

A Dream Realized and Reinforced: Local Youth Create Powerful Anti-Violence Messages

On the heels of the 25th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nationally recognized holiday, local youth and their families gathered recently to celebrate anti-violence awareness. Over a twelve week time period, youth of Martin Luther King Recreation Center and Wissahickon Boys & Girls Club of Philadelphia both further broke community barriers, artistically articulating the relationship between art and anti-violence. The 2010 Anti-Violence Silk Screen T-shirt Project enabled these talented and motivated youth to not only better understand the power of peace, but to realize their own voice as ambassadors for social change and community impact.

On Tuesday, January 11, 2011, Art-Reach—along with key partners, city legislative officials, and community constituents—celebrated the creations of youth from the Martin Luther King Recreation Center at Villa Retail Store (1231 North Broad Street). In partnership with the Philadelphia Cultural Fund, Villa Retail Stores, The Fabric Workshop and Museum, and local artist Ben Volta, Art-Reach recognized the hard work of program participants and honored winners of the t-shirt design contest. Additional sponsors and supporters of this year's project include Senator Larry Farnese, the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, InterAct Theatre, the Cradle to Grave program, Temple's Trauma Unit, public speaking coach Malyka Sankofa of The Enterprise Center's YES Program, and marketing professional Cass Green.



Students' work was framed and exhibited throughout the Villa store. Following the event, they were given to the youth participants.



(above) Public speaking coach Malyka Sankofa (center) was present to support the students.



Lead artist, Ben Volta, merged the students' designs to create a permanent work of collaborative art that will be installed at the center.

Senator Farnese spoke to the importance of arts and culture in the Philadelphia community. “I think it’s important what the youth have done,” said Farnese, who is a well-known supporter and promoter of the city’s artistic edge. “Art offers us not only cultural, artistic enjoyment, but also economic opportunities.”

Farnese commended the youthful pioneers for their ability to explore the meaning and power behind—and within—youthful expression. Farnese’s comments set the tone for an empowering event that icy Tuesday evening as all attendees awaited the announcement of the winners of this year’s anti-violence initiative.

(right) Senator Farnese poses with Sierra Horsey-Morris and speaks with her parents (below) after she was announced the winning designer of the individual category.



In addition to commending the creative contributions of all submissions, several youth from the Martin Luther King Recreation Center were awarded distinctions. Several students were selected as merit winners and were awarded a pair of sneakers of their choosing from Villa Retail Stores. Four students were also highlighted for their ability to work well together in collaboration to produce a t-shirt design; each of these students took elements from their individual designs to

produce a polished product as a group. Team leader Takara Freeman Elerby and group members Samira Scott, Sierra Horsey-Morris, and Déja Brown were each presented licensing compensation for their team t-shirt design. One student, Sierra Horsey-Morris, was also recognized for her unique individual slogan and t-shirt design, winning a licensing fee imbursement for that design as well. Along with receiving checks to cover licensing for the designs, winners also took away key lessons from this year's project.



Takara Freeman Elerby was awarded lead designer for the collaborative t-shirt category.



*Board member, Jerilyn Dressler and Senator Farnese
buying their t-shirts.*

Already an art lover, Sierra better understands the importance of anti-violence awareness and how creative expression begets empowerment and change. “I wanted to learn more about the non-violence aspect. I already like art,” explains Sierra. When asked what she would tell other youth thinking about participating in similar projects, Sierra notes that she “would tell them to try it. It’s just self-expression and doing whatever you feel.” The winning t-shirt designs are now on sale for \$10 each at two Villa Retail Store locations for the next three months; all proceeds from t-shirt sales go to the represented youth centers. Artistic Director of the Martin Luther King Recreation Center, Leroy Moses, echoes Sierra’s comments and emphasizes the importance of self-expression. “If [these children] express themselves and the beauty within them...humanity will see it, benefit and grow,” said Mr. Moses.



Mr. Moses stands with Sierra



The design team for the collaborative category pose with Christina Jackson, Project Manager

And what would Dr. King have said in response to the efforts of the students, their families, and project partners, on his 82nd birthday? His eyes and heart would have lit up in amazement, passion and awe at the incredible contributions of peace made by these gifted children. “He would have loved it,” said Mr. Moses. “He would have given a round of applause to the youth for their efforts.” Dr. King’s dream of a peace for all persists and remains a priority for many as we work to protect our communities from violence. Dr. King once offered that “Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal.” While that goal has yet to be completely attained, the empowered and motivated youth participants of the 2010 Anti-Violence Silk Screen T-shirt Project propelled us forward towards a dream realized, reinforced, and far from forgotten.



Revealing the winning design for the first time.(left to right: Christina, Stephanie Borton, Sierra, Patrick and Lennetta)

****You can support the community centers involved in this project by purchasing t-shirts at the following Villa retail locations:**

On North Broad Street: 1231 North Broad St., 19122

In Germantown: 5700 Germantown Ave., 19144

Congratulations to the winning designers!

Martin Luther King Recreation Center

Individual Designer: Sierra Horsey- Morris Collaborative Lead Designer: Ticcara Freeman Ellerbe

Collaborative Design Team: Samira Scott, Sierra Horsey-Morris and Deja Brown

Wissahickon Boys and Girls Club of Philadelphia

Individual Designer: Andre Allen

Collaborative Lead Designer: Derrick Jackson

Collaborative Design Team: Bashirah Brown, Briyon Moore, Kenisha Smith, Rosella Jones and Shanika Johnson

[See photos from the event](#)

-By Talia Adell Stinson

Talia serves as [Special Projects Ambassador](#) through [Art-Reach's Ambassador Program](#)

