

CHILDREN FIRST CLUB NEWSLETTER

December 2011

Volume 1, Issue 1

A Letter from the President

Dear Reader,

I am very excited to present to you our very first *Children First Club Newsletter*. This newsletter reflects the activities of our club, which addresses children's issues on a local, national and international scale. We accomplish this through discussions, lectures, film screenings, and fundraisers. We also reach out to important professionals related to this field.

Through our activities, we hope to foster an awareness and sensitivity about children and youth that will be present both during club activities and in your day-to-day life.

Members of our club, both men and women, come from many different cultural backgrounds and majors. During our weekly meetings, we are free and encouraged to be ourselves. We share ideas

and laughter, while at the same time we're learning about serious issues. The purpose of the Children First Club is simple — to put first the safety, protection, and well-being of children and youth.

I would like to encourage everyone who is interested and passionate

about children's rights to come and join the Children First Club, where you can speak out and represent the voices of children.

With Warm Regards,
Jeanny Kim, President of
The Children First Club



Making Children First at the Welcome Back Bash and Club Fair

Children First Club members from left to right, Jeanny Kim (club president,) Ariana Chavez (secretary) Tierra Woods, Dagmar Vodrazkova, Meghan Santos, Natalie Vattuone, Gabriella Giglio, and Elizabeth Gutierrez.



Check us out on Facebook:

[Children First Club](#)

Contact us:

children1stclub@gmail.com

Announcements:

Children First Club Toy Drive

From now until December 20th, the Children First Club is collecting toys for donation to the Million Fathers Club, whose mission is to encourage the participation of fathers in their children's lives. Assemblyman William Scarborough, Honorary Chair of the Million Fathers Club is hosting a holiday party where fathers and their children from a local homeless shelter are being invited to attend the annual event. Two hundred children are expected to attend this year. Donations of unwrapped toys are desperately needed to ensure a great holiday season for underserved children. Please drop off toys by the Children and Youth Studies Program office at 3602 James Hall.

Upcoming Events

December 6 th	December 20 th	December 22 nd
The 20 th Anniversary celebration of Children and Youth Studies	Toy Drive for Million Fathers Club	Million Fathers Club Annual Christmas Party and Toy GiveAway

Les Petits Okapis Bake Sale

By Timothy Ngo

The Children First Club held a bake sale a week ago, with proceeds going to *Les Petits Okapis International*. The money raised will help the street children in the Democratic Republic of Congo to get a second chance at life by paying for their school fee, food, clothing, and supplies. Future projects in mind that the proceeds will help to develop include a computer learning center and teaching the young Okapis how to make solar panels for studying at night to one day making it a business.

Les Petits Okapis means “the small okapis,” a very rare and shy animal that has survived years of civil conflict and continues to do so despite being poached for meat by hunters. The street children in the Congo chose to call the organization *Les Petits Okapis International* because, like the okapi, the street children in the Democratic Republic of Congo are facing unfortunate circumstances after the war. Poverty leads them to live on the

street without the basic needs to survive, often resorting to criminal behavior for some means of survival.

Though some students walked by with a glance or “busybody” gesture, some individuals showed their kindness by listening to our cause and buying our sugary goods or donating money. One individual, after opening her mind and heart to our purpose, told us she just wanted to save lives and donated her money. Another was a blogger interested in supporting us by writing about the event as well. One student was able to relate to our cause on a personal level since she herself was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

From the bottom of my heart and soul, I wish I could include everyone. Still, we thank everyone who contributed that day to help save the children’s lives, and we thank those reading this article.



Adolescent Literacy

By Meghan Santos

Middle school is considered by many in the education community as the most difficult age group to teach. Teachers are not provided with concise guidelines as to how to handle their students. “Should they be treated as children or adults?” is just one of the questions educators ask themselves. However, the proper education of these adolescents is critical because it is the bridge between relatively simple “baby work” of the early education years and the more sophisticated tasks of a high school curriculum. This time period represents the deciding factor of whether a person will develop sophisticated and necessary literacy skills.

According to the book, *Adolescent Literacy: What Works and Why*, poor readers at these grade levels are being dealt with in a manner that is counter-productive. For example, re-

medial or ESL students are being encouraged to do less independent reading and more reading aloud during class time. This is not helpful for the fact that when students read aloud, they are often corrected by a teacher for mispronouncing words and for other superficial literacy issues. Whereas, when students read on their own time, they are able to relax and discover their own joy in reading.

Reading moves from being a burden and a source of embarrassment into an arena that nourishes discovery and learning. In addition, more advanced readers are asked more thought-provoking questions that require them to analyze the text. This is often not done for remedial students; they are deemed as not being advanced enough for this level of work. By handling the problem in this manner, all educators

are doing is keeping semi-literate students, semi-literate.

This crisis has a profound impact not only on a person’s quality of life but also on society as a whole. Everybody must be educated for the progression and preservation of a successful society, and literacy is at the foundation of academics. According to www.nyc.gov, the age group of 16-18 represents 72 percent of the inmates who were charged with violent felonies at a certain medium security prison. Greater than 50 percent of said inmates read below the sixth-grade reading level. Every child is deserving of a good education and society’s mistreatment of its youth-at-risk is an affront to their human rights.

Children of the Democratic Republic of Congo

By Yolande Ramazani

There are kids in the Democratic Republic of Congo who live lives they did not choose. Until this day, Rwandese and Ugandese kill Congolese for their soil, diamonds, and gold. This killing causes children to lose their families and lives. Thus, with their barbarous lingo such as "leave the fly, kill the Congolese", children in the Eastern Congo are suffering and dying from rapes, HIV, amputations,

malnutrition and many more absurdities.

