procedures.
- Extend City offered benefits to domestic partners with Blue Cross/Blue Shield being the sole provider for health care.
- Amend the City’s personnel policies related to leave policies to include domestic partners and the children of domestic partners.

Updates

Palmer Munroe Center Initiative – various on-going meetings are being conducted to explore developing a youth center facility to include an element of restorative justice. A proposal presentation is scheduled for the December 12, 2009 City Commission meeting.

Financial Viability – An aggressive work plan has been set forth with the goal of bringing back to the City Commission recommendations, prior to the beginning of next year’s budget process, on a variety of issues related to how the government is financed, including appropriate levels of reserve funding and general fund transfers from the utilities.

Political Leaders on the Verge


Essence Magazine

Who will be the next Barack and Michelle Obama? Cynthia Gordy asks that question in her Emerging Leaders 2010 article in the on-line version of *Essence Magazine*. Ten emerging political players in the trenches were spotlighted—elected officials, activists and local leaders making their mark in the nation’s capital and around the nation. I was featured as one of these 2010 Emerging Leaders. See posting 8/10 at the following web address. http://photos.essence.com/galleries/emerging_leaders_2010

Essence approached me in mid-September with an impromptu phone interview. Reflecting on the experience, I was humbled, yet excited once the reality of what was happening set-in. I was raised by my mother to always do what was right and not to worry about the recognition. That mantra has guided my life's work and paid off tremendously in every thank you, and word of encouragement that I've received.

November Calendar Events

“Subject to Change”

Date	Time	Events
11/10	9 am – 4 pm	Office Appointments
11/10	4 pm	CC Meeting @ CHC
11/11	Veteran’s Day	City Offices Closed
11/12	8 am	Palmer Munroe Center @ Palmer Munroe
11/16	Noon	CRA @ CHC
11/16	1 pm	CRTPA @ CHC
11/24	8 am	Palmer Munroe Center @ CH
11/24	9:30 am – 2 pm	Office Appointments
11/24	2 pm – 4 pm	Financial Viability @ CH
11/24	4 pm	CC Meeting @ CHC
11/26-27		<p>HAPPY THANKSGIVING</p>  <p>City Offices Closed</p>

Code:

CC – City Commission
 CH– City Hall
 CHC – City Hall Chambers
 CRA – Community Redevelopment Agency
 CRTPA – Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency
 HHS – Health & Human Services Target Issue Committee
 LRTI – Long Range Target Issue Committee

“Serving is Leading”