

UNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS 2008

Unity Retreats and Unity Summer Internship

The mission of the Unity Leadership Programs is to engage and empower a new generation of youth working for social change. We do this by involving youth in two distinct but interrelated programs.

The first, called Unity Retreat is an intensive weekend experience that focuses on identity, values, decision making and living in a multi-cultural world. The retreats stand on their own as powerful learning tools for youth and also serve as the “live action interview” for admission into the Unity Summer Internship program. In 2008, Unity Retreats will be offered twice in March and involve up to 100 youth. This overnight experience will include large and small group activities, team building games, identity caucus groups, and reflection time all designed to encourage the youth – individually and collectively – to claim pride in their identity, to build cross-cultural relationships and to connect with their values.

The second program, Unity Summer, is a ten-week internship that places youth who have completed the 9th through 11th grade in a social justice organization in the Twin Cities. The organizations provide a training ground for motivated youth to build inter-personal skills through a real-life work experience. The internship is complemented by a rigorous series of workshops that integrate the learning at the work site with practical skills development. The workshops focus on the tools needed to make lasting change – an understanding of oppression, community and power as well as the development of critical thinking skills necessary to analyze issues and grasp the root causes of problems. Celebrating its 15th year, Unity Summer has engaged and trained 295 youth in the skills needed to create social change. Graduates of the program agree that Unity Summer is a life-changing experience.

The Unity Summer Internship will operate between June 16th and August 22nd with a 200 hour commitment. Of those 200 hours – 170 hours will be spent in the internship; the remaining 30 hours are allocated to the training workshops. Unity Summer interns are paid a stipend of \$1,300 for this 200 hour commitment. Previous internship experiences have included:

- Community organizing efforts around affordable housing;
- Working on the Twin cities Pride Festival;
- Planning and implementing National Night Out activities;
- Organizing local campaigns on clean water and alternative transportation;
- A summer enrichment camp for minority and immigrant youth;
- A local public radio’s efforts to increase community engagement from diverse populations; and
- Monitoring international news media sources around human rights issues in Latin America.

The Unity Leadership Programs are a collaboration between several organizations. First Universalist Church provides the overall leadership and administrative support while the partner organizations of YO! The Movement, the Somali Action Alliance, Dar Al Hijra Mosque, the Prosperity Campaign and Project Legos provide access to and relationships with youth. As a collaborative effort all partners are involved in program design, implementation and evaluation as well as in the recruitment, selection and ongoing support of the interns. Funding for the Unity Leadership Programs comes from a variety of

sources including grant allocations, program partners, worksites, the general operating budget of First Universalist Church, individuals and fundraising projects.

The program has various levels of adult support. Debra Rodgers as Peace and Justice Coordinator at First Universalist manages the overall program. Program volunteers consist of First Universalist members as well as representatives from the partner organizations. Young adult mentors are hired for the Unity Summer Internship to provide positive adult interaction as well as to facilitate a small group learning experience. Each worksite assigns a supervisor for the intern to support the work experience, integrate the learning of the workshops and evaluate their work performance. Finally, the partner organizations provide a supportive learning environment for the youth having completed either the retreat or both programs to act on what they have learned.

The goals for 2008 are to involve up to 100 youth in the two retreat experiences and to place 20 interns in local organizations. The process of recruitment of both youth and placement organizations begins in January and continues until the middle of April. While the Retreat experience is open to everyone who meets the age requirements, there is an application process for the Unity Summer Internship Program. Youth selected for the internship program must meet criteria which include: demonstrated interest in social change, attendance at one of the Unity Retreats, general availability, able to work independently, and potential for leadership.

For more information on the Unity Leadership Programs contact:

Debra Rodgers
Program Director
(612)825-1701 X106
debra@firstuniv.org

Judy Broad
Unity Leadership Chair
jab@spacestar.net

You can also visit us online at www.firstuniv.org/unity.html.