

# PEACE in Action

## Building a Culture of Peace in Schools and Communities

### Help Increase the Peace (HIPP) Program

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By Kathryn Liss

The Help Increase the Peace Program (HIPP) is a 15-year-old project of the American Friends Service Committee that uses an experiential training model to teach non-violence to youth. The HIPP Program is based on the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) that has brought Quakers into American prisons to teach non-violence. Fifteen years ago in Syracuse, New York the participants in an AVP workshop said "Let's reach youth before they are incarcerated and help them find other ways of solving their problems." From this, HIPP was born.

Today, HIPP is reaching youth in communities around the U.S. and even outside. Last year I co-facilitated HIPP institutes to train facilitators in Japan and Hong Kong, as well as in the U.S. We have an active project in Ontario, Canada. Some mixture of HIPP and AVP is being done in communities in Australia and East Africa—Kenya, Rwanda, and Burundi.

HIPP takes many forms and reaches different goals. The basic elements of building community and teaching communication skills for resolving conflict non-violently are always there. Underneath are the elements of affirmation for self-esteem, accepting differences of race, class, and gender, and developing leadership. In most workshops, a team of adults and youths provide the facilitation for a group of youths and/or adults. This aspect of leadership development and empowerment of youth is a crucial element of the project.

Some examples of how HIPP is being used follow:

- In Arlington, Virginia all three high schools are using HIPP as a curriculum to teach leadership and diversity. This year, Yorktown High School has been teaching 6 sections of this course with 180 students. These students are practicing their skills by leading workshops three times a year school-wide to increase the acceptance of diversity in school.
- In Tampa, Florida HIPP is being used as part of an after-school program for African American boys. They are learning how to be more respectful of each other and themselves through games and activities that teach conflict resolution, affirm self-esteem, and build community.
- In Western Massachusetts the program has also been in place for eight years. Youths who were among the first participants are now the organizers of the program, and 60 new facilitators will be certified by the end of this summer. Some of the youths leading workshops are as young as 13 years old.
- In Charlottesville, Virginia the project is bringing youths from low-income housing projects into contact with youths and adults from the college community. They have obtained grant funding to provide stipends for the participants from public housing to be in the workshops and eventually to become facilitators themselves.
- Students who were trained in HIPP at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland are taking the program into the elementary schools and teaching younger people in after-school programs. A group from Goucher traveled to a town in Texas near the Mexican border and used HIPP to work with local people from both sides of the border to build community.
- In Indianapolis, Indiana, HIPP has been used by the Peace Learning Center for many years. They have trained their AmeriCorps volunteers to be facilitators who will, in turn, work with every fourth grade student in the city to teach peaceful means of resolving conflicts.
- In Hartford, Connecticut two middle schools have been doing HIPP workshops together. One is an inner city public school, and the other is a private school. By looking at issues of inclusion and exclusion, they

have built caring relationships between young people who probably would never otherwise have met each other.

- In Boston, Massachusetts, a group called Teen Empowerment is using HIPP workshops to train their youth staff who go out into the community and pass this information along to others. This spring their project is to make a video about how different people in the various housing projects solve their "beefs" (conflicts).

We have heard examples of schools that have been transformed through using HIPP, for example in Toronto, Canada and in Hartford, Connecticut. Sustaining this transformation is difficult. Too often, school personnel change, students grow up and leave, and the environment returns to its previous state.

Nonetheless, the lives of many individuals have been changed. These young people are now out in the world handling problems better, feeling affirmed in their belief that everyone of whatever race, class or sexual orientation has something of value to offer them, and offering their leadership in building community. A youth, who was a shy wallflower when he began HIPP, became class president. A young woman, who wasn't sure she could go to college, got a large scholarship based on her participation and leadership in HIPP. Others have learned other leadership skills and have succeeded in ways they might otherwise not have done.

It is always hard to say what conflicts we have averted with our programs and workshops. When conflict breaks out, it is evident; but how do we know about the conflict that might have been brewing, but which has been averted by the timely intervention of someone with skill and confidence? Participants have told us about going home and intervening in squabbles between their siblings and even between their parents. Others have intervened in potential conflicts in their communities.

Nowhere is conflict absent. It is not the lack of conflict which measures peace, but the ability to resolve conflict non-violently. The principles of HIPP allow us to make better choices each day. Those principles are:

1. Find something you have in common.
2. Reach for the good in others.
3. Listen before making judgments.
4. Base your positions on truth.
5. Be ready to change your position if it is wrong.
6. A position based on truth will give you the courage to act.
7. If you can't avoid danger, face it creatively rather than violently.
8. Use surprise and humor.
9. Learn to trust your inner sense of when to act and when to withdraw.
10. Be willing to experience discomfort for standing up for what is important.
11. Be patient and persistent.
12. Help build community, based on honesty, respect, and caring.

With these principles in mind, young people who have experienced HIPP (and the adults who work with them) have been able to have calmer, more successful lives resolving conflicts constructively, rather than destructively, and standing together with one another to represent the importance of community while still honoring diversity.

HIPP manuals are available for purchase from American Friends Service Committee, PO Box 73008, Washington, DC 20056 for \$30 plus \$6 shipping and handling. To become a HIPP facilitator, it is necessary to take either the three weekend workshops (Basic, Advanced, and Training for Facilitators) or the five-day summer Institute. For more information; contact [hipp@afsc.org](mailto:hipp@afsc.org) or check the website: [www.afsc.org/hipp](http://www.afsc.org/hipp)

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PEACE 

cannot be kept  
by force  
It can only be  
achieved by  
understanding

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