

NETWORK Connection

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • SECOND QUARTER 2013



What Children Deserve



E. KIM

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Cover photo: Mariangelis Fuentes, one of the authors of "We Make a Difference!" on page 12. A community organizer, she just finished painting the bench in Von Nieda Park. Courtesy Student Leaders' Von Nieda Park Task Force.

dear members

Spring is finally beginning to poke its nose out here in DC. There are daffodils blooming, and cherry trees getting up their courage to dazzle tourists. It gets me thinking about the springtime that we are experiencing in our Church.

I hope that Pope Francis will really lead us toward those at the margins of our society. I love that he rode a bus in Buenos Aires and cooked for himself. What a fine example of really caring for all and letting go of pomp and ceremony.

In this rejuvenation of Gospel values, I see nourishment for our mission here at NETWORK. It is a time to know that we continue to live these very values in our advocacy and caring. What a treasure that we might again be accepted for our struggle for justice for those who are left out of our economy. I am so grateful that we have been together in these challenging years. May we continue to be community for each other in this springtime moment of cautious blooming.

Simone Campbell, SSS

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To Hold the Needs of our Children's Children at the Heart of our Concern

BY SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matt. 19:13-14

As I have traveled around the U.S., I have been saying that I do advocacy rooted in my faith, but the place where we meet in a pluralistic society is in the Constitution.

For me, the Preamble sets out the ideals for "We the People." While all of the aspects of the Preamble are challenging, I think the point that receives the least attention in our money-obsessed culture is the mandate to do our work "for us and for our posterity."

Over and over, corporations and government make shortsighted choices in order to maximize profit or minimize debt. We have lost the sense that we are called to invest for future generations.

When I read the urging of Jesus to let the children come to him, I realize that the essential way forward means that we see the needs of our children and our children's children as the touchstone for all decisions. We cannot ignore the call of the future if we are to act responsibly in the present. Parents do it intuitively for their own children, but the call of Jesus is for all of us to do it for all children.

In advocacy I know that we work hard to create policies that support families. I was honored to have dinner the other night at Governor O'Malley's home in Annapolis, Maryland. About 20 of us around the table talked about the need to heal the heart of democracy. A piece of the conversation that received the most energetic response concerned problems in education as teachers must focus on tests and not on integrating values and ideals. One guest spoke about how she uses opera to free children's voices. After the meal, another guest embraced her because this opera class had freed her own child's voice both literally and figuratively. The child blossomed through

art and learned to speak up in other ways. This is education that is nurturing our posterity.

Then, a couple of weeks ago I was speaking to a large group of students about the struggles of families to make ends meet. In the process, we used the human bar graph for the change in income over the last 30 years. It is always a powerful experience (see <http://www.networklobby.org/nep/mind-gap-workshop>).

As we shared our insights, a young man (I'll call him Ryan) raised his hand and said he had always thought that his family was "middle class." He discovered in our exercise that they were really toward the bottom of the economic ladder. Ryan suddenly recognized the sacrifices his parents had made to shield him and his siblings from worry as they tried to make ends meet. He started to cry as he now understood what it meant for them to make sure he could attend college when they had so little. His tears of gratitude touched me deeply as he took another step into adulthood right before my eyes.

It made me think that this is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew's gospel. Children are the ones whom we reach out to protect. We do all we can to raise the next generation in a responsible and caring way. We care for their present and invest in their future, nourishing reflection and cultivating values. In the midst of it all, we pray that something will take root in their spirits so they will embrace the realm of promise. Those values are rooted in Ryan's spirit and are flowering in his care for his parents and siblings.

I pray that as we wrestle with politi-



Youth advocates enjoy swings they got the county to refurbish. They were participants in the Student Leaders' Von Nieda Park Task Force summer program, sponsored by their school, St. Anthony of Padua in Camden, New Jersey. See story on page 12.

cal decisions facing our nation regarding gun violence, the budget, immigration reform, climate, etc., we hold the needs of our children's children at the heart of our concern. If we make decisions that will benefit them, then we will fulfill both our constitutional mandate and Christ's call. It will be for the good because the reign of God belongs to our children's children.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.

O God, forgive and help us transform our rich and powerful nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.

O God, forgive and help us transform our rich and powerful nation which protects guns before children.

Help us to stand up together and speak up together and pray together and act together to make America safe, just and right for all Your children.



The Massive Human and Moral Cost of Gun Violence *Time to Say, “No More.”*

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



The heartrending massacre of 20 six- and seven-year-old children and six educators in Newtown, Connecticut galvanized public attention once again, as after other mass shootings. But the killing of children by gun violence is not new. It has been a relentlessly unreported and under-reported plague that has snuffed out the lives of 166,500 children and teenagers since 1963. That's an average of 3,470 child and teen deaths every year for nearly 50 years. That's 174 classrooms of 20 children each year. The number of children and teens killed by guns since 1963 is three times greater than the number of U.S. military per-

sonnel killed in action in the Vietnam (47,434), Afghanistan (1,712) and Iraq (3,518) wars combined. frolicked down the streets on which they walk to and from school; danced through their school buses; waited at the red light and bus stop; lurked behind trees; run them down on the corner; and shot them through their bedroom windows, on their front porches, and in their neighborhoods.

