

Jazmen D. McKinnor

North Lawndale College Prep Peace Warriors

Invisible to the vast public school view of youth, sits an extraordinary project in Lawndale called the Peace Warriors. This program was introduced to the community and through the Lawndale High School by Lafayette Monroe who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King in the 1960s and was deeply influenced by the non violent examples King practiced. This current, self initiated group of high school students has set out to change the language of violence in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Chicago within a school that has discontinued the surplus of metal detectors and security.

This text was written by Jazmen McKinnor, a junior and peace warrior at North Lawndale College Preparatory High School who I met through Robin d' Averso, a friend and teacher at the school during a Peace Warrior rally in May 2010. The rally marked 192 consecutive days without an incident. Hundreds of students, administration, and teachers walked to the park that morning to declare a victory of sorts in a collective effort to expose the benefits of waging peace. It was also a stark

reminder of the potential and readiness of the participating youth in standing up against the violence that has fallen significantly on this Chicago community. The Peace Warrior program has provided the high school students with the tools to resolve conflict and with the training to use those tools and share them effectively with their peers.

There is a sense that some schools are representing preparatory sites for future institutions as barred windows, industrial colors, durable wall coverings, friendly police presence, metal detectors, security guards and a climate of suspicion influences and determines specific conditions that conflicts with meaningful learning. Jazmen spoke frankly to me about school violence, adolescent taboos, and pressures from fellow students that are often worse than random physical attacks of violence before the Peace Warriors. Listen to Black Public Radio (a Stockyard Institute project) for the interviews from a dozen high school students in Lawndale about the Peace Warriors. www.stockyardinstitute.org - Jim Duignan

It all begins in the mind of an angry child. A child that just wants to destroy...destroy things that it isn't in control of. Fighting is a natural way of solving those situations that's uncontrollable. But what does fighting lead to? It leads to more fighting, anger and less leadership. This comes from a person without a role model that consumes leadership in its life. The North Lawndale area in Chicago is filled with people who believe that violence is the answer. NLCP, a high school in the North Lawndale area takes the word "PEACE" to another level. The administration encourages students to live peacefully. The school celebrates the number of days students have gone without a verbal altercation.

There are teen leaders throughout Chicago, but few send a positive message in Lawndale like the NLCP Peace Warriors. Current Peace Warriors were involved in some verbal altercations in their past, but it has become a process of learning from the previous mistakes to become a better person in the future. Often, young people serve as better models to young people than adults. The Peace Warriors had the same experiences as the teens that's looking up to them in the school and will help to provide an example to live differently and to one day change the community.

Larrinita Starks, a Peace Warrior at NLCP is a leader for her peers and anyone else who needs to witness a model of leadership. Larrinita explains to me that she loves being a Peace Warrior because gets the opportunity to change peoples lives. She also changes their impressions of violence and helps them deal with confrontation. "I use to get into a lot of fights," Larrinita states, "and now I have evolved from fighting to solve my problems to becoming a peace warrior to lead people in the right direction." If a person isn't being taught that violence is not the answer, then they will believe that it is an option. The purpose of a Peace Warrior is to step into people lives and educate them, leading them in the right direction, and making it known that the Peace Warriors are there to help with any problem.

I am a senior at NLCP and I'm also a Peace Warrior. I help out in the school by setting an example for my peers to follow; I am also a writing coach, so children come to me and other coaches when they need help with their writing skills. This is



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called helping each other out. I am a sister, a cousin, a friend, but most importantly I am a leader. Instead of just helping out in the school I also help the senior citizens in the Lawndale community by volunteering every year for commissioner Robert Steele's annual initiative to help the senior citizens around thanksgiving time. We feed them and give them some health information to better their understanding on things. This is what I do as a leader and I want people to follow my lead as they progress into a leader for themselves and other people that surround them.

The Peace Warriors at NLCP have already made a name for themselves in the North Lawndale area. How can we expand the Peace Warriors into other Chicago schools? We need to get the word out of how teenagers can make a change in their community with support and guidance from the adults. The adults play a big part in the NLCP Peace Warrior project, pushing the youth beyond the limits of success. To be a leader you need more than a positive attitude, you need the grades. You need the grades to show that you know what you're doing and can accomplish the tasks that are given to you. Before a leader can solve what's going on in their community or in someone else's neighborhood he or she has to fix what's going

on in their own life. Larrinita does just that. She said. "I don't try to help the community, first I try to solve what's going on at home before I can worry about other people." Maybe this is because there are not enough leaders in the African American household to lead the children in the right direction. Most of the time adults can't talk to teenagers the way teenagers can talk to each other. It's best to have a peer give another peer advice and support because they understand the situation better. This is the NLCP Peace Warriors' function. They give good advice about grades, situations that go on at home, peer pressure and violence. The kind of violence that's found to be happening in the North Lawndale community is gun violence, bullying and a whole lot of fighting with weapons. This is what we as a neighborhood have to deal with every day, and the fact that we have Peace Warriors to lead the community is a wonderful feeling.

In the end, the North Lawndale Peace Warriors get the job done; they encourage one another and push their fellow classmates to increase the peace and to become better leaders. It is the mark of a good friend, a call to what needs attention and the makings of leadership for the future. ♦