Children for Change Club takes center stage at recent Season

IEP FILE PHOTO

Children, volunteer teacher Amanda Stanley and members of the community pose with the caption "Share the Love."

IEP FILE PHOTO

The children's art work represents the "Season for Nonviolence and peace cranes."

Standing up to violence in the world we live in takes wisdom and courage. The forward-progressing global movement is finding a way into our classrooms and onto the streets of Virginia Beach.

On April 13 Mayor Bobby Dyer proclaimed the "Art of Humanity Day" in honor of celebrating the Season for Nonviolence. This annual 64-day season is meant to bring awareness, education, and inspiration to the spirit of nonviolence and the ripple effect of change that it creates in our communities.

The grassroots awareness campaign is annually held through the dates that mark the commemoration of the assassinations of Mahatma Gandhi (January 30) and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (April 4). This annual event was inspired by what our local young people are already doing to cultivate love, peace, and nonviolence in their classrooms and our communities.

Through art, music, poetry, outreach and activities for involvement, young people are empowering themselves to learn about and implement nonviolent practices and influencing their peers to do the same. Embracing nonviolence is an active movement that can truly change the world, and it is also a weapon that fights against violence.

This season is about educating everyone about the power of a love-force and the ability we have to harness this powerful weapon without needing a single bullet.

The history of humankind has proven that nonviolence creates true change, big or small, in our personal lives and the society around us. When Herta Okonkwo, a local teacher and activist, was inspired by a middle school student who wrote a nonviolence pledge for her school after the school shooting at Columbine in Colorado on April 20, 1999, she started advocating for the community to adopt this educational season.

After more than 20 years of promoting this in her local community, Herta beamed with joy as she watched Virginia Beach Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence read the proclamation alongside the mayor. She was present as the first ever Season for Nonviolence flag was presented to the Children for Change Club from W.T. Cooke Elementary School, led by volunteer teacher Amanda Stanley.

The children shared the myriad of creative activities they implemented during the 2019 season. The Children for Change hope that one day every school will proudly fly a Season for Nonviolence flag to demonstrate that peaceful empowerment is being cultivated in our schools through programs such as mediation, conflict resolution, anti-bullying efforts and other creative nonviolence practices.

Virginia Beach young people have joined the hundreds of communities across the globe that are breathing life into this season. The event left tangible evidence behind at the Virginia Beach Little Theatre with the painting of the Season for Nonviolence permanent community mural, featuring Gandhi and Dr. King. The mural was conceptualized by artist Jared O'Flaherty. A peace pole will also be planted in the Vibe Creative District for the public to enjoy.

The young people were supported by the Interspiritual Empowerment Project, the Virginia Beach Human Rights Commission, the Vibe Creative District, and other organizations and city partners, including community businesses. Those who attended were clearly delighted and moved by performances from Teens with a Purpose and Virginia Beach Little Theatre.

Members of many nonviolence grassroots groups filled the show-and-tell hall to network and provide inspiration for participants. Through community collaboration, this grassroots effort is truly an example of Mahatma Gandhi's challenge to "be the change we wish to see in the world" as we celebrate the diversity of one another's gifts. Please join us as we continue to make manifest this powerful life changing movement.

For more information and to stay motivated or to get involved: SeasonOfNonviolence.com and follow Season for Nonviolence Virginia Beach on Facebook.

- Amanda Bean