Gun violence has taught, entertained, and tantalized them incessantly across television, movie, and video game screens and the Internet. It has snatched away their parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, friends and teachers; sapped their



Listen to the children:

"My friends are dead. I saw the bad man. He was next to me when we ran out."

"I played ball with him. Now he is dead."

"My friend got killed cause she didn't hide good enough."

"Do you think it is my fault?"

The number of children and teens killed by guns since 1963 is three times greater than the number of U.S. military personnel killed in action in the Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq wars combined.

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The United States of America has spent a trillion and a half dollars on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars so far, purportedly to protect our children and citizens from enemies without, while ignoring the reality that the greatest threats to child safety and wellbeing come from enemies within.

Don't let anyone tell you current gun safety regulations are working just fine. They aren't. Every 30 minutes, a child or teen is shot in the United States. Every 3 hours and 15 minutes a child dies from gun violence. It's time to say, "No more."

Gun violence saturates our children's lives and relentlessly threatens them every day. It has romped through their playgrounds; invaded their birthday parties; terrorized their Head Start classrooms, childcare centers and schools;

energy and will to learn, and made them forget about tomorrow.

It has nagged and picked at their child and youthful minds and spirits and has darkened their dreams, day in and day out, snuffing out the promise and joy of childhood and inflicting on them post-traumatic stress disorders—often chronic. It has caused them recurring nightmares and made them afraid to go outdoors or to the movies. It has made them want to or feel they have to get a gun or join a gang to protect themselves because adults can't or won't protect them. It has made them plan their own funerals because they don't think they'll live to adulthood. It has killed them with guns every three hours and fifteen minutes and injured them every 34 minutes. It terrifies them and makes them cry inside and wonder if and when enough adults are ever going to stand up and make it stop and make children safe.

These are some of the devastating voices of children from Sandy Hook Elementary School. Elaine Zimmerman, the executive director of the Connecticut Commission on Children, joined by others, has been offering support to children and families in Newtown, Connecticut since the shootings at their school.

Elaine said, "I am haunted by the child who said, 'There is nothing you can do or say that will convince me that this will not happen again.'"

No one should be forced to pay a lifelong emotional or physical toll because a fit of anger, an episode of depression or other mental illness, or a careless accident ended with a gunshot. No child deserves to have their childhood snatched away in an instant and their life changed forever because of an adult's decision to carry and use guns, including high-powered assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips.

Opposite—ABOVE: Advocates march in Washington, DC. BELOW—Youth engaged in the CDF campaign to "protect children, not guns." All photos in this story are courtesy of the Children's Defense Fund.

Listen to the children. The costs of gun violence in America are far too high for them and for all of us.

President Obama, in his moving remarks at the Sandy Hook interfaith prayer vigil at Newtown High School on December 16, 2012, got it right when he said: “Caring for our children. It’s our first job. If we don’t get that right, we don’t get anything right. That’s how, as a society, we will be judged.”

And we will not pass the test of the God of the prophets or New Testament or all great faiths if we do not protect all of our sacred children against repeated and preventable gun deaths and injuries. Every child has a right to live and to dream and to strive for a future that is not destroyed in a second because we cowered before a special interest lobby and refused to protect them.



At the height of the Vietnam War, anti-war demonstrators filled the Mall and confronted the president, Congress and Pentagon—calling for an end to that war. What is it going to take for the American people—for you and for me—to push the president and members of Congress and governors and state legislators to stand up to the NRA, gun manufacturers and sellers? What is it going to take for them to place protection of children and teens and adults ahead of the protection of guns and profits and their election to office? How much is a child’s life worth in today’s political economy in America?

In 2013, as we honor the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and

the dream of our gun-slain prophet of nonviolence, Martin Luther King Jr., let us truly hear and follow rather than just celebrate him. Now is the time to free ourselves from the plague of gun violence. Isn’t it way past time for some hard soul-searching about what we believe as Americans? Do we believe in the sanctity of life in America or don’t we? We decide.

Small acts by enough of us can set off big ripples across our nation and shake up our political leaders. The important thing is to care and to act and to keep acting for as long as it takes until the NRA’s lock on gun policy is broken.

Suggested Activities

- **Prayers:** Highlight concerns for children’s safety and wellbeing in your church’s prayers. Remember children lost to violence and invite church members to stand for those children even if they don’t have a family member they are remembering.
- **Offering:** Collect a special offering that will support a local program providing safe haven, conflict resolution skills, restorative justice, or mental health services for children in your community.
- **Remembrance:** Find out the numbers and/or names of children killed by guns in your state since the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Include the names in your prayers and/or bulletin. If your place of worship has a bell, toll it once for each child whose life was lost to guns. If your place of worship has a memorial wall or other location where the names of loved ones who have died

are listed, consider adding the names of children lost to violence in the community.

- **Serve:** Create a list of service opportunities for members of your church that will help reduce violence and promote conflict resolution, peace-making, and good mental health. Options may include after-school programs, in-school programs, juvenile detention facilities, crisis hotlines, and family support programs.



