Stories of Engagement

We all have our own unique path towards shaping a more just and compassionate world. Alumni, community partners, faculty, staff, and students, share your story here! Simply email your story (250-500 words in length), image, slide show, video, etc. to Jennifer Magee (jmagee1) by the 1st of the month. New stories will be added to this page by the 15th of each month.

Arts for Social Action, by Maria Castenada Soria '18

This past summer, Maria Castaneda Soria ‘18 received a Swarthmore Foundation grant to work on the Son Revoltura project. Reflecting on her summer, Soria tells the story, “As a part of our partnership with Juntos, we have the opportunity to bring our art out to support different events and actions. Currently, Juntos is working on a campaign to shut down the Berks Family Detention Center. This center detains entire undocumented families that have been picked up by immigration and are currently undergoing their deportation proceeding, most of which are filing asylum cases. You will find children as young as 11 days old incarcerated with their mothers and siblings. Within the facility, there have been a number of abuses including medical neglect, sexual assault, and labor violations of the incarcerated women. Over the summer, Juntos had a number of actions outside of the Berks Family Detention Center as a part of the campaign to shut it down. When we would go out to the actions, some of the families would go out and watch us from the other side. We always had a group of jaraneros go out to the action and play sones for the families and to support the energy..."
of the action. During one of the actions we played a son called “La guacamaya,” which is The Macaw. During the son the chorus says “vuela vuela vuela / como yo volé / cuando me llevaban preso / y yo sin saber por qué,” which translates to: “Fly fly fly / just as I flew / when they took me captive / and I didn’t even know why.” And while the chorus is being sung, the dancers on the tarima will move their arms in a flying motion. As we played that son and sang “vuela vuela vuela…” We saw the families and little kids all the way on the other side start moving their arms too, flying with us. That moment was unforgettable for us because in that moment the detention of the families became very real. They were on the other side with a desire to fly away and be free, but they couldn’t. This moment inspired the art that we put together later for other actions. We partnered with Philadelphia muralist, Michelle Ortiz to create art for the following action, and we made a piece with a child flying on a bird that said “Pronto volarás” – “Soon you will fly”. We also wrote some verses for “La guacamaya” inspired by families in the detention center one of which said:

Al cantar la guacamaya
le canta a la libertad
y en su canto se hallan
el amor y la unidad

Vuela vuela vuelas
pronto volarás
cantando por estas calles
tus versos de libertad

As the guacamaya sings
it sings out to freedom
and in its melody you find
love and unity

Fly fly fly
Soon you will fly
Singing through these streets
Your songs of freedom.”
During her internship this past summer with the Center for Mental Health at UCLA, Lang Scholar Raven Bennett ‘17 wrote an information resource called “Preventing Teen Dating Violence.” In the “Concluding Comments” of the resource, Bennett wrote, “It is unlikely that problems such as teen dating violence will be solved simply by developing better strategies for schools to focus specifically on prevention. Such strategies can help, but ultimately what a school needs is to embed such a focus into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to development and learning and re-engaging disconnected students. The time has come for schools to move away from stand-alone programs for addressing problems such as peer-on-peer violence. Just adding another program worsens the marginalized, fragmented, and piecemeal status of efforts to help students. Rather than pursuing yet another discrete program, it is essential to use each concern that rises to a high policy level as an opportunity to catalyze and leverage systemic change. The aim should be to take another step toward transforming how schools go about ensuring that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond. It is time to embed advocacy for discrete programs into advocacy for unifying and developing a comprehensive and equitable system.”

Read the complete resource here.
Lisa Kato ’19 on Fracking in Northern Pennsylvania

In an article published in Swarthmore’s The Daily Gazette on September 30, Swarthmore student Lisa Kato wrote about a trip that Pericles Powerpush took six Swarthmore students on to Northern Pennsylvania to learn about the consequences of fracking.

Kato describes fracking, “Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” as it is better known, is a process that is used to extract shale gas from reserves several thousands of feet deep into the ground. It uses water, chemicals, and methane gas to create fissures in the groups in order to extract this gale. In the process of doing so, chemicals and methane gas escape and contaminate the water reserves that lie above these shale gas reserves.”

During the trip, the group focused on understand the impacts of fracking on the landscape and people of northern Pennsylvania. One of the most striking examples was the effect that fracking had on a privately owned well.

“When we poured this water into a bottle, shook it, and put a lighted match to it, the water caught fire,” wrote Kato. “The home owner has owned this well for 51 years and while the water contamination has significantly worsened over time, he and his family had been using this water for everyday use. Now, he must use water from the water buffalo that the oil company has provided for drinking water. “It is difficult to fight these companies when city hall backs them up,” he said when asked about possible solutions to this evident problem.”

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