

# The Normative Times

*The New North American Family Institute Monthly Newsletter*

## Dr. Bakal's Corner



### Normative Learning Communities

Recently, I received a letter from a gentleman who worked for NFI Massachusetts and is currently a student doing research on the educational characteristics of organizations. As someone who knew and had practiced the Normative Approach, he decided to compare it to the concept of learning organizations as described by Peter Senge, who wrote a best selling book about this subject called *The Fifth Discipline*. He asked me if I thought NAFI/NFI is a "learning organization." Peter Senge defines learning organizations as having a number of key distinguishing elements. First, learning organizations place a strong emphasis on not just developing a central vision but sharing and discussing it with all members of the community. A second characteristic of learning organizations is that their members take responsibility for their own learning and, in a collective sense, make learning a key part of their community culture. In this way, learning organizations develop people's capacities to continue to grow through high participation and by sharing values and goals.

In coming to understand Senge's definition of a learning organization, I answered the inquiry about NAFI/NFI by confirming that we are --and *continued on page 3*

## Adventures in Learning Throughout NAFI/NFI

Jill DiChiara, Program Development and Marketing Project Manager

Thinking outside of the box is nothing new to the program staff at NAFI/NFI. Throughout our various corps and regions, there is a consistent and active desire to be creative in how we run our programs. Traditional educational environments have often proven to have lackluster results with our students and so we must strive to be open to new ideas, opportunities and educational models. We recently spoke to program directors and staff from all over NAFI/NFI. What we discovered is that there are some amazing activities happening out in the field in terms of community and project-based learning. The

activities don't need to be elaborate to have an impact; something as simple as going off site and seeing a movie can help connect these youth to the communities they are hopeful of re-joining after leaving NAFI.

We also discovered that using project-based activities as an educational tool helps our students and residents experience areas of life that are often off-limits to youth in their situations, both demographically and socially. We are proud to report that the dedicated staff throughout NAFI/NFI have been able to provide these types of experiential learning "adventures" to youth in our



A Contoocook student celebrates a great run at Pat's Peak.

care and wanted to share just a few examples of their accomplishments to the community at large, in hopes they will inspire us all.

### Taking care of self at NFI

**North:** The Contoocook School, a special education day school located in Contoocook, NH, focuses on wellness, both in extracurricular activities and as an *continued on page 4*

## NAFI Reaches Out to Bridge the Gap Between Police and Urban Youth

By Jay Paris, Deputy Director Strategic Planning, Development and Training

Typically, kids in trouble and cops on the street are not the best of friends. It's not the way it has to be, or certainly should be, but ask most teenagers in juvenile lock-up how they feel about police officers and their responses will be filled with antipathy. On the other hand, ask police recruit officers who are learning to patrol urban streets how they feel about kids who hang out on corners and they'll say they don't trust or under-

stand them.

In the past few years, violence among urban teenagers has skyrocketed in most cities but few more dramatically than Baltimore and Boston. During this time,



Baltimore Police Cadets and TOYC students work together.

Jim Isenberg, NAFI's Director of Strategic Planning and Marketing, began developing leadership academies for young police officers around the country through the Police Corps. The pattern he saw was clear; kids and cops didn't know how to talk to each other.

Eventually, John Yates, Regional Director of Mid-Atlantic, teamed up with Jim Isenberg to develop a two-day, very intensive training *continued on page 3*

## Notes From All Over—events, updates and highlights from the field

**Mid-Atlantic:** Stephen Principe, Director of The Loudoun County Youth Shelter, reports that the team continues to work towards strengthening the culture of their community. To support this development, several projects are in the works including the refurbishing of old canoes for facility use, OLE trips, a drumming initiative, as well as an audio/video recording program. Celebrations, events and community service outings continue to drive the program, and provide opportunities for leadership development, teambuilding and lots of fun!

