



The Community School

P.O. Box 555 ■ Camden, Maine ■ 04843 ■ 236-3000

NEWSLETTER NO. 69

DORA LIEVOW, EDITOR

MARCH 1999

To celebrate the School's 25th anniversary

Changing Lives: A Conference on Relational Education

May 8th 7.30 pm at The Camden Opera House

Panelists:

Jeanne Bamberger, Professor, MIT School for the Humanities

Fred Bay, President of the Paul Foundation

Bonnie Benard, Resiliency Associates, Berkeley California

William Davis, Professor of Education and Director, Institute for the Study of Students at Risk,
University of Maine at Orono

Gordon Donaldson Jr., Professor of Education, University of Maine at Orono

Eleanor Duckworth, Professor of Education, Harvard University

Richard Freeland, President of Northeastern University

Arnold Langberg, Educational Consultant and founder of the Mountain Open High School

Debbie Meier, Principal, Mission Hill Public School, Roxbury, Mass,
member of Faculty of Education, Harvard

Ron Miller, author, President of the Foundation for Educational Renewal, Williston, Vermont

Brenda Wentworth, Social Worker and Community School graduate

A publication of conference proceedings will be available in hardcopy by October 1999

Reception with panelists after the discussion

FREE ADMISSION

Letters to Zoning Board

ON MARCH 9TH AND 17TH the School jumped the major hurdles in its path towards a new addition to the property on 79 Washington Street. Both the Zoning and Planning Boards of Camden voted unanimously to support the School's plan.

I attended the Community School and graduated with the much needed help of the staff members and classmates in 1992. In the time I spent at the C-school, I overcame obstacles of anger, self worth, and the lack of "space" from surrounding students.

Although the whole process of the school is to provide you with knowledge as to how to go about living within a community, it can become difficult and overwhelming. One much needed thing is space. As most of the former and current students know, curfew just doesn't do it; it's not long enough to cope with your anger if you don't

want to talk about things. The reason for me going on about this is that if there's an expansion (including an exercise room) it will help many young students to steer their anger in a positive direction which would help them mentally and physically and earn the self respect many of them deserve. To go to the library and read a book or go to the exercise room and vent off some "steam"; either way the expansion would bring a more positive outlook. I also encourage the staff members to have their own bedroom; talk about waking up on the wrong side of bed (when they don't even have one)! Finally, I would like to mention that a better landscaping for the school is just what they need. I would hate to admit this but sometimes books are judged by the cover and get thrown on the back shelf where nobody deserves to be.

— Lisa M. Kennedy

The location of the school plays a large role in the operations. As a student, being required to have a full time job and at the same time not being allowed to drive a car necessitates the downtown location. As the number of students will stay the same I cannot imagine that the impact on the neighborhood will be any different. There will only be the addition of a nicer looking school and more room for the students to call their own; not to mention more carpets to vacuum and windows to clean and therefore less time to hang out on the streets!

— Molly Gentle

It was at this year's 25th reunion that I saw just how significantly the Community School has affected the lives of at-risk teens. Though the residential program serves eight students each term, I have witnessed how the school remains a supportive and sturdy foundation for students throughout their adult lives. This has been due, in part, to the openness of the Camden community, who has welcomed our program on Washington Street, and allowed us to co-exist in the predictable residential home-like setting that so many students lacked and deserved.

