

April 2015 Teaching Youth to Pursue Peace

Youth at Circleville Juvenile Correctional Facility (CJCF) are taking a big leap forward to transform their lives by pursuing peace rather than engaging in acts of violence.

From January 20 - March 21, CJCF youth participated in the Power of the Peace Project, a 40-day event designed to inspire youth to change their behavior and think twice about committing acts of violence. (To read information previously shared about this project, please click [here](#).)

When the program kicked off, 58 youth signed the Power of Peace pledge. Of those youth, 21 did not commit any acts of violence during the designated period. At the end of the 40 days, a total of 35 youth had successfully completed the program and attended the graduation ceremony.

"Over the 40 days, I learned how to promote peace and take responsibility for my actions. I still have my days when I want to go back to trouble-making, but I really like this peacemaking," said Youth J at the graduation ceremonies held at the Warren Youth Activity Center.

Listen to another youth in the video talk about his experience.



"You have turning points in your life, and this is one of them," said Kit Cummings, founder of the Power of the Peace Project, addressing the crowd of youth and their families at the graduation ceremony.

While Cummings has traveled all over the world spreading his message of peace, this was the first time the Peace Project took place at a juvenile facility.

“The Power of the Peace Project was great for our young men. It was great for our facility,” said Larry Mallory, Gang Intervention Specialist at CJCF.

Cummings founded the Power of Peace Project in 2011 as an experiment at a Georgia maximum security adult prison. He brought together gang-affiliate inmates and worked with them over a 40-day period to reduce violence.

In addition to signing a pledge, youth also agreed to wear a wristband that reads “I am the Power of Peace.” Participants were also required to live by the following *Seven Steps to Peace* during that time: being a peacemaker wherever they go; treating their adversaries with respect; when provoked not retaliating, but finding a better way; when cursed not cursing back, and using deliberate language; not lying, cheating or stealing; when they are wrong promptly admitting it and quickly making amends; and treating their enemies the way that they wish to be treated.

The program requires daily reading and meditating on inspirational quotes from various twentieth century peacemakers, visualizing themselves living peacefully, and journaling about ideas and breakthroughs.

Each week, youth viewed a 10-minute video message from Cummings. Afterwards, they convened in small study groups with program facilitators to engage in discussions about progress, obstacles and failures in their daily program.

Five CJCF staff volunteer facilitators of the program were present at the graduation and gained valuable lessons, too. “Power of Peace enabled me to become my best self,” said Theresa Myers, Social Worker at CJCF. Other facilitators included Jaquanda Clark, Kimberly Times, Clifton Chapman, and Markus Patterson.

Speaking at the graduation ceremony about the positive impact the Peace Project had on his life, Youth E said to his mother, “You do not have to worry anymore. I want to come home and do the right thing.” He then walked over and gave her a hug.

In just a few weeks, the Power of the Peace Project kicks off at the Cuyahoga Hills JCF on April 14, and I expect it will have another big impact on our young men at that facility.