

THE UMOJA CONNECTION

Fall Update
2006

A Word from our Executive Director:

Dear Friends of Umoja,

Fall and the start of a new school year are always a time of change and reflection, but never more so than this year. The fall of 2006 means that we are rapidly approaching the ten-year mark since Umoja first came to Manley Academy. In the beginning we signed on for the mission to see students through high school and make sure they are prepared to transition to a successful adulthood, not only as learners but also as citizens with a vested and positive stake in their community and their world. We have had so many successes and so many worthwhile struggles this past decade; we look forward to major celebration and reflection this year as we make our way toward our official anniversary date in August 2007.

This will be our first school year without Dr. Flanagan, the principal who welcomed us to Manley and gave us room to grow and become part of the school culture and who has served as Umoja's board chair for these last 9 years. We are thrilled about our newly forming partnership with Sean Stalling and Janice Wells, Manley's new principal and assistant principal. Their vision and direction for young people and the adults who serve them matches perfectly with Umoja's and we are truly excited to be part of their team.

We recognize that the influx of new students at Manley, as a result of local school closings, will present challenges and opportunities, and we are committed to meet them head on. When we began our work at Manley in 1997, 650 students attended Manley; that number will be closer to 1,300 students beginning school in September of 2007! It will be extremely important for us to adjust our scope and direction accordingly to best serve a larger school population.

We also welcome the new principals at Paul Revere Elementary School and Gage Park High School and have spent the summer laying the groundwork for our continued partnership efforts at those schools. Finally, this fall brings the start of our newest partnership efforts with ACE Tech Charter School, on Chicago's South Side. In its third year of operation, currently with freshmen through juniors in the building, Umoja has a special opportunity to help build a college culture and an effective framework for holistic student development across the school. The students, teachers, and administration at ACE already inspire us.

As we gear up for this new school year, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on one of our fullest and most successful summers to-date. Thank you, as always, for all you do to support the young people that are Umoja Student Development Corporation.

Sincerely,



Lila Leff, Executive Director

LOOK OUT WORLD! READY OR NOT HERE THEY COME!

Schools attended by Manley graduates of 2006 include:

Briarcliff University - Iowa
Carroll College - Wisconsin
Chicago State University
Dawson Technical Institute
Illinois State University
Indiana State University - Indiana
Malcolm X College
Miles College - Alabama
Northeastern Illinois University
Northern Illinois University
Paine College - Georgia
University of Illinois
@ Urbana Champaign

Inside this Issue:

Community Builders 2006	Page 4
College Class 2006	4
Funders	3
School Partnership Update	3
Alumni Reunion	2
Comer Mentors	2
Piper Rudnick Event	2



Piper Spotlight

On July 21st, 20 soon-to-be ninth graders traveled downtown with the Paul Revere Alumni Association for an Umoja sponsored field trip. Umoja, beginning with 5th graders at Revere Elementary School, is building a culture to support and challenge this group of young people through graduation at Revere, their transition to high schools all over the city, and as they make their way to and through college. As part of this process, Umoja, along with Paul Revere Alumni staff, planned a summer program for the newly graduated 8th graders designed to give them a real sense of work place skills and preparation for high school.

As always, Umoja's pro bono law firm, DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary, went above and

beyond in its efforts to support Umoja's vision. Providing more than 20 attorneys and other law firm employees for a full morning,

Alumni students conducted their very first informational interviews in the setting of DLA Piper board rooms. Sitting opposite attorneys, paralegals, docket clerks and other administrative professionals, young people introduced themselves, their resumes, and their dreams. With the greatest of kindness and professionalism, DLA Piper Rudnick



Gray Cary participants gave individual feedback to students as well as talked about their own professional paths and the

struggles they had met along the way. "I never thought I could talk to adults I didn't even know, wearing suits, and everything," one

participant said with wonder at the end of the day. When asked if it was as tough as she thought it would be, she responded, "Tougher, but I feel really proud now. Like I can talk to anyone."

