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## Franklin Square DREAM Update October 2006

October was an incredibly full month for the Franklin Square DREAM program – DREAM traditions, new and old, new mentor training, matching new mentors and children, and a couple of new ideas that the program has been taking on. Franklin Square DREAM currently consists of 24 children (1 more new child from a Somali-Bantu family was taken on during the month of October), and 26 mentors (with 2 of these mentors currently away on study abroad). These children come from 14 different Franklin Square families. DREAM mentors range from freshmen to seniors at St. Michael's College.

From the initial list of 30 applicants, DREAM has taken on 18 new mentors. This new group is a tight, well experienced, and high energy group of mentors. New mentor orientation consisted of four parts: a session of DREAM boundaries and guidelines run by the co-chairs of the program; a half day retreat of group bonding, visioning, and story telling; an hour long training run by the DREAM office about child behavior management, and three weeks of Fridays getting to know DREAM children.

These Fridays were focused on programming that would break children and mentors into small groups (a blend of new and old DREAM mentors and kids). The purpose of this was two-fold: 1) new mentors have a chance to work in small groups with more experienced mentors who are able to model child management skills and healthy relationships; 2) new mentors have a chance to meet DREAM children in smaller settings, begin to establish relationships that will eventually lead to a one-on-one match.

Friday programming included an afternoon of improvisational skits (performed by DREAM kids and mentors on the main stage at St. Michael's College), pumpkin carving, and attending UVM Elm Street DREAM's annual Big Chili Cook-Off (a DREAM tradition!). The month closed with a Halloween visit to a local corn maze where DREAMers had the opportunity to trick or treat in full costume, for both candy and toothbrushes (donated by a local dentists office!). For each of these activities children and mentors had a chance to work with a different small group and explore new and favorite places – St. Mike's campus, UVM campus, and a nearby Colchester farm.

Overall, the transition of new families into DREAM this semester has gone exceptionally well. The obstacle of racially charged tension between DREAM families is still present (both at the home, and during DREAM time), but DREAM mentors are working hard to create a "safe" environment with the children of Franklin Square that does not tolerate prejudice. The children and mentors together established a set of shared group rules and all signed a contract agreeing to abide by said rules. They also implemented a discipline system that includes losing the privilege of attending a DREAM Friday if using disrespectful language to another DREAMer.

To make sure that DREAM mentors are adequately trained and supported in their exploration of issues related to cultural diversity, DREAM staff has been working with local partners to increase the resources available to our mentors. DREAM staff has been working on the advisory board for the implementation of funds from a new grant specifically geared towards training mentors of refugee families, and dedicating a number of staff hours to growing our connectedness to other outside resources at the Agency of Human Services, the United Way, and Burlington's Center for Community and Neighborhoods.

The DREAM Alumni Organization (composed of past mentor graduates from the DREAM program) has also begun a round of grants for the end of the 2006 year. Each program is encouraged to apply for funding for a dynamic programming idea of interest to the children and mentors. After a lot of debate about what Franklin Square DREAM could apply for the mentors settled on an application to paint a mural at C.P. Smith, the local Elementary school that most of the DREAMers attend. Mentors have been in touch with the administration of C.P. Smith to discuss this proposal, and to further build the communication between DREAM and the local schools.

On a related note, during the month of October a handful of DREAM staff, board, and two mentors from Franklin Square attended a city wide forum to discuss the possibilities of socio-economic integration (SEI) of Burlington schools. The topic being quite controversial in the city right now, this meeting was challenging to navigate. About an hour was spent in table discussions amongst Burlington residents, parents, and educators. DREAM staff, mentors, and board were there in part to become more educated about the subject matter, as well as to advocate for our families in the Franklin Square community. Below are thoughts that the two Franklin Square mentors who attended the event were willing to share:

*"I don't mean to get all philosophical, but I feel like this is the only way I can explain it. I do DREAM to help spread equality. To give everyone, every child, an equal opportunity. I know this sounds cliché - something you've heard a million times around. But, as I was helping re-arrange chairs in the auditorium where the Burlington school board meeting was just held, this idea of equality just stuck in my mind wouldn't leave. I got it. I suddenly realized what the school board is trying to do by redistributing the "wealth" among all its schools. I realized its end-all, its goal, my goal, DREAM's goal: to give every child a chance to achieve; to create an environment filled with the opportunities that every child has a right to experience."*

*--Eric Jackson, 2<sup>nd</sup> year DREAM mentor*

*"Going to this meeting not only educated me about the Burlington schools and opened my eyes a little more to the subject. This experience helped me understand more about DREAM and the mission of DREAM. DREAM's mission is to empower kids from affordable housing to reach their potential and be aware of the options that they have while achieving their dreams (and having fun, of course!). Then I see going to this meeting and helping to be a voice for a whole community of families who was not necessarily represented as helping these children to reach their full potential and make all their options the best options available and to make their options just as equal as any other child going through the Burlington schools with a higher socioeconomic status."*

*–Kylie Edwards, 2<sup>nd</sup> year mentor*

Another DREAM Lab has been scheduled for the month of November. Look forward to hearing more updates on parent/mentor communication, as well as plans for the end of the semester!

Keep DREAMing!

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