— Kathleen Benedetti,
Teacher/Counselor, Passages Program

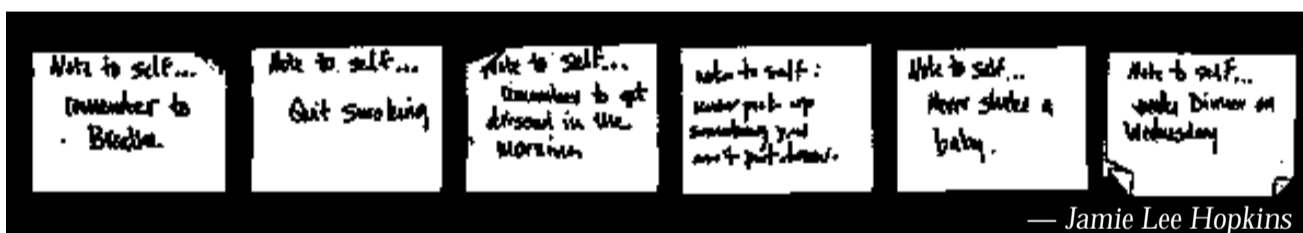
Camden is fortunate to have this marvelous little institution in its midst, and the support – devotion, actually – which

the school regularly receives from its prominent citizens makes the entire community a beacon, educationally speaking, for the entire country! Not only do they do a splendid job together, both staff and students, but they write about the life of the school very eloquently – I have always published excerpts from these writings to tell the world about this remarkable group of people! I was fortunate enough to visit the school briefly last summer. It was quite clear to me that the school fits in easily into the residential neighborhood where it is located – so completely, in fact, that I had to drive up and down the road several times – and finally to inquire – in order to find the house!

— Mary M. Leue
Publisher, Down-to-Earth Books;
Editor, The Journal of Alternative Education
and The Journal of Family Life

Too often these days, with all of the centralization and consolidation, schools are isolated from the life of the community. Young people sense this missing connection, which has caused many today to lack in motivation and direction. If, on the other hand, a school is located within a real neighborhood, students tend to take more seriously the part they play in the world around them. The bottom line is that both school and neighborhood benefit from the exchange.

— Chris Mercogliano, Codirector,
Albany (N.Y.) Free School



— Jamie Lee Hopkins

The Log

I've had a few days since our second camping trip to relax. I thought the trip went great although it certainly had its ups and downs. It was hard for me to have to give the leaders constant guidance and fill in details of things that need to get done. A nice role reversal would be a student leader approaching a staff and anticipating that things will need to get done, rather than students feeling like "puppet leaders."

It would also be a nice change for folks to take on the challenge of planning activities for the trips. I suppose my biggest fear is that students would fill the weekend with a lot of unchallenging non-productive activities that go against the camping program goals. But we won't find out unless we try!

— Bruce

and a reply ...

Dear Bruce,

What are "non-productive" activities? Are you ever going to understand that (and repeat after me) hiking for SOME of us, is a "non-productive" activity. I dread it beforehand, despise it during, and afterward, there is no great feeling, like "Wow, I did it" (like rappelling); it's more like "That was awful, I'm tired." It's not just complaining. WE ARE TRYING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING! There are many activities we could enjoy "together": fun, interesting, even challenging. I am open to NEW suggestions, and my thinking cap is on.

— Lauren

Educational Travels — One Student's Story

My travels began in the paper mill town of Woodland, Maine. Woodland is located in Washington County, whose claim to fame is in being among the ten poorest counties in the United States. The educational standards matched the economy in its poverty. I had one amazing teacher during my time in Woodland. Her name is Sue Martell, and she teaches kindergarten. It was all downhill from there.

In eighth grade I attended a six week summer program at Gould Academy. I did not appreciate the hour and a half long lecture format, but in the light of my new social freedom I forgave it. Unfortunately, I was incredibly homesick, and spent the first six weeks of the fall semester in my room, crying. I began to make friends, but I was amongst yuppies for the first time, and it was terrifying. I decided to leave Gould, and look for a school with a more alternative approach.

The school I found was The Putney School, in Putney, Vermont. It had a strong work ethic which meant that every student had a job, sometimes two, working on the school run farm. It seemed to be the epicenter of highschool student individuality. Putney painted a lovely picture of the way an alternative school should be. It was not for me. At Putney, I felt as though I should be happy. It appeared to be everything I had wanted in a school.