**Connecticut: Fore!!** NAFI CT will be holding their **1st Annual Golf Classic** on Thursday May 18th at the Tunxis Plantation Golf Course in Farmington, CT. This inaugural charity event will raise funds to enrich the lives of the children served by NAFI CT programming. Registration for the event begins at 10:00 a.m. and the Shotgun Start takes place at 11:00. Golf, breakfast and dinner: \$150; dinner

only: \$30. Please contact Diana Bennett at 860-284-1177 or dianabennett@nafi.com for tickets or to make a donation to this worthy cause.

**North:** The North Corporate Office reports that they recently spent the day at the **Davenport School** on March 22 for an all day volunteer program improvement day. Karen Gincott explains, “we brought tools, volunteers and high-spirits and by the end of the day, we had painted the bedrooms, re-finished the dining room floors, tore down a wall and worked with the students and staff to help give the program a fresh start.” The school recently moved into a beautiful, new modular school and focus is on improving the condition of the residential dorm; currently a very old farm house. “The staff is thrilled to be able to lend a hand to a program in need. The students are taking much better care of the dorm and school and are really supporting norms that take pride in

their space and living area. **We are proud of the Davenport School community** for their care and commitment to themselves and others (their mission).”

**Florida:** Sue Anthony and her team at **Monticello** are pleased to report that NAFI has been re-awarded the Monticello New Life contract from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. The new contract will commence this month and take the team through 2009. Congratulations!

**Rhode Island: Network program staff** members are sending a host of post cards to Rhode Island State Representatives to inform them that they are concerned that the impact of fiscal belt-tightening is having an adverse impact upon the people they work with in their programs. **Lincoln House staff, Sherry Hicks** recently received her RI Case Management Certificate. **Main Street** has begun their season of fund raising for the local Women’s Resource Center by

publishing a cook book which will be available for \$7.00. Susan Giblin reports that the Network recently held their Annual Talent Show on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at Ray Hall on the Butler Hospital Campus and that the event was an enormous success.

**NFI MA:** NFI MA: CIP will be hosting the Second Annual Children’s Education Fund Banquet on June 22nd at the Sons of Italy, in Arlington, MA. For tickets, donations and more information, please contact Tennille Waldo at 781-643-0761. Last year’s event raised over \$6000 and we are hopeful this year’s fundraiser will be an even larger success!

**Corporate Office:** Shelly Waldman, Director of Human Resources, would like to remind everyone that the Employee Handbook will soon be available on the Internet. Beginning in May, employees will be able access the Handbook and other timely HR documents simply by visiting [www.nafi.com](http://www.nafi.com). Stay tuned for further updates!

## Community Service Committee Connects with The Special Olympics

On Friday, March 3rd and Saturday, March 4th, a small group of corporate staff members had the opportunity to volunteer their time to assist the Massachusetts Special Olympics in kicking off their annual Winter Games. The group was comprised of members of the NAFI corporate office Special Events Committee, including Betsy Angelico, Sharon Bogdan, Pam Bruce, Jill DiChiara, Louisa Loke and Colleen Macomber.

The committee was formed last year by HR Coordinator, Sharon Bogdan, as a result of the Danvers Office staff’s increased desire to get involved in an organized volunteer effort.

When asked about her involvement with the committee, Bogdan replied, “We work in an industry where people are touching the lives of those around them on a daily basis. Here at the corporate office, we are a bit removed from that and a group of us wanted to find a way to have that same type of hands-on experience and connection that people in the field take part in every day.”

Friday’s activities were mainly comprised of assisting the Special Olympics Staff with check-in and registration prior to that evening’s Opening Ceremonies. On Saturday, Betsy, Pam and Sharon were joined by Bob Ver-

mes of the Risk Management Department at Shawnee Peak, where the group distributed lunches to the athletes competing the afternoon’s downhill skiing competition. All agreed that the experience was truly rewarding and hope to continue their involvement with this very special organization by volunteering at future events.