- **Advocacy:** Set up a table in a central location with information about sensible gun safety legislation and other policy opportunities in your state or in Congress to protect children, care for their health and mental health, and reduce violence. Have copies of the materials available with contact information for state and federal representatives.
- **Study Circle:** Start a study circle that will meet regularly to read and respond to publications about children and guns. Use materials such as CDF’s “The Truth About Guns,” “Federal Policy Agenda: Ensure Every Child a Safe Start,” “Protect Children Not Guns: Key Facts,” the “Protect Children Not Guns 2012 Report,” and other resources on CDF’s website for your discussions. “Wrong Place, Wrong Time: Trauma and Violence in the Lives of Young Black Men” by John Rich is another good resource for a study circle or book group. The Catholic tradition may also have edu-

cational resources prepared on the topics of violence, peacemaking and other related subjects. Incorporate those into the study circle.

- **Engage Youths:** Plan a special youth program on changing the culture of violence. Create a safe, supportive place for youths to talk about the glamorization of violence in our culture—including video games, music, movies and more. Let them take the initiative in developing solutions to de-glamorize violence and promote positive values of peacemaking. Or, perhaps plan a “fishbowl” discussion where parents sit in a ring around the outside and simply listen to the dis-



ussion about violence by the young people on the inside. Adults may be surprised to find out how much they can learn by listening to a candid conversation.

- **Educational Forum:** Hold a special education program or forum to discuss gun safety, inviting a guest speaker or speakers. Many religious traditions have already developed materials on the topic that can be downloaded and shared, and much information is available at www.childrensdefense.org.
- **Host a Documentary Film Series and Discussion.** Plan an evening, or series of evenings, to show a documentary that will inform, inspire and stimulate discussion and action on a topic related to children and nonviolence.
- **Conduct a Child Watch Site Visitation Program.** Plan and conduct a Child

Watch guided site visitation to highlight the problems of gun violence. Recommended sites include those related to gun violence and incarceration, such as the morgue, a juvenile detention facility, a hospital or emergency room, and sites that highlight healthy development and violence prevention, such as a Head Start program, schools with conflict resolution programs, and community health and mental health programs.

- **Plan a Community March.** Partner with as many places of worship in your community as possible for a community march and vigil. Plan a group procession to various sites in the community. Some of the sites could connect to child



Senator Dianne Feinstein and supporters of commonsense gun laws.

suffering—sites where children have been shot, or courthouses or gun dealers. Other sites could be places offering children help and support, such as a Head Start program or a place of worship. At each stop, a different religious leader could offer brief, powerful information about the suffering of children from gun violence and poverty, a reading from a sacred text, and a prayer.

- **Create a Resource and Referral Booklet.** Provide families with information about where they can turn for support to deal with mental health concerns including depression or suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, and bullying. In addition to making sure that individuals and families needing these services are aware of them and can access them, encourage

members of your church to donate time, money or items to support these services.

- **Reach Out to Schools in Your Community to Offer Your Services and Support.** Congregations in some communities have adopted schools to offer volunteers, resources and special activities for the schools’ students. Be ready to stay with it for the long haul. Too many children already have experienced disappointment and resentment when promises have been broken.

Some schools have successfully used grandparents to provide a welcoming school environment as children arrive each day, to keep an eye on hall activities, and to help get children on the buses at the end of the day. Bring seniors together from your various congregations to play these roles.



Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), has been an advocate for disadvantaged Americans for her entire professional life. Under her leadership, CDF has become the nation’s strongest voice for children and families. More information about CDF’s “Protect Children,

Not Guns” campaign can be found at www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/protect-children-not-guns/.

Congress Must Act on Major Issues Ranging from the Federal Budget to Gun Violence

BY NETWORK ISSUE STAFF

A second term for President Obama and a new Congress. Can we expect more gridlock or will Washington finally find its way?

Federal Budget

The Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the federal government for the second half of this fiscal year (H.R. 933) passed both the House and Senate in late March. Overall CR spending levels adhere to caps set in the Budget Control Act (2011) plus an additional \$85 billion in cuts due to sequestration.

Five appropriations bills were passed separately: Defense, Military Construction, Homeland Security, Commerce-Justice-Science and Agriculture. Defense was given flexibility to adjust how it is affected by sequester, avoiding across-the-board cuts impacting other areas.

The FY 2013 spending bill started at the \$1.043 trillion level agreed to in the Budget Control Act of 2011, but was then decreased by the amount required by sequestration. This new level will be met by a 5% across-the-board cut in non-defense programs for the year. However, since these cuts are made in only the second half of the year, these programs will experience approximately 10% reductions in spending, as explained in this letter from the director of HHS Administration for Children and Families to colleagues who administer grants in the field: "...since the funding and sequester statutes do not offer flexibility for Community Services Block Grants, the overall payments for the fiscal year will be reduced by 5%. Therefore, the remaining quarterly payments for the fiscal year will be reduced by approximately 10%."