A FAMILY AFFAIR - Umoja and Manley Annual All Class Reunion

On Thursday, July 27th, Umoja hosted the first annual Manley graduates all class reunion for an evening of fun, games, prizes, food, and catching up with old friends and mentors. It was definitely 'a family affair' as alumni returned to see peers and Umoja staff and share their successes and struggles. This year we celebrated the expansion of our College & Career team by welcoming our new Alumni Advocate, who will champion our efforts to implement outreach strategies and extend our open-door policy to alumni in need of support and access to resources. The All Class Reunion provides an opportunity for alumni to reconnect with each other; use staff as career/college

resources to brainstorm options for their futures; have fun and recreate high school memories; and gain strength to reach for their next immediate goal. As more Manley graduates return home with college degrees, or successfully on the road to attaining them, they provide the most effective encouragement for other graduates struggling to find their path after high school. As Umoja enters our 10th year, the list of young people we served during high school grows to a daunting size. With the help of our Alumni Advocate, Umoja is working to build a systemic tracking tool that will allow us to remain connected to and supportive of the greatest number of graduates possible.



Comer Mentors

The summer of 2006 saw the grand opening of the Gary Comer Youth Center on the South Side of Chicago, serving youth from Paul Revere School and the South Shore Drill Team. Already a partner of Paul Revere School, the opening of the Comer Center in the Greater Grand Crossing neighborhood provided Umoja with another opportunity to reach young people. As part of the inaugural summer programming at the Comer Center, Umoja developed a five-week mentor program for rising ninth graders. The mentor program, which paired one to two dedicated adults with a small group of young people, fostered meaningful and substantive discussion and activities. The mentorship program gave youth a safe space to share their concerns about their upcoming enrollment in high school – personally, socially, and academically.

From the beginning, the program was a hit with youth and mentors alike. After the first session many participants

asked if their groups could meet more than once per week or at the very least longer than one hour. Although Umoja was unable to accommodate this request, it really set the tone for the program! Throughout the five-week program the mentor groups

The mentorship program gave youth a safe space to share their concerns about their upcoming enrollment in high school – personally, socially, and academically.

tackled issues such as what to expect from the high school experience, healthy and risky relationships, racism and stereotypes, as well as leadership development. By the end of the five weeks, many young people reported that talking openly with a group of peers and an adult, who really listened to them, was

the best part of the program...and they still wanted longer sessions!

Umoja Board of Directors:

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Special Thanks to our Funders:

Umoja would like to thank the countless individuals, businesses, organizations, and foundations who have donated their time and funds to help our programming succeed. We couldn't do it without you!

Corporate & Foundation Funders:

Chicago Foundation for Women
Comer Science & Education Foundation
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Girl's Best Friend Foundation
Leo S. Guthman Fund
John R. Houlsey Foundation
The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation
Kersten Family Foundation
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Little Angel Foundation
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In-Kind Funders:

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Jackie Kaplan
Manley Career Academy High School
Music Industry Workshop
Nirvana Yoga
North Lawndale College Prep High School
North Lawndale Community Church
Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church
Paul Revere Elementary School
Protiviti
Sam's Wines & Spirits
Peter Thompson
The Upton Family
Victory Gardens Theatre
Visions Service Adventures
Wishbone
WNBA

Update on our School Partnerships....

Professional Development

Over the last few years, Umoja has expanded our core services to include ongoing intensive professional development work with teachers. The summer of 2006 provides a perfect example of our efforts. Over the course of the summer, Umoja staff worked with more than 60 staff at four schools for over 50 hours of teacher development. While the process varied at each school, the core principles were identical: to provide support and resources to teachers so that together the school administration, student representatives and Umoja could design holistic, school-wide programming that will challenge and support students to address social, leadership, college and career, and academic topics in fun, integrated, and engaging ways. Based on this planning, Umoja will offer and coordinate monthly activities that impact more than 4,000 students each month during the 2006-07 school year.