NAFI Staff at the MA Special Olympics

### We Want to Hear From You!

*This story is just one example of the many volunteer efforts happening all over the NAFI/NFI map. We would love to hear about what innovating and exciting activities are taking place in all of our programs and regions.*

**Please share your community service story with us by emailing Jill DiChiara, Managing Editor, at [jilldi-chiara@nafi.com](mailto:jilldi-chiara@nafi.com).**

*We look forward to hearing from you and sharing your experiences with the rest of NAFI/NFI in a future issue of The Normative Times!*

## NAFI Bridges the Gap Between Police and Urban Youth story continued from page 1

for police recruits that utilized incarcerated youth to help NAFI trainers develop and role play scenarios from situations that commonly occur in the life of police officers.

Called the Youth Initiative Training, the workshops proved to be transformational. For hours each day, youths and police participated in team building exercises on ropes courses, interacted in emotional scenarios and had in-depth discussions about their respective fears, challenges and goals. By the end of the final day, the participating police officers genuinely understood and held affection for the very kids that



A group of students from Thomas O'Farrell Youth Center work with the Baltimore Police Department to complete a ropes course.

they had admitted to hating at first glance. And the young people involved in YIT also had radically different, positive feelings about police officers.

Following two years of these successful trainings in Bal-

timore, YIT was offered to all graduates of Boston's Police Academy in 2005. Again, the trainings were hailed as a breakthrough in police and juvenile justice circles. This past March, the Mid Atlantic team hosted another successful round of trainings for the Baltimore Police Department with help from the residents at the Jane Egerton House and TOYC. Another round is planned for later this year.

Many believe YIT should become a national model for police training. Currently, police departments in Lowell, MA, White Plains, NY and Hartford, CT are considering implementing it in their communities.

Most recently, NAFI/NFI's work with police has taken a new direction as Isenberg and Yates have teamed up with the Baltimore Police Department to organize neighborhood councils to work closely with District Commanders, expanding even further the possibilities of community policing.

*"We believe that when clients take part in their own learning and healing, it causes learning to naturally flourish in their program communities."*

a vibrant member of the ACE community.

At NAFI/NFI, we honor the notion that learning is a lifelong pursuit and we also believe that the best way to learn is to teach. I am delighted that many employees at NAFI/NFI at all levels are engaged in educational programs, from adult education classes to pursuing doctoral degrees. By enriching themselves, these staff also enrich us, and enhance NAFI/NFI as a true Normative learning community.

## Normative Learning Communities story continued from page 1

and have always been – a learning community. In effect, we are a Normative learning community. In the Normative Approach, we emphasize the importance of the community and the shared values as ways of creating learning/healing environments. Our focus on creating communities helps us become open, diverse and inclusive. Senge's conceptualization is that a learning organization can be created by bringing individuals together who seek to learn. We actually go a step further. We believe that individual learning is most successful when it is supported by community norms and values that promote it. In Normative Communities, we always encourage members to be responsible for their own growth and hold each other accountable to do so. We believe that when clients take part in their own learning and healing, it causes learning to naturally flourish in their program communities. We work

closely with clients, encouraging them to play a strong role in their own recoveries. We seek to create goals and tasks to engage our clients to pursue them together with us. Our mutual working relationships are essentially known in the literature as "working alliances" or "therapeutic alliances." To emphasize the importance of learning from each other and from clientele, it is necessary to flatten hierarchies, and encourage mutual learning and growth in the context of an open community. Organizations that create conditions for people to find answers for themselves, and to teach one another, are not only more powerful but more empowering.

I am reminded of a situation in Rhode Island that serves as a good example of the power of mutual learning in our program communities. There was a Hispanic youth at the ACE program who had a hard time adjusting and acted out his

frustration by defying the program's norms and regularly engaging in mischief. His behavior challenged the educational staff and the program's leadership to find ways of engaging him. At ACE, every staff member and every youth has an opportunity to partner in the learning process by teaching a course of his or her choosing. Despite this youth's acting out, the staff invited him to teach classes in Spanish. And according to Jerry Carnevale, who related this story to me, this invitation was a turning point for him. He became thoughtful, serious and engaged. In the process, he became an active participant in his own learning. Several staff members and youth participated in the class that he was now running. He realized he had something to offer, a factor that brought a dramatic change in his behavior. By being given the opportunity to contribute, he turned his situation around and became

## Adventures in Learning story continued from page 1

important part of the curriculum. This year, the middle school was offered a life science course that has a fitness component. The students are studying human biology as they contract to commit time at home—yes, this is homework!—to a fitness regime. They have studied CPR and First Aid, have learned the bones of the body by doing a Macarena dance, and have gone on hikes to do formal nature observations as they increase their own strength by walking.

Program Director, Nancy Pierce explained, “The school is committed to the whole student. When kids don’t feel well, they can’t learn well. If we want our students to function properly in school, part of our job is to help them develop the healthy habits that support learning.” This focus has caused the school to offer a winter skiing session at nearby Pat’s Peak, three seasons of team sports, nutritional and hygiene counseling, meditation and special field trips, such as yearly canoeing trips. “This year, we are hoping to take our students on an overnight white water rafting trip.



One of the highlights of the Contoocook school curriculum is the opportunity for field trips, such as canoeing on a nearby river.

What we know is this: if students begin to believe in the strength, integrity and reliability of their bodies, they develop the confidence they need to succeed with their other challenges.”

### Brush with fame at Chauncy Hall:

Recently at Chauncy Hall Academy in Massachusetts, a group of several residents were able to experience a once in a lifetime event. These residents had the opportunity to meet former Celtic, now Timberwolf, Ricky Davis, and former NBA star turned Celtics analyst, Dana Barros. Residents were excited to meet an NBA star and brought items for Ricky Davis to autograph. What surprised residents the most was the unexpected gift they received from Mr. Davis on top of an already exciting day. Each student was given a gift certificate to Toys R Us and a ticket to an upcoming Celtics game. One of the residents was thoughtful in using his gift certificate to buy Christmas gifts for his family. Several days later, the residents enjoyed watching a Celtics win over the Utah Jazz. One resident summed up the day with these words: “This is one of the greatest moments in my life! Ricky Davis was so cool. We had awesome seats. Even better, the Celtics won!”

**Spreading the word at Touchstone:** For some time now, the young women at Touchstone, in Connecticut have participated in the program’s nationally ac-



The Road to Life team in the Badlands of South Dakota; one of their many adventures last summer.

claimed Creative Writing Program and have learned to use poetry and short stories to express their thoughts and feelings. Their first step in sharing their powerful writing was through a self-made anthology, *I Am Not A Juvenile Delinquent*. After publishing two successful editions of the book, the young women are now also sharing their words with a live audience. The girls have been attending and participating in public poetry readings in nearby Hartford and have really embraced the opportunity to share their poems and stories with their community, outside of Touchstone.

**Road to Life 2005 with the Rhode Island Network:** Maryanne McIntyre, Education Director for the Rhode Island Network, had the adventure of a lifetime this summer when she and four residents from ACE and Challenges traveled cross country on a 20 day expedition. Called “The Road

to Life,” the trip served as an educational experience that can’t be found in any traditional classroom.

The group took pride in creating their own Normative Community. By developing their own norms and expectations for the journey and creating a trip mission, they were able to follow the Normative Approach. Heather, a student at ACE, had this to say upon her return. “I was just in awe everywhere we went. It (the trip) was so amazing, it is almost too hard to put into words. We had our ups and downs, but we were able to overcome them with the help of the Normative approach.”

The group continued the learning experience by sharing it with others in their program communities upon their return. Its impact and the impact of any of these experiences can best be summed up in one Main St resident’s thoughts. “Thank you for sharing your trip with us and please keep sharing your adventures with others you meet. You never know who you may inspire.”



Grazing buffalo in Wyoming

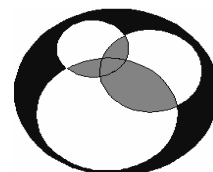
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