These cuts are hitting children hard! Cuts to Head Start are already reported in several states and Washington, DC. The Iowa Early Intervention program for

preschool students with special needs will lose 11 teachers in Sioux City. Iron County, MO will drop three weeks of Head Start, and Georgetown County, SC is considering closing Head Start centers for four weeks or cutting 55-60 children from the program. Two Head Start classrooms are being lost in Columbus and Franklin, IN. This is just a small sample of how, by cutting early childhood education, the effects of these across-the-board cuts will be felt well into our nation's future.

Other populations are also already being affected. Meals-on-Wheels in St. Joseph County, IN is dropping services for 30 seniors, while Jackson, MS may close nutrition centers and send frozen, rather than warm, meals to seniors.

Cities also report losing housing vouchers and utility assistance. In Delaware, Westside Family Healthcare estimates 3,000 people will likely lose healthcare. Drug and alcohol treatment in Sitka, AK will end on April 30. Twenty-four small airports will also lose all FAA funding for air traffic controllers.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate have each passed versions of an FY 2014 budget that are very different from each other.

They may determine a "deeming resolution," or maximum spending limit, and allow the Appropriations committees to set subcommittee amounts, known as 302b allotments. This would allow for regular order as each subcommittee—such as the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (T-HUD) subcommittee in the House—would determine program area limits and then reconcile with the T-HUD subcommittee in the Senate.

If this does not happen, there could be a Continuing Resolution

for funding beginning October 1, 2013. Alternatively, some committees may come to an agreement—as Defense, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs did for the second half of FY 2013.

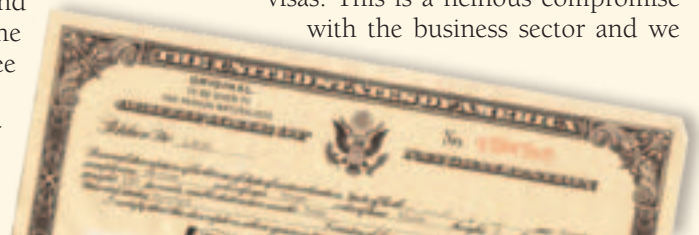
Regardless of how these issues are resolved, there will be less money available.

Additionally, in the summer we will be facing another debate about raising the debt limit. The debate over the debt limit in 2011 is the source of the Budget Control Act annual spending limits established for the next 10 years, and of sequestration. Our nation can't afford yet another debate that will result in decisions that harm vulnerable populations. We will continue to press for a fair—and faithful—budget.

Immigration

NETWORK is excited to witness and support the bipartisan effort to create commonsense immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million currently undocumented people in our country, and that protects family unity. We also believe that reform should not be contingent on border security measures. Commonsense reform should be reasonable in assessing fines and fees and should include achievable requirements for proving work history, learning English, and passing criminal background checks.

To our dismay, the Senate bipartisan proposal may eliminate the family-based visa categories that include siblings and adult children in exchange for an increase in employment-related visas. This is a heinous compromise with the business sector and we



Need up-to-date information about legislation in Congress? Check out NETWORK's Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/bills/>. ★ To learn what happened to legislation you followed in the past, go to <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/votes/> and enter your zip code in the "Key Votes" field.

ardently oppose the destruction of family reunification efforts in order to cater to the interests of corporate America. Immigration reform must strengthen, not marginalize, the family immigration system.

The prospects of a bipartisan immigration deal improved recently as a result of labor and business reaching an agreement on a visa program for low-skilled workers. Recognizing that the devil is in the details, NETWORK is closely monitoring and lobbying for progress, participating in field activities, and standing hopeful as we await the entire reform package from the Senate's "Gang of Eight."

We are also awaiting a possible House immigration bill that may have various pathways to citizenship based upon visa categories. We are hopeful that all sides are interested in passing legislation with a pathway to citizenship and that the current momentum can override the interests that oppose a just solution for immigration reform.

Medicaid

NETWORK has been working feverishly with state-based Nuns on the Bus teams to lobby their governors to improve Medicaid enrollment pursuant to the Affordable Care Act. We presently have 14 state-based Nuns on the Bus coalitions that are comprised of various healthcare and civil rights organizations.

So far, 25 governors have accepted the federal funding, including eight Republican governors. The federal government will initially cover all, then never less than 90% of the costs of enhanced eligibility, providing preventive care to millions of hard-working families, and the ability to see a doctor



BRIAN SULLIVAN

On the U.S. Capitol grounds, the Bartholdi Fountain awakens for spring. Sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi later created the Statue of Liberty.

promptly, as needed, instead of ending up in the emergency room. Additional benefits of expansion include economic stimulus, job creation and a more productive, healthy workforce. While there is no deadline to opt in to the improved program, the 100% match is only for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016. A governor who delays participation by even one year will forever deny the state the millions of dollars that it could reap in the first year.

Affordable Care Act

On the Hill, NETWORK continues to fully support and lobby for preservation of programs presently included in the Affordable Care Act. We strongly oppose the House-passed Ryan budget, which seeks to repeal the expansion of Medicaid and other important aspects of President Obama's healthcare reform law.