Ace Tech's Student Development Program

At Ace Tech Umoja worked with a core group of teachers, administrators, and students creating monthly school-wide themes that address some of the topics that are most relevant to students. From there, the student development planning group created a monthly series of activities and seminars that will take place in small groups during a designated student development day. The theme will continue to be explored through individual classes throughout the month. For example, October's theme of community building will involve a guest speaker who addresses the current re-development of the area surrounding the school. Sessions encourage students to identify community assets and deficits, as well as discover their own priorities and process for redevelopment. They will also explore the communities in their life that they currently feel a part of, including their relationship to the school. Each month throughout the school year, Umoja will work with teachers in 3-hour professional development sessions to reflect on the past month's successes and plan for the next month's activities. Additionally, they will explore strategies for positive relationship building with students and a variety of facilitation tools to address topics in an engaging way that furthers connections between teachers and students, helping students to integrate their myriad experiences into a framework for their own views, values, and growth. Umoja is confident

that this kind of personalization changes the nature of high school for a student, providing more focus, support, and motivation.

Manley and Gage Park High Schools

Manley and Gage Park High Schools each spent the summer designating monthly half days as a time for school-wide Umoja based student development efforts. During a summer's worth of planning, an annual calendar of themes and activities were devised to address issues like self and collective responsibility, planning for the future, healthy habits (physical, nutritional, emotional), dating violence, developing a business personality, making connections to college and careers, building positive relationships, and managing conflict. Umoja will work closely with teachers to oversee the process for creating curriculum, reflect on student and teacher feedback, and offer monthly teacher trainings supporting this work.

Paul Revere Middle School

5th – 8th graders at Paul Revere will also spend a half-day per month engaged in Umoja supported student development activities. Middle school teachers worked with Umoja this summer to create quarterly themes that build middle school culture, helping students take responsibility for themselves, understand and cultivate leadership characteristics, and begin preparation for a successful high-school career. Each month's session will be hands on, fun, and provide engaging activities. Last year's feedback was excellent and we look forward to receiving even more favorable reports from students and teachers this year.

“core principles...to provide support and resources to teachers so that together (we)...could design holistic, school-wide programming that will challenge and support students to address social, leadership, college and career, and academic topics”

Umoja Staff

Katie Ackert, *Special Projects Coordinator*
Marlee Benton, *Office Assistant*
Ted Christians, *Associate Executive Director*
Joe Cytrynbaum, *Academic & Leadership Director*
Marcia Kunstler, *Development Coordinator*
Lila Leff, *Executive Director*
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Anna Osterbur, *Student Advocate*
Andre Smith, *Student Advocate*
Jacare Thomas, *College & Career Coordinator*
Nicole Williams, *Program Development Specialist*
Simone Woods, *Student Advocate*
Easter Young, *Alumni Advocate*
Ilana Zafran, *Student Advocate Fellow*

Building the Community School by School, Summer by Summer... Community Builders Update



Community Builders (CB) provides a perfect example of Umoja's leadership model. This six-week paid summer internship for high school students challenges young people to explore issues surrounding themselves and their community. The internship is designed to give students real work experience, while enriching them academically and promoting social awareness growth. In past years, the CB internship was exclusively offered to students in the North Lawndale community. This summer the Community Builders internship expanded to the South Side of the city ("Pockettown" community) in partnership with the Comer Youth Center. Eighteen students, ranging from rising sophomores to rising college freshmen, were employed at the new site, in addition to the 23 rising sophomores through seniors employed at the North Lawndale site.

West Side

The Lawndale CB interns spent the summer examining meaningful student involvement in public education and what they, as young people, can do to impact the quality of their own education. Interns were divided into three teams and decided on an inquiry focus question to guide them in their research and exploration this summer. The three questions asked: what young people can

do to change themselves, their teachers and the quality of their schools, what role gender plays in the opportunities available and the treatment of young people in schools, and how gangs impact students and their experiences at school. Each group created a research plