

The Wellspring

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Inclusion is the Wellspring of Democracy

Open Society Institute Provides Support to Create a Statewide Progressive Coalition for Mississippi

By Susan M. Glisson

This past spring, the New York-based foundation Open Society Institute awarded the Winter Institute \$220,000 to help create a statewide alliance of progressive organizations.

Under the umbrella of the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, the funds will be directed entirely to developing a coalition to address key issues like economic justice and security, education, youth empowerment, and community organizing. By leveraging the resources and strategies of such a diverse group, we can all work more effectively to make Mississippi better for everyone.

Portia Espy, CAO of the Southern Regional Office of the Children's Defense Fund explains "In Mississippi we have approximately 11,000 nonprofit organizations (not including the 2,000 or so faith-based organizations) of which some are working collaboratively on common issues.

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On October 28th, Mission Mississippi honored Reverend John Perkins and Governor Winter for their leadership in racial reconciliation and justice. Their remarks are well-worth reading! Please find them on-line at www.winterinstitute.org

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It makes sense, especially during this time when resources are harder to come by, that we look for commonality and pool our efforts to realize larger, more positive outcomes in our communities and across our state. This effort is helping to bring nonprofits together for this all important conversation and to encourage collaborative efforts across the state. It's a win-win situation for all involved." Karla Velez of Catholic Charities agreed, saying that the coalition will be, "A resource center that will assist the entire state with different issues."

Approximately sixty non-profit groups throughout the state are participating stakeholders in this new effort and have met twice to identify shared values and working purposes for the coalition. The groups serve Mississippians across the state in such impor-

of the coalition and handle the logistics of the eight conferences.

The coalition will choose four key issues around which to host a conference. Issues will be selected based on a variety of criteria, including whether or not several groups are already working on the issue with demonstrable success and



PHOTOS BY CHARLES H. TUCKER

Participants begin planning a statewide network



tant areas as access to justice, equity in education, access to health care, and youth programs.

According to MEPC Director Ed Sivak, "MEPC is excited to be part of the Advance Mississippi effort. The William Winter Institute on Racial Reconciliation has done a remarkable job in pulling together a multi-racial, statewide coalition of Mississippians working together to create opportunities for some of the state's most vulnerable residents."

The funding will support the hosting of eight conferences over two years. It will also provide funding to hire a project coordinator for the grant period who will coordinate the work

which issues will have the greatest community impact. Two conferences will be offered in the spring, each focusing on issues chosen by the coalition.

The conferences will bring together non-profit groups with expertise in each area as well as community leaders who are eager to access new strategies and support for local work. By the conclusion of each conference, community leaders will be supported in creating a year-long work plan of action around the chosen issue. A second conference the following year will bring back the first conference's participants to evaluate their success and chart a sustainable course for building on their work.

Nancy Kohsin-Kintigh of the ACLU said, "The coalition convenings, thus far, are really exciting. There is so much intense and wonderful social justice work going on in the state and we are finally finding a venue to connect our work!"

The coalition will next meet on Friday, January 21st in Jackson.

For more information on how your group can get involved, please contact the Winter Institute at 662-915-6734 or wwirr@olemiss.edu.

Spotlight on a Summer Youth Institute Participant: De’Vante Wiley

By Kaitlyn Barnes

All of the students who participated in the Summer Youth Institute returned to their communities to start doing good work, but one in particular has been especially busy since the end of the program.

De’Vante Wiley, a 16-year-old from Greenwood, MS, met with Mayor Carolyn McAdams within two weeks of returning home from Oxford to propose his plan for a community garden. De’Vante hoped that by working together to grow a garden which any member of the community could benefit from his severely segregated hometown could overcome racial tensions and progress. Mayor McAdams informed him that attempts had been made in the past to initiate such a program but there was never anyone willing to lead. De’Vante offered his services immediately.

His first task was to get a petition of ten signatures from people willing to dedicate their time to the project. De’Vante secured forty-three signatures. The mayor then assigned city gardeners to help with the implementation.

In no time at all, the garden was up and running. De’Vante says it has been a huge success. He brings a group of younger boys whom he mentors to work in the garden a couple of times a week.

When they are not growing vegetables, De’Vante is organizing games of basketball, kickball, and football to teach the boys sportsmanship. He also tutors them, while keeping his own grades in pristine shape.

De’Vante has taken Greenwood by storm, but he has also started drumming up interest for similar projects in other towns in the Delta including Ruleville, Sunflower, and Drew. Quezdon Nash was among the students to whom De’Vante spoke in Ruleville earlier this fall. He says of De’Vante, “He influenced me to do a lot of the things that I am doing now, and he will continue to influence the things I do in the future. The whole time he was talking about how we need to make

our communities better and how we can bring change.”

De’Vante is certainly bringing change, not only to his community but also in his own life. His activism has drawn attention from Harvard researchers, the Hollywood directors and producers working on the film version of *The Help*, and the organizers of the Washington Journalism and Media Conference, who have invited him to participate in the youth conference in July.

So what’s next? De’Vante is in the initial stages of planning the first annual Community Day to get members of the community, black and white, to come together for a clean-up day. Sadly, he might be leaving Mississippi soon to



De’Vante Wiley with Governor William Winter

PHOTOS BY SUSAN M. GLISSON

move back to Texas but he says he is going to get as much done as he can while he is still here. He says he would like to leave knowing there are “more ‘De’Vante Wileys’ who can get my kind of work done.”

In regards to the role that the Summer Youth Institute played in his activism, De’Vante says, “If it had not been for the Institute, change would not have been on my mind. I had to look at it from the Institute’s perspective, that I could end racial tension and bring change to the community.”

Summer Youth Institute a Great Success!

By Melody Frierson

For ten days in July, twenty-six high school student leaders from across the state of Mississippi gathered on the campus of the University of Mississippi for the inaugural Summer Youth Institute. More than just a leadership retreat, the Summer Youth Institute (SYI) intended to help facilitate and nurture a sense of community between the

Youth Institute participants received information on various subjects impacting their respective communities. Subjects covered during the ten-day retreat included, but were not limited to, economic justice, educational equity, diversity, LGBT rights, and privilege-related challenges. The students were also provided a set of practical skills which would allow them to more effectively use popular social media networks (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) to create change within their respective communities.

Civil Rights tours through Money, MS and Philadelphia, MS helped to make all of the information they received more tangible. SYI participant Ying Lin said, “Visiting the Delta and Philadelphia was immensely powerful and moving. Never in my life have I wanted to work for a better world and for equality more than I



PHOTO BY CHARLES H. TUCKER

SYI participants with Governor William Winter

students, many of whom would never have met otherwise. Organizers of the Summer Youth Institute wanted to create an environment where young people would be able to learn community building skills as well as be able to create a sense of community between the young people of Mississippi.

The youth coordinator for the Winter Institute, Patrick Weems, served as the director of the SYI. Weems and a team of interns and volunteers spent several months planning and organizing the Youth Institute. Of the more than forty student leaders nominated by teachers and community leaders, twenty-six young rising high school sophomores and juniors were selected. These young women and men had shown their commitment to making their respective communities better places.

Through workshops, panels, and seminars, Summer



PHOTO BY SUSAN M. GLISSON

SYI participants at the historic store in Money, MS.

have when I stood in the Sumner courthouse or at the death sites of [slain Civil Rights workers] Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner.” Focusing on Civil Rights history allowed the students to see inspiring examples of local leaders and young people who made big impacts in their communities. The histories of these places connected students to a long line of active citizenship in Mississippi.

Follow-Up with Youth Regional Groups

By Nickolaus Luckett

Additionally, students learned the importance of fundraising, public speaking, public policy and advocacy, and network weaving in the creation and sustention of effectual organizations.

The Summer Youth Institute culminated in a final presentation at the Jackson-Evers International Airport which allowed the students to utilize the skills they had acquired over the ten-day institute. Governor William Winter joined the students and offered encouraging words as they prepared to return home. Another memorable moment occurred on



PHOTO BY SUSAN M. GLISSON

SYI participants in a scavenger hunt on the second day.

its last day when Mrs. Myrlie Evers-Williams, wife of the late Medgar Evers and founder and president of the Medgar Evers Institute, surprised the students and staff with an encouraging and heartfelt phone call.

At the end of the ten-day experience SYI participant Lucas Ferguson said, "Well, after spending ten days at a place, and making close bonds, I will always hold SYI as home in my heart, because home is not a location, it is a feeling; a feeling of love, security, and happiness. Only time will tell how we used this ten day adventure, but I hope it gets used."

For more information about next summer's program, contact Patrick Weems at phweems@gmail.com or 662-915-6734.

After the Summer Youth Institute in July 2010, students from around the state returned home with two goals in mind: developing ways to work together and continuing or beginning work at home. On November 6th, a one-day Youth Summit was held in Jackson to brainstorm ways that they can work together and their work at home has taken shape in many different forms.

In Philadelphia, MS, students have created a dialogue-based organization called Dangerously Powerful Dialogue (DPD). DPD is conducting serious dialogue about issues facing their community and from this dialogue they hold to create initiatives. One possible project that the group is exploring tackling is teen pregnancy.