Medicare

Under the House-passed Ryan budget, Medicare would become a voucher program that would shift rising health-care and higher prescription drug costs to seniors. It is unlikely that this budget will pass in the Senate, but we cannot even allow it to be a starting point for compromise.

Violence Against Women Act

The reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (S. 47/H.R. 11) passed with strong bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House. The reauthorization improves on the previous bill by giving increased protection and support to immigrants, Native Americans abused by non-Natives on reservations, abused youth, and people targeted for sexual orientation. NETWORK strongly supported this stronger bill.

Gun Violence Prevention:

NETWORK has worked with others for commonsense measures to counter gun violence, and we were deeply disappointed by the April 17 Senate votes that defeated efforts to reform U.S. gun laws. The Senate voted down expanded background checks despite the fact that 90% of Americans support them. They also defeated efforts to ban certain military-style assault rifles and limit the size of ammunition magazines. We agreed with the president's assessment of the Senate's actions when he said, "All in all, this was a pretty shameful day for Washington."

The good news for gun violence prevention advocates is that there is movement on the issue in some states. New York, Colorado, Connecticut and Maryland have already approved legislation.

We will continue to press hard for commonsense legislation to counter the scourge of gun violence in our nation.

Want timely information about key issues in Congress? NETWORK members can sign up for our weekly email legislative hotline. Send your name, zip code and email address to jsammon@networklobby.org.



Nabil Musa of “Nature Iraq” shows EPIC director Erik Gustafson and the youth participants photos of bear, wild goats, jackals and other animals captured by the camera trap. All photos courtesy of EPIC.

Seeking Peace and Healing in Iraq

BY FARAH RASOOL AND LAURA LUNDAHL

In 2006, Farah Rasool was finishing her last year of high school in Baghdad, Iraq, while Laura Lundahl was living in Minnesota, attending her senior year of high school.

Seven years later, both women now work for the Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC), a non-profit based in Washington, DC that seeks to empower youth to promote peace in Iraq. While they are now coworkers and friends, the journeys that led them to EPIC are very different, and both journeys started in 2006 when Iraq fell into a chaotic, violent civil war.

Laura was only 13 years old when the Bush administration invaded Iraq. She watched the aftermath play out from the comfort of her couch. Four years later, horrified by the disintegration of Iraq into civil war, Laura decided to study international relations in college.

Understanding Firsthand the Violence in Iraq

For Farah, her journey to EPIC includes a very personal understanding of the organization’s mission of youth empowerment, having grown up in the heart of Baghdad. One evening in the middle of the civil war, on the eve of her high school graduation, she was eating dinner with her family when armed men stormed in and sprayed the house with bullets.

The Rasools were told that they must leave or be killed. While her parents and brothers fled to Egypt, Farah was determined to remain in Iraq and finish her education. It was not easy for her, living in an unsafe neighborhood with her family far away, but she was not deterred.

“Education was the thread I was holding to help me survive; not only to

live but also to make me feel that I was still a human being who could overcome horror and hardship in order to succeed.”

What Drew Farah to EPIC

It is because of this determination that Farah works at EPIC today. She wanted to



Authors.

Hike participant examines a shell he found.



have the opportunity to help her peers in Iraq overcome the difficulties in their pasts and pursue their dreams of a brighter future.

EPIC's projects in Iraq were what originally drew Farah to the organization. In the fall of 2011, EPIC held an **Iraqi Youth Hike**, which brought together ten Iraqi young men and boys from the violently divided city of Kirkuk—some for the first time—and took them on a three-day journey of discovery through the beautiful mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Environmental education is not typically a focus in the Iraqi school systems, and every young man who participated in the Iraqi Youth Hike came away with a much broader understanding of their own backyard. Here is a sample of what they said about their experience:

"The multiple languages and nationalities taught me many things about our community." —Ali, 22

"The best part was spending peaceful time with the teachers and students. There was no discrimination or political issues between us. The Iraqi Youth Hike taught us about nature and protecting the environment. At the same time, we had fun!" —Ahmed, 17

"I loved hiking and the spirit of teamwork!" —Mohammed, 24

Future Plans

This coming summer in Erbil, the capital city of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, EPIC will carry out a new project called **PhotoVoice Iraq**. Researchers the world over have praised the photovoice method, and EPIC will be the first to bring the practice to Iraq.

The project will teach twenty young Iraqis (ages 10-25) to use the power of photography and their own voices to

"I loved hiking and exploring nature and its elements. I got to see the tops of mountains at sunrise. It would be good if such programs could be conducted all over Iraq to spread awareness among people about the environment, and how to conserve it."

—Abdulrahman Yousif Akbar, participant in the Iraqi Youth Hike

raise public awareness and reach decision-makers about the issues that they care most about. The youth participants will use cameras and personal narratives to explore how Iraq has changed, and how that change is affecting their lives and future aspirations. Then, they will photograph and write about the positive change that they hope to see within their lifetimes, and how they see themselves being a part of that change.

With nearly 60% of the Iraqi population being under the age of 30, EPIC works to ensure that the United States develops a more positive relationship with the young people of Iraq. PhotoVoice Iraq is a great, interactive way in which to accomplish that goal. As Farah says, "I love the idea of young Iraqis using cameras to tell the story of change in Iraq and how that change is affecting their lives. It gives them an opportunity to express their feelings, their hopes and their dreams. Programs such as the Iraqi Youth Hike and PhotoVoice give young

Iraqis new knowledge, new friendships and new experiences."

What Attracted Laura

While it was the field projects that attracted Farah to the organization, it was another aspect that drew Laura to EPIC. Having spent her college years working on several advocacy campaigns, both in the United States and in Europe, she wanted to continue this work in Washington, DC. With the EPIC office mere blocks from the U.S. Capitol, advocacy is a large part of EPIC's mission toward achieving peace in Iraq. Using her background in grassroots advocacy,

Laura is helping EPIC put Iraq back on the agenda.

Iraq's Future

To mark the 10-year anniversary of the start of the war in Iraq, EPIC launched a "Campaign for Iraq's Future," including a petition at www.epic-usa.org/petition, to build support for long-term U.S. and international commitment to promoting peace in Iraq. Once the petition gains 10,000 or more signatures, EPIC will deliver it to President Obama and the U.S. Congress to show that Americans and concerned citizens around the world believe in a peaceful Iraq.

Farah and Laura, while coming from very different backgrounds and experiences, share the same vision of a peaceful Iraq. EPIC, and its work through advocacy and projects with young people in Iraq, is a wonderful outlet for these women to promote their shared vision of peace and healing in a war-damaged country.

Are you interested in helping EPIC's mission of empowering youth for peace in Iraq?

Please join Farah and Laura at www.epic-usa.org to learn more about EPIC's mission, projects in Iraq, and the Campaign for Iraq's Future.

We Make a Difference!

BY GENESIS SANTANA, MARIANGELIS FUENTES, ASHLEY MELENDEZ,
NELMARIS LAUREANO AND SOLEDAD VELAZQUEZ

Many of us first became involved with the Student Leaders' Von Nieda Park Task Force in a summer program sponsored by our school, St. Anthony of Padua in Camden, NJ. We saw the state our park was in and we decided to make a change. We became tired of seeing all the drug use and crime occurring in a place that should be a safe environment for the people in our community. At one point, our park was even titled "The Nation's Most Depressing Park" in a newspaper article. Some of us live near the park and feel scared to walk through it at night.

In the beginning, Camden Churches Organized for People (CCOP) used the students mainly because we looked nice in the pictures and attracted attention, but after a while we started taking action and began to make a difference in our community.

Now we hold monthly meetings with city and county officials to discuss issues in the park. At our weekly community organizing classes with Fr. Jud and Ms. Klingler, we make phone calls to officials and plan agendas for our next meetings. Over the past year and a half, we have been able to get new swings, basketball nets and noticeboards in the park. We host community clean-up days at the park throughout the year, and ugly trash that used to sit in the park for weeks or months now gets cleaned up by the city within 48 hours. Our art teacher, Ms. Baum, even painted a beautiful mural

on the community center this past summer (pictured on page 16). A local development corporation that plans to make infrastructure changes to the park this spring has agreed to look into providing better lighting for the park as well. We asked county officials for better police protection in the park, and two weeks ago they announced in the newspaper that the new county metro police would start patrolling the park. Through hard work, determination and perseverance, we have been able to create positive change right here in our neighborhood.

Joining the group has had a big impact on our lives. Not only have we gained confidence, but we've shown the people in our lives that children can change the world we live in for the better. One of our leaders, Genesis, even said that she has learned to question authority, a feat for a 14-year-old girl. Since joining the group, many students have said that they might look into a job with politics in the future. We started as small-minded children, not knowing that we held so much potential in our little hands. But now we are able to speak to city and county officials without even stuttering. We have been recognized for our achievements at the local, regional and national level, and last summer we were invited to Washington, DC to give a presentation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Our community has become involved, too. In our March meeting with officials, many of our neighbors, whom we have never seen, came and supported us. Also, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we showed children who live in our



Student Leaders, after giving a presentation at the Camden City Mayor's Youth Council at City Hall.

community the difference between community organizing and community service. We have set a good example for the people around us, and now over 60 adults have separated into small groups to continue the work that we started, such as repairing a local bridge.

On February 9, we met Sister Simone Campbell at Sacred Heart Church in Camden for their annual Gathering for Peace and Justice. We made note of how serious she is when dealing with working for justice, but kind-hearted toward people at the same time. We felt that Sister Simone really listened to what we had to say. Meeting her has made us realize that even adults take us seriously and that our small voices have been heard. We would like to thank her for her advice and admiration, and we hope she is doing well.

The Student Leaders' Von Nieda Park Task Force includes Ashley Fantauzzi, Lea Rosario, Jenaya Aide, Alejandro Berna, Jessica Lugo, Sergio Martinez, Itzel Tapia, Usuri Rodriguez, Ziani Sanchez and Victor Velazquez. For more information, go to their school website www.stanthonycamden.org/.

The students with Sr. Simone Campbell at Sacred Heart Parish's Gathering for Peace and Justice.