It's taken me a very long time to realize what went wrong. Putney was the picture of individuality, but in reality it was just as conformist as Gould and Woodland had been. All that had changed were the standards of conformity. It was one hundred and seventy students all trying to be individuals, in the same, exact ways. From my experiences at Putney I've realized two things. The first is that I love to work, and that ties in with the second. I need to feel challenged, and to feel like I am accomplishing not only my short term goals, education and personal satisfaction, but also my long term goal of development as a human being. Education should include all of that.

I left Putney in the spring, and decided to take a year off and go to work. I became a respite care provider on the Passamaquoddy Native American reservation near where I live. I loved my job, but realized that I could take it only so far without a higher education. I knew of The Community

School through my mother, who has had some clients who have attended. The more I learned about it, the more it seemed like the right place for me, offering a degree of closure, without forcing me to go through another year and a half of schooling. I applied in the summer, and was accepted.

So here I am, at my beloved Community School. There are eight students accepted every term, and a term lasts for six months, after which we receive a high school degree. We live together in a house, and take turns with chores, including a night of cooking for everyone, each week. We all hold full time jobs, mine is an internship at a local nursing home, and pay rent each week. We take classes at night in our four required subjects, each student working individually on a course designed with the aid of a staff person. Each subject culminates in a final project of some kind, at least one of which must be an analytical paper. We also have required group classes which focus on sex, parenting, substance use and abuse, conflict resolution, and cooking. The last four months have been the most challenging of my life. No words can describe my feelings for this place where I have discovered – through conflicts and resolutions, through everyday interactions, through challenges of my most basic beliefs, and through significant loss – myself, and the tough stuff of which I am woven.

— Lauren Withers

IN MEMORY OF EVELYN JOHNSON

The School lost one of our best friends in 1998. Evelyn was director of foster care in Rockland when we began the School in 1973. Over the years she became a Board Member, a tutor, and a yearly cookie baker for the Auction. Most importantly, she was a radiantly beneficent inspiration to us all. We thank the following people who made donations in her memory:

*Donald and Linda Gibson
Erwin and Dorothy Gallagher
Mrs. Isabelle L. Jillson
Dan and Jean Boobar
Mr. Samuel W. Collins, Jr.
Jean and Tim Lavigne and Pat Hofmaster
Peter and Pam Vose*

News from Passages ...

We would like to thank the **Camden Area YMCA** for their continued generosity and support on behalf of Cschool students and faculty. They have recently extended the use of their facilities to teen parents and faculty in the Passages Program. Four Passages students have made use of these benefits so far, and have been able to begin to meet their physical fitness goals. Many thanks to the YMCA and to Randy Hocking, Membership Director, for his support.

This past fall, the Passages Program has connected with **Kelmscott Farm**. A recent Passages graduate, who was just one of many horse-lovers in the Passages Program, volunteered for Kelmscott Farm's Horse Fest in exchange for complimentary passes to visit the farm again with her family. The Passages Program would like to thank Kelmscott Farm for their support. We look forward to collaborating with Kelmscott Farm further this coming season.

Letters to Zoning Board

I am writing to express my support for the renovation to the Community School building. As a graduate of the school I can attest to the invaluable service that the school provides to students and to the community. The proposed renovation will really be an asset to the neighborhood because it will improve the existing property, create off-street parking which leaves more spaces for neighboring houses on the street and will increase the value of the property. As I understand it, the renovation will not change the number of people living in or using the school. I hope the town of Camden will show support for this successful and effective alternative school

that has made a positive impact on the lives of so many people in the state of Maine.

— *Jenny Menna*

The siting of the school in a residential neighborhood seems to be important to the program's fundamental message to its students: the statement that despite the difficulties these students have faced, there are adults, and there is a community, willing to accept them if they have the courage to move forward themselves. We have always been impressed that Camden has been open-minded and far-sighted enough to make this statement.

— *Dana Brooks and Sandra Cramer*

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