These students want to create programs and policies to address this issue. On the Coast, students who are a part of the S.A.I.N.T.S. organization, are working on a related issue, STD/AIDS prevention policy. On December 1, they held a World AIDS Day Program at ST. James Baptist Church in Gulfport, MS.

In McComb, MS, students are calling for a NAACP youth regional meeting to start addressing issues in their community.

Students in the Delta created the Delta Alliance of Youth (D.A.Y.) to promote youth leadership and dialogue and students in Jackson created Students with a Goal (S.W.A.G.) to begin addressing issues in their communities. The Cleveland Youth Council is continuing to do great work in their community. Their initiatives include encouraging youth voices, and promoting diversity, civic engagement, youth organizing, service-learning, philanthropy, and leadership development. The students have done several events, such as voter registration drives, abstinence workshops, and hosting dialogue meetings. In north Mississippi, students such as Lucas Ferguson have been partnering with the Safe Schools Coalition to promote tolerance and bring awareness to issues that LGBTQ students face in Mississippi.

Through the work and dedication of the youth and the Winter Institute youth organizer, Patrick Weems, students from other communities have reached out for help creating organizations. Weems is currently meeting with students from Ruleville, MS and the Brookhaven Performance Arts High School to help empower their work.

The Welcome Table: An Era of Dialogue on Race Continues

By Hope Owens Wilson

After the highly inspiring Welcome Table retreats during the spring of 2010, the communities of Philadelphia, Greenwood, McComb, and Oxford, Mississippi, have been busy working to make sure they keep momentum going. In each community, facilitation team members have held meetings with local community members to reinforce the tools learned at the retreats and to aid each community as it identifies next action steps.

Jackie Byrd Martin, a community organizer in McComb says that her community has discussed its negatives and positives in the hopes of fostering a base for possible projects, “Our group is very interested in community, we hope to promote community and gain greater community and outside support.” In addition to this the McComb group hopes to serve as a catalyst for dialogue amongst adults about the overriding issues of the community.

Successful dialogue is not only the goal of McComb, it is also that of the Oxford community. Recently they have launched a project entitled “Breaking Bread,” an initiative for having “intentional racial conversation” over dinner with friends. During the fall of 2010 through January 2011, participants from the spring retreat will host dinners in Oxford with diverse participants in order to expand the purposeful conversation around race in that community. A gathering at the end of January will bring all of those new members together to assess next steps, including identifying assets and allies as well as a potential community project.

In Greenwood, The Bridge is working hard to keep the lessons taught at the retreat alive. Fred Baine says that his group has “adopted” the Greenwood Mentoring Group, a group which reaches out to “at risk” children by providing after-school tutoring. In addition, this merger has helped to create ties between areas of members of the wealthy white community who help by providing funding for the program, and low-income residents who need the services. An effort to create an interracial community choir unfortunately has met with difficulties, as even that tiny gesture toward interracial activity was perceived as threatening by some. However, Mr. Baine is not without optimism, “Hopefully we can re-ignite that in the coming year, help provide more funding for the GMG with the help of the Kellogg Foundation and the GMG can be duplicated in other needy neighborhoods in the future and we can continue to encourage more white involvement in this cause.”

In Philadelphia, retreat participants are creating a project called “Philadelphia Speaks,” to document the changes that have occurred since 1964 to move that community past its divided racial history. In addition, local adults are now working intensively with a new youth group to bring together black and white youth.

The youth have expressed a determination to end teen pregnancy in the county which has one of the highest rates in the state. The Philadelphia team has requested the creation of a one-day version of the retreat to be offered to constituents like single mothers, who have difficulty leaving home for two days but who would like to begin learning the Welcome Table Model. The facilitation team has created a one day version of the retreat and will begin offering that version to communities in 2011.

In October, members of each community gathered in Philadelphia to meet with members of the Kellogg Foundation board. We took the opportunity to introduce those community leaders to each other, to share their respective experiences and to begin planning a common agenda. The participants agreed that the process has great potential and expressed a belief that they are building a movement. They want to identify and implement the supports to sustain that movement. They asked the Winter Institute to assist them in gathering other participants to plan such work and we are eager for that opportunity.

The facilitation team will host a retreat for statewide leaders on April 7-10th at Lake Tiak O’Khata. Participants will be drawn from a newly-created network of approximately statewide progressive organizations, in a coalition that is being supported by the Open Society Institute, through the Winter Institute.

