

WALKING IN EACH OTHER'S MINDS

A Journey by Youth from New Haven, Milford, Easton, and Weston

A value of 'no harm to others' exists among a majority of youth in New Haven, whether they believe in an outer or inner God, whether they understand jokes or they don't, whether they can throw a ball or they can't, whether they join a gang or they don't, whether they are gay or straight, and whether they speak English fluently or they're still learning. So why do some youth get bullied, leave school, or become socially isolated?

The value of no harm can become compromised during the middle school years when youth work hard to fit in with their peers. Peer groups often involve a need for security that replaces or extends the security of the family. At this stage, youth also become more keenly aware of the social communication differences between themselves and others. However, they don't have skills to bridge these differences verbally; they don't know what to say or how to manage the discomfort of their peers.

The rate of social communication differences among youth is increasing rapidly, and these youth have a more difficult time fitting in with peers. Inclusion Teaming recognized this problem and ran its first program in 2010; then opened its doors in New Haven in September 2012. We opened with a gift from a New Haven resident, support from the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven, and an invitation from the Granville Academy after school program to team their youth with ours.

Then, on Thursday, February 7th, participants from the Inclusion Teaming/Granville Academy partnership met with Ray Wallace from Guns Down Books Up and with youth from The Future Project who were considering advancing their ideas by working with Inclusion Teaming. During the meeting, the Granville Academy youth told the

potential collaborators what they had been learning, “I learned to understand what it might be like for a person with autism to not know the language of gestures;” “To ask ourselves “what if” before making assumptions about others;” “To see the bright mind of another individual because we had the chance to listen and to learn.” Justin Sherman from Inclusion Teaming, a participant with high functioning autism said, “I have confidence now that I have never had before. I can sit for a while in a group, I can speak my mind, and I can look people in the eye now when I speak, and that is a lot of progress for me.” Brendan Wendt, another Inclusion Teaming participant with high functioning autism said, “It is wonderful to see that others are beginning to understand us, care, and make it easier for us to express ourselves.” At the close of the meeting, all collaborators were excited and expressed a desire to work together.

Inclusion Teaming is a non-profit organization and a member of the Citywide Youth Coalition. Inclusion Teaming is working to build funding supports to make its services affordable to all.

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