

# restorED

Interns: Jake Bryan Bonifacio, Giselle Rohane, Maggie Godfrey

Youth Peace Leaders: Alex Sonsini-Hornick, Endiya Griffin, Iman Zermeno

Mentor: Swati Singh

*“We can say ‘Peace on Earth.’ We can sing about it, preach about it or pray about it, but if we have not internalized the mythology to make it happen, then it will not be.”*

- Betty Shabazz

## Breaking The Ice

From the beginning, the Pre-Launch of SFI had “broken the ice” for everyone who committed their time to create a positive impact within the community. We held our first official Thread Meeting at Lestat’s coffeehouse in North Park. Of course, there would be an initial reserved-type of feeling between new acquaintances, but from the attendance for the meeting, we were able to share our common interests and why we committed our presence to SFI.

To start it off, the interns, who are Jake, Giselle and Maggie had introduced themselves and positions in regards to SFI. Leading to the Youth Peace Leaders for our Thread, Alex, Audrey, Endiya and Iman, who shared where they attend school as well as the grade they are going into for the school year. Our mentor, Swati was able to provide her background and brief professional experience at an attendance from a later Thread Meeting, which was conducted at Twigg’s Bakery & Coffeehouse in North Park.

We’ve built a relationship and connection with each other through various icebreakers such as *Two Truths and a Lie*, which allowed each of us to learn personal facts about



each other while having a fun engagement. We've also delved into a deeper level icebreaker titled, *Cross the Line*, where we were able to have more of an understanding of how we felt in particular situations about SFI. In *Cross the Line*, a long strand of tape, about 1 foot in length was placed in front of us to represent "the line" and when asked a question. Stepping across the line would represent a "yes" and stay behind the line would represent a "no." Questions ranged from easy, surface-level topics to deeper-level topics, but the main

purpose of the game was to see any commonalities that are shared with another member in the group. Icebreakers were a great way to start each meeting, as well as build a community within our Thread, to produce trust and a sense of comfort from each other.

The original project idea that our Thread proposed was the production of a multimedia gallery. The Youth Peace Leaders' idea was to interview Opportunity Youth and translate their narrative of how the Traditional Education System had adversely challenged them while attending school. What was to be derived from those who attended the gallery were evoked emotions as they listened to the Opportunity Youth's narrative and read their biography described on poster boards.

In a brief walkthrough of the Multimedia Gallery, those in attendance would stroll through the Gallery and would have the opportunity to express their emotions and reactions on a piece of paper, which would give them the option to pin it onto an expression board at the end of the Gallery. However, our Thread had faced challenges

through each meeting because of frequent disagreements of how the project plan was to be portrayed by each Youth Peace Leader. Unfortunately, there was consistent confusion within the Thread, which tested our ability against time constraints and personal opinions.

Among the logistical obstacles we faced, there were additional interpersonal challenges within the Thread that tested our ability to collaborate as a team. The diverse personalities with each member of the Thread exposed the liberty of “real world” challenges and this was an opportunity to overcome one of those challenges. We held constant check-ins to see where we stood with each other and how we felt about the standing project idea. These check-ins led us to come to a consensus of what can be accomplished as Thread together.

From frequent community check-ins and realization of adverse ideas, we’ve led to a decision as a whole that a multimedia gallery would not have been feasible, but it was a wonderful idea to branch from. With our Thread’s flexibility and resiliency, we were able to restructure the project idea into a platform, such as a website, where Opportunity Youth can liberate their voices and express their narratives. The website is also a good resource to educate more on the topic of Restorative Education and Restorative Practices for those who are interested in learning more about the subject.

***Problem Statement:*** “*The participation of Opportunity Youth is inadequate, which can lead to a disallowance of positive experiences for them.*”

***Goal:*** “*To implement awareness of the injustice and negative factors within the traditional education system that leads Opportunity Youth to have their voices subdued in society.*”

## **In The Making**

The process of creating the next steps to the project was crucial to complete what we as a Thread perceive as a success. The obstacles the Thread had to endure would seem apparent like any group project, which propelled the issue of establishing the proper group dynamic, as well as the roles and responsibilities towards the project. Due to our Thread having extremely diverse personalities towards the project, it took us longer than expected to finalize the complete idea of what we want to complete. The flexibility of our

Thread allowed us to keep the core idea of incorporating Opportunity Youth into a website, which was more accessible.

These modifications were made possible with the assistance from our Program Officer, Tina Medina, and Program Officer Assistant, Alexa Withrow. Tina and Alexa were prime examples of producing assertiveness as well as being understanding while in attendance in the meetings with our Thread. Our Thread needed to go back and focus on the rebuilding aspect of creating a community. The contrasting personalities from our group led to loose ends, but the use of restorative circles proved to be remarkably beneficial towards getting a positive result with rebuilding our community as well as coming to an agreement with what lay ahead during the progress of our project.

Our Thread was also very fortunate to have Swati Singh as a Mentor. With Swati's expertise in restorative practices, she was able to provide professional insight into what research we should conduct regarding restorative education. Due to a conflicting schedule, there were times where Swati wouldn't be available in person, however, she maintained communication and was always

attentive to any messages or updates concerning the Thread. Swati is an incredible woman and Mentor who shed her knowledge and experience of Restorative Education Reform, which allowed for the Thread to maintain a constant thought process of the topic.



*“Appreciate [the] beauty of change in all of its forms.”*

*- Swati Singh, Restorative Practitioner/Restorative Education Reform Mentor*

## Finishing Touches



From the obstacles we have encountered, we were able to stay cohesive and adaptive to maintain a positive result. Of course, we had preferred to originally keep the idea of creating a venue event for those attended, to express their emotional connection with

our idea, however, situationally we had to adjust and redirect our mindset towards creating a project that did not involve distinctive details to plan. The agreement on creating a resourceful website, where anyone that has an interest in Restorative Education Reform can have access to, led to a more impacting outlet.

We've managed to work through the struggles and develop our Leadership skills in working together to complete our set goal. When it came down to it, time management was an essential element towards completing the project. With certain commitments that took precedence, that would be the main consideration of what had caused some challenges during our journey in SFI. However, to overcome this challenge we had to maintain strong communication, which would be a strong benefactor to maintaining the bridge of "getting to the finish line." Life introduces situational events that test your ability in approaching any challenging situation and we must always plan accordingly. SFI allowed for each of us to learn more about what real-life events may occur in a group project setting and the Youth Peace Leaders, Interns, Mentors, and Program Officers were able to come together, assess the situation and successfully create our project.



*“**Restorative Education Reform** is the sustainable integration of socially, racially, and economically just trauma-informed practices into teaching, learning, and community-building within schools and other institutions that have the capacity to transform the lives of youth. Restorative practices bear witness to the stories of marginalized young people and call upon the acknowledgment of injustices committed by inequitable systems as opportunities for communal healing. They place youth and their lived experiences at the center of storytelling and educational practice so that they may be empowered to both realize and affect positive social change.” -Swati Singh (Restorative Educator)*

**Restorative Practices** shift the conversation between teachers and students to be less punishment-oriented and to offer an opportunity for all people affected by an action to have dialogue about how to make things right and restore the classroom community.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.