The Moral Scandal of Gun Violence

What Will YOU Do to Counter the Effects of Gun Violence on Our Children?

Thus says the Lord: In Ramah is heard the sound of sobbing, bitter weeping! Rachel mourns for her children, she refuses to be consoled for her children—they are no more! —Jeremiah 31:15

In 2010, 18,270 children and teens were killed or injured by guns; in 2010 a child or teen was killed or injured due to gun violence every thirty minutes. More children and teens are killed every three days than were killed during the Newtown, CT massacre. The time for action is now!

The activities and statistics used on this page are taken from the Children's Defense Fund's campaign "Protect Children, Not Guns." NETWORK encourages everyone to go to their website (www.childrensdefense.org) to support their efforts to end gun violence in the United States—and to stand with children everywhere.

Here are a few activities that you can do in your church or other place of worship:

- **Advocacy.** Organize a group to lobby your members of Congress in their district offices. Another form of advocacy is to start a letter or email writing campaign, or to organize a call-in day for your church. Get everyone to call or write a letter telling Congress to protect children, not guns.
- **Start a dialogue.** Invite a guest speaker to a special meeting to discuss gun safety, provide some literature on the topic of gun violence prevention, and start a conversation with people in your community about the importance and urgency of legislation.
- **Engage youth groups.** Plan a youth group night with a focus on talking about gun violence and guns in our society. Offer a safe space for teens to talk about their thoughts, fears and experiences with guns. Encourage them to talk to their friends about gun violence prevention.
- **Organize public displays of remembrance.** Find out the names of children and teens who have been killed or injured due to gun violence in your community and find a way to publicly commemorate them. Public displays attract attention, but also serve as a longlasting reminder that gun violence has permanent consequences.

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.



NETWORK—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace
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DO YOU KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT GUNS IN OUR NATION?

Here are some facts:

★ **A gun in the home increases the risk of homicide, suicide and accidental death.** Contrary to what many people believe, having a gun in your home doesn't make you safer, but instead endangers you and your loved ones. A gun in the home makes the likelihood of homicide three times higher, suicide three to five times higher, and accidental death four times higher. For every one time a gun in the home injures or kills in self-defense, there are 11 completed and attempted gun suicides, seven criminal assaults and homicides with a gun, and four unintentional shooting deaths or injuries.

★ **Armed school guards and teachers will jeopardize the futures of some children.**

Armed guards or officers are already in about one third of our nation's public schools. Columbine High School had an armed guard, and Virginia Tech had a full campus police force. There is no evidence that armed guards or police officers in schools make children safer.

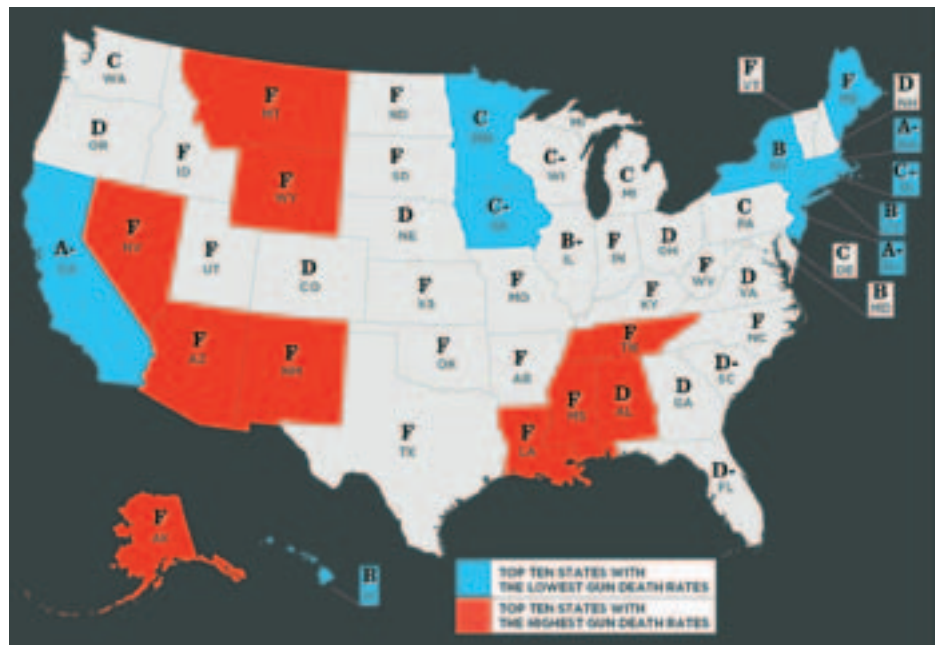
★ **Criminal background checks work, and making them universal at the federal level would make them far more effective.** Since its implementation in 1994, the Brady Law, which instituted a federal background check requirement for sales through licensed dealers, has denied 2.1 million firearm purchase applications.

★ **Universal background checks will not lead to a registry of gun owners.** The Brady Law of 1994 explicitly bans the creation of a

registry of gun owners. Under this law, instant criminal background checks have been made on more than 100 million gun sales in the last decade, without leading to the formation of any gun registry. Claims to the contrary have paralyzed congressional action on the issue. The vast majority of responsible gun owners support background checks because they know that the only people who will be negatively impacted are criminals and those who sell them firearms.