Life is very hard for these poor kids. They need the most basic things such as drinking water, food, medication, clothes, and education. Their childhood has been taken away from them. Not long ago, they were forced to hold a gun and point at the population. Today, some have no choice but to stick to hard labor to provide for

families. Others, traumatized, have few options for survival. The message is that Rwandese and Ugandese have, and continue to kill and destroy the Congolese population. Over 12 million Congolese have perished in this genocide. Opportunities should be made to help the affected children of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Teaching Social Justice

By Carlyle Price

There is a lot of mention of "social justice" in Schools of Education across the country, including here at Brooklyn College. The idea is that these schools want to encourage teachers of the future with "dispositions" – another buzz word – towards critical thinking; that's in addition to traditional metrics of mastery of subject content and educational skills.

These buzz words bother many people; particularly, it seems, those of a conservative bent. Their argument is

that academia has become a refuge for the liberal-minded, and so to seek such dispositions in potential teachers is to politicize teaching.

I'm quite concerned that children are currently raised in an overly politicized world and have a more difficult time sorting through biased information to reach their own conclusions than ever before in history. A belief in social justice can be confused with belief in social change; and change for the sake of change is not healthy.

However, it also seems presumptuous to come to such a conclusion about academia and the development of educators. Justice – and social justice – doesn't inherently imply an agenda, liberal or conservative. A concern for what is just – what is right – is a practical concern, ideally unconnected to political biases.

In light of today's difficult circumstances, we must train our children to solve problems – not to further antagonistic rhetoric.

A Life Changing Experience

By Gail Andrews

Living and growing up in Trinidad and Tobago, I would constantly hear these words, "The children of today are the leaders of tomorrow." These words were symbolic of the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr Eric Williams. Fast-forward to my registering for the Children and Youth Studies Program at Brooklyn College.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the emphasis on making children into future leaders was mainly focused on education. If you didn't meet the educational requirements because of any issues there might be in your life, your

chances of being successful were slim to none. The consensus in Trinidad and Tobago was that a child is either "bad" or "good." The Children and Youth Studies Program has taught me a lot about other issues that may affect a child's behavior and capacity to learn. There are deeper issues such as child sexual and physical abuse, poverty, inequalities in the way resources are distributed, and their geographical location. Through this program, I also learned that Trinidad and Tobago are members of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and has signed and ratified

this document. As a child in Trinidad and Tobago, I was not aware that I had these rights because they were never taught as part of the school curriculum.

As I write this article, I feel sad at the thought of how many children have fallen at the wayside because of the lack of knowledge to dig deeper and look at every child as an individual, and not assume what is right for one child is right for another. The Children and Youth Studies Program is a step in the right direction.

A Brave Mother

By Timothy Ngo

A recent shooting in Brownsville involved a selfless, heroic pregnant mother of 13 who gave her life protecting the children who walked with her from school. Zurana Horton will not be forgotten for the admirable and brave actions that saved those children's lives.

When you used to go to school as a child, how was the environment around the school? Did you feel safe? Was there something to be scared of? Personally, my experience in elemen-

tary and middle school was, for the most part, safe – I always played handball after school in the schoolyard. After watching a news segment and reading articles about this shooting, I realized that I have taken for granted my childhood school days, which I am now extremely grateful for.

As for the children who must live under these unfortunate circumstances, this incident only created further fear and insecurity. One child – a friend of the 11-year-old who only got grazed on

the face by a bullet, thanks to Zurana – said something that disheartens me deeply. She said that the outside world was a place where people can do great things, but based on where she lived and what happened, she guessed it was not possible there.

I personally cannot and will not forget this tragic incident, which burns in my mind and heart. Let us strive to create a better and peaceful environment that children deserve and need, so Zurana hasn't died in vain.

Movie Event – “*Very Young Girls*”

By Elizabeth Gutierrez

The Children First Club had the privilege to host our first movie screening of *Very Young Girls*, a documentary that follows young adolescents who have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation. It is a documentary that gives a voice to young girls have been part of a life that has been wrongly portrayed by the media.

Very Young Girls was produced by Rachel Lloyd, a former survivor of

sexual exploitation and founder of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), a New York City based program created to help young females who are struggling to leave behind their pimps and stop the life of sexual exploitation.

We had the pleasure of having Professor Ellen Fried as our guest speaker. She is a GEMS board member and teaches the course, *Children and the Law* in the Children and Youth

Studies Program at Brooklyn College. She answered questions and gave an in-depth discussion about GEMS, which left our audience intrigued.

This could not have been possible without the help of Children First Club members and our guest speaker Professor Fried. We hope that our movie screenings can become an annual event. Thank you to all who attended the screening.

For more information, visit www.gems-girls.org.

Children's Studies 20th Anniversary & National Consultation

By Sylvia Anderson

As an upper senior and Children's Studies major, I was excited at the prospect of attending this most important event, “Social Justice for Children: To End Child Abuse and Violence Against Children,” on November 4, 2011. From the inside of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York's meeting hall -- a truly beautiful place -- my awareness, concerns and emotions were raised for these children.

Out of the many topics of discus-

sion presented, advocacy and ways to prevent and eliminate violence against children were at my center of attention. I appreciated the presentation of the knowledgeable and Honorable Judith S. Kaye, Retired Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals. I was especially interested when she spoke about retired individuals who are looking into the foster care system and adoption after retirement.

I admired the Honorable Patricia Martin, the passion she possessed for

what she termed as “her” foster children, and the work she has put into the new *Caring Adult Initiative* for children aging out of foster care. The consultation enhanced my educational experience and has motivated me to look into a future profession in the area of child advocacy. The founding Director, Professor Gertrud Lenzer and her team did a wonderful job of creating, planning and hosting such a successful event, of which I applaud.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”
-Nelson Mandela

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