

Green Faith Heroes: Interfaith Youth Group of Greater Philadelphia Cleans Up Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center

About 110 youth from the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia's Youth Program became Green Faith Heroes by cleaning up Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center in Philadelphia. Youth attended from the following 30 congregations and schools:

- White Rock Baptist Church
- Quba Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies
- Al Aqsa Islamic Society School
- Beth Am Israel synagogue
- West Catholic High School
- First United Methodist Church of Germantown
- Mishkan Shalom Synagogue
- Chestnut Hill Presbyterian Church
- Mt. Zion Baptist Church
- Germantown Jewish Centre
- Masjidullah
- Masjid Mohammad
- Main Line Reform Temple
- Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
- Villanova Foundation for Islamic Studies
- Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship
- Bahai Fellowship
- St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- Christ Ascension Lutheran Church
- St. Mary's Episcopal Church of Ardmore
- 59th Street Baptist Church
- Greater Philadelphia Church of Christ
- Main Line Unitarian Church
- Al Jamia, Christian Stronghold Baptist Church
- Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church
- St. Ignatius
- Temple Beth Hillel Beth El
- Esperanza Academy
- Goodwill Baptist Church
- St. Vincent de Paul of Germantown.

The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia is co-sponsored this powerful day with the Fairmount Parks Commission, the Philadelphia Green Program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center, Inc., the Arts & Spirituality Center and Neighborhood Interfaith Movement (NIM). This event was held as part of the National Day of Youth Service in which teens of diverse religious traditions through the world came together for meaningful discussion,

community service, and reflection. It is coordinated nationally by the Interfaith Youth Core.

For us in Philadelphia, this day is part of a year-long interfaith youth initiative called Walking the Walk, in which high school teenagers from different faith traditions meet 13 times a year for meaningful conversation, interfaith dialogue about shared values, community service and reflection. It is part of a larger program Inspired to Serve: Youth Led Interfaith Action funded in part by Learn & Serve America of the Corporation for National & Community Service (a pilot of Search Institute and Interfaith Youth Core).

This Day of Interfaith Service provided new youth with a 'taste' of interfaith work by being Green Faith Heroes.

A lot was accomplished with all that youthful energy! They removed about 35 bags of trash from the creek, including 6 rusty bicycles, computer parts, rugs and a B-B Gun. Youth muscle ripped out about 2000 pounds of invasive plants, and replenished the area with 50 native plants and about 70 trees, including redbuds, sugar maple, chokeberries, and magnolias. Trails were cleared and prepared for spring. All of this activity cleaned our waterways, saved soil from being washed away, and beautified the area with blossoming plants which will be enjoyed by many area families for years to come.

The reasons for volunteering were as varied as our participants. A Jewish youth talked about being one with a community greater than himself and an ethic of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world). Christian youth talked about stewardship of the Earth as God's creation. Muslim participants spoke of the Islamic concern for the environment and the many blessings one receives by planting trees. Baha'is spoke of the reflection of the names of God in the natural world. A Yoruba youth spoke of the sacredness of all of nature. Many of the participants spoke of a concern for the beauty of their own neighborhood, a concern for the Earth itself, and a desire to preserve the environment for future generations so they have a beautiful, clean, safe place to live. Some spoke of the need to serve as an example of how to treat each other and the environment. Youth also spoke of a need to have a voice regarding the future of our planet. All of us felt the beauty of coming together as a human community and learning to know each other as friends.

After a day of hard work, the youth expressed that they felt hopeful, inspired, motivated, encouraged, and happy to have made a contribution to our environment and our future. New friendships developed from working side by side, sometimes between people who might not otherwise have met. After some time for conversation and reflection, the youth leaders planted a sugar maple to symbolize our hope for the future and for enjoyment by generations to come. Then, we split into groups to express and reflect upon our shared values through the arts. We had groups who were drumming, making collages, participating in movement and theater workshops, creating banners and collages, writing poetry, and singing and creating music.

We had a wonderful, successful day filled with new friendships, the joy of working together in service motivated by shared values, and the satisfaction of having helped our environment, our community, and even future generations.



Receiving instruction on how to identify invasive plants.



Cleaning up the creek.



Gearing up for the job.



Removing invasive plants.



Instructions on how to plant a tree.



Clearing the way for new plants.



You're never too young to participate!



Working together.



A day of hard work and a sense of accomplishment.



Time for reflection afterwards.



Youth leaders plant a sugar maple.



Having fun in theatre class!



Performing a skit promoting taking care of the earth.



Drumming workshop!



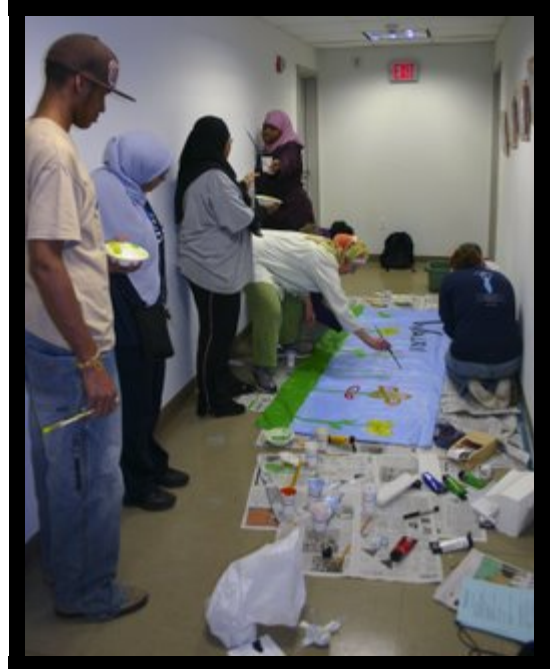
Listening to the music...



A play about our hope for the future.



Learning to create new music through voice and percussion instruments.



Creating a banner for the Interfaith Peace Walk.