★ **State gun laws are a critical way to improve the safety of everyone, not just children.** How does your state measure up?

GRADING STATE GUN LAWS



Graphic used by permission of Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, smartgunlaws.org
http://smartgunlaws.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/stateranking_FINAL.jpg

SUPPORT COMMONSENSE LEGISLATION TO COUNTER GUN VIOLENCE.
As the Children's Defense Fund tell us: PROTECT CHILDREN, NOT GUNS!

Learn more about what you can do at
www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/protect-children-not-guns/

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.

Not Healthy for Children...

By JEAN SAMMON

I thought for quite a while about what I could write on the theme of children. I have no children myself (though as an aunt, I've participated in the lives of two nieces and four nephews as they grew from children into adults) and I have not really thought of myself as an advocate for children. But I wanted to write this "Making a Difference" article myself because it will be my last one. I have decided to retire at the end of April, and I wanted to say thank you to the NETWORK members who have inspired me over the 14+ years that I've been here.

But what to write about children? Yes, I was a child myself once, as Sister Simone Campbell reminded me as I pondered this. But lately I've been feeling like I need to be a grown-up now, particularly since my Dad died a few years ago and my Mom died this year.

As the deadline neared, an old slogan came into my head: War is not healthy for children and other living things. And I realized that I *have* been an advocate for children, especially in the time I've been at NETWORK.

When I first came to NETWORK as an Associate in 1998-99, I was involved in an arms-control coalition that was lobbying for ratification of the nuclear test ban treaty. We lost that one, and I'm still hoping that the Comprehensive Test Ban



Author (in blue) speaks out at nuclear test ban treaty demonstration in front of U.S. Capitol.

Treaty comes up again. We also lobbied for cuts to military weapons such as the F-22 fighter jet, which did get cut, even though it took ten years.

In 2001 we (NETWORK and many other groups) lobbied against the resolution to give the president authority to use force to respond to the 9/11 attacks, and the following year we lobbied against the vote that would take us to war in Iraq.

Peacemaking has always been my special interest, and at NETWORK I've had the opportunity to broaden my view of what it takes to make peace. I learned about the three Ds of national security: Defense, Diplomacy and Development. I've also learned that national security is about economic security, and I've been a part of NETWORK's many advocacy efforts for economic justice for families, adults and children. We've worked for justice for immigrants and refugees, for the Children's Health Insurance Program, for housing for homeless parents and children, for unemployed parents who struggle to take care of their children, for food and nutrition for women, infants and children, and for policies to reduce gun violence.

And I had the opportunity to ride with NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus to speak out for a faithful federal budget that promotes the common good. The nuns I know have always been for faith, family and fairness, and against the things that would deny human dignity.

I've learned that there are a lot of things besides war that are not healthy for children. And I've had the chance to write about many of those things, and how you, our NETWORK members, are making a difference on these issues.

My mother saved every article I ever wrote for the *Connection*. I discovered this while I was cleaning out her house over Easter weekend. So I feel she has helped me write this article, just as many of you have helped me when I asked you to help me write my articles.

I don't know yet what I'll do after I leave NETWORK. Probably I'll still show up as a volunteer now and then. I will, somehow, continue to try to make a difference. And I'll know that I'm not alone.

Thank you for making a difference to me, to NETWORK, and for justice in our world.

Jean Sammon, NETWORK's Field Coordinator, is retiring at the end of April.



1995 photo of author with niece Jillian Laub, and nephew Brian Sammon.



Women, Wisdom, and Witness, edited by Rosemary P. Carbine and Kathleen J. Dolphin, includes a chapter on NETWORK. Liturgical Press <http://www.litpress.org/Products/8064/women-wisdom-and-witness.aspx>

For Everything A Season by Joan Chittister. Orbis <http://www.maryknollsociety.com/description.cfm?ISBN=978-1-62698-019-8>

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TOP: Student Leaders with Fr. Jud Weiksnar by the mural that they convinced their art teacher to paint in Von Nieda Park, with city funding. MIDDLE: The same wall before it was painted. BOTTOM: Students show one of the pedestrian crossing signs that they had advocated for placement on busy roads by the park. Story on page 12.

Thank you

for your ongoing financial support, your activism, your prayers and your solidarity with our mission of seeking justice for people who are poor! You helped us reach new likeminded people who were desperate for government to do better. You helped launch NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus, a groundbreaking series of events that has changed the dialogue on social justice issues. And you will be the reason we keep this momentum going.

How can you help move our work for justice forward?

Use the envelope in the middle of this magazine and send us a contribution to underwrite the efforts of our educators, organizers, and lobbyists.

Or go to NETWORK's secure online donation page (www.networklobby.org/donate) and set up a one-time, monthly or annual donation. (You can also use this opportunity to sign up for NETWORK email updates to keep informed about what's happening on Capitol Hill.)

Become a NETWORK G.E.M. and Give Every Month—call our office for more information.

Spread the word

to people you know so that they, too, can invest in our mission of justice!