Over the next several months, the Welcome Table project has much good work to accomplish: it will offer one-day retreats to communities, members of the facilitation team will create a manual of the Welcome Table Model, which encapsulates the tools and strategies of each phase of the process, and we will continue supporting local community initiatives. As requested by the communities, we will gather representatives from each community in a series of planning meetings over 2011, culminating in a harvesting meeting September 8-11th in Jackson, MS, to evaluate what has been successful, to identify what remains to improve the process and how the process might be best shared with other Mississippi communities.

First High School Youth Summit Cements Commitment to New Youth Network

By Patrick Weems

“We are making up the future here.”

—Guiliana Pizzuto

Over fifty students came to Jackson, MS on November 6th to participate in the first High School Youth Summit sponsored by the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. Students from all over the state came together to explore new ways to think about their local communities and to also organize a statewide network of youth organizations.

Many of the young people who came to the summit had participated in the Summer Youth Institute, but the majority of the students were new students who had been recruited by

“Touchstones” from the Welcome Table in order to build rapport and to make everyone feel comfortable. After the Welcome Table activities students got back with their community groups and thought about their work locally. Everyone came back to a large circle and presented their local work and new ideas to make change. The students talked about issues like poverty, teenage pregnancies, education and other issues that affect them and their communities. The students did an amazing job of presenting to each other and thinking critically about their communities.

After talking about their local work participants moved into a discussion about how they can support each other and formally create a statewide network of progressive youth groups. Each group came up with what they needed to sustain their work, and also what they can offer to a statewide network. The Philadelphia group talked about how they can offer a model for racial reconciliation by showing how their community created a new narrative. Quezdon Nash of Ruleville said his group could offer up, “opinions that are often overlooked” because the Delta is seen as

place of poverty and despair rather than of hope. All of the groups acknowledged that they needed moral support in order to keep their good work going.

The students left with a sense of encouragement that they could accomplish the goals they had set over the course of the day, but they also acknowledged that they needed the support of all the groups in order to sustain themselves. The students have continued to communicate over Facebook, but it is obvious that nothing beats actually coming together in person. By 2011 the students hope to be able to launch the statewide network and create a website to help keep up with all the amazing work happening around the state.



PHOTO BY CHARLES H. TUCKER

Student participants gather to create a statewide youth network.

word of mouth. Students from Ruleville came because they had heard about the good work being done by De’Vante Wiley in Greenwood, MS. Shamiski Collier and Cache Boler of Philadelphia, MS, who went to SYI, recruited eight dedicated students from Neshoba County to come to the event. Almost every single SYI student who came was able to bring new students from their area. The SYI alumni made the Summit a success by bringing new faces with great ideas.

As usual, the young folks brought amazing energy, and great conversation. The students started off by splitting up into small groups and doing some relationship-building activities. The students used dialogue techniques called



Institute Welcomes New Interns

By Megan McHenry

The institute would like to recognize our three new interns for Fall 2010: Kaitlyn Barnes, Megan McHenry, and Hope Owens-Wilson. We are happy to have them join our great staff here at the Institute.

Kaitlyn Barnes is a freshman Classics major from Jackson, MS. A graduate of Murrah High School, Kaitlyn was actively involved with CRCL (Civil Rights/Civil Liberties) club and other activist organizations throughout high school. This summer she was a counselor with the Winter Institute's Summer Youth Institute and felt that it was such a pleasure to get to know the young people involved in such great work in our state. Kaitlyn believes that, "the Institute has a bright future ahead of it" and she is "excited to be a part of it!"

Megan McHenry has been volunteering with the Institute throughout the years and joined the Winter Institute staff for her final semester at the University. She graduated in December 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in History with a Business and Spanish double minor.



Staff and interns of the Winter Institute: top to bottom and L to R: Patrick Weems, Melody Frierson, Hope Owens-Wilson, Kaitlyn Barnes, Megan McHenry, Nickolaus Luckett, Rhondalyn Peairs, Susan Glisson, Charles Tucker

Megan said, "I will carry this experience with me throughout my life. I feel so lucky to conclude my stay at the University of Mississippi with such an amazing internship."

Hope Owens-Wilson worked with the Youth Media Project and CRCL in Jackson, MS before beginning her first year at The University of Mississippi as a Theatre major in the fall 2010. When offered the opportunity to be a student intern at the Institute, she was so happy that she could be paid for doing something that she loved. Hope said, "It is weird to be able to keep doing this type of work beyond the limits of a high school after-school activities," but she is so happy that she can through the great work at The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation.

Any success of the Winter Institute is due in large measure to the contributions of amazing young people like these interns. The institute is working now to formalize the opportunities of its internship through the creation of an academic minor on campus.