

GlobalYouthUnite  
a proposal to the Katherine Wasserman Davis Foundation  
100 Projects for Peace  
A Project with The Underground Café  
Winter Burhoe '08  
Hamilton College

"From understanding comes hope for change."  
--Christine Wiltz, author of *The Last Madam: A Life in the New Orleans Underworld*

Utica, known as "the city that loves refugees" has the fourth highest density of refugees in the U.S. (Wilkinson). With over 11,000 refugees from Afghanistan, Vietnam, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Former Soviet Union, Lithuania, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Burma, Poland, Romania, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Yugoslavia, Utica is truly a global community (MVRCR). Over the past 30 years, Utica has been struggling economically and poverty rates have skyrocketed, with 24.5% of all families living below the poverty line (US Census).

Youth in Utica tend to self-segregate into ethnic and racial groups and, according to a report by Social Science Associates, "racial and cultural differences are a significant site of verbal and physical conflict in youth" (Darman 7). In addition, this study found that "Utica is an emerging gang city... and youth gang involvement will continue in Utica unless there are countervailing forces" (Darman 7). Many emerging gangs, such as the Asian Boyz, Latin Kings, Crypts, and Bloods are based primarily on race and nationality.

This summer, I hope to foster greater awareness and understanding among youth and create opportunities for them to be heard. I have developed The GlobalYouthUnite Program in collaboration with The Underground Café, a non-profit teen center in the Cornhill area of Utica. I first became involved with The Underground Café in the fall of my sophomore year at Hamilton. Although I had always been involved in community service, never had I worked so closely and collaboratively with youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. I was compelled by the stories that youth told me about themselves, their families, and their community.

The vision for The GlobalYouthUnite Program is to transform Utica, NY into a unified, globally aware community by working with youth, parents, local colleges, businesses, non-profits, and community leaders. This summer, I will build on the solid foundation built by The Underground Café to facilitate cultural education programs, leadership development workshops, a regional teen service exchange program, and a global youth organizing campaign with a diverse group of refugee and low-income teens. These programs will raise the awareness of youth on issues pertaining to identity and difference—issues of race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality, and age—with an emphasis on race and nationality. In addition, it will provide them with the tools necessary to create positive social change in their community. Through a "for youth, by youth" publication, the opportunity for teen-initiated projects, and a youth exchange, youth will be able to apply what they have learned about identity, difference, and leadership to address real-world problems that they have identified. Youth will reach out to other youth and adults in order to mobilize community support for their initiatives and spread the word through their publication. In addition, GlobalYouthUnite will help people in Utica understand that the issues they are dealing with in their local neighborhood impact people across the nation and in other parts of the world. Connecting their local concerns with those on a global level, Utica's youth

will recognize they are a part of a much larger community. For a full list of programs and goals, please see the attached table.

I will continue to volunteer with The Underground Café throughout my senior year at Hamilton and ensure the long-term sustainability of the GlobalYouthUnite Program by applying for grants, hosting fundraisers, and involving even more Hamilton faculty members and students. In addition, The Underground Café has committed one part-time staff member to help run the GlobalYouthUnite Program beginning in August 2007.

In the future, youth that participate in GlobalYouthUnite will have the opportunity to become more involved in the production of the program. Setting up the strong base of youth will allow for the sustainability of GlobalYouthUnite in the future. As the program continues, the community of Utica will be further unified and globally aware.

#### Works Cited

Darman, Steve et. Al. "Youth Violence and Juvenile Crime in Utica, NY & A Comprehensive Plan to Address this Violence and Crime." Utica: Social Science Associates. 25 July 2005.

Wilkinson, Ray. "The Town that Loves Refugees." Refugees Magazine. United Nations Refugee Agency. Vol. 1, No. 138, 2005.

US Census Bureau. Quickfacts. <http://infoplease.com/us/census/data/newyork/utica>. (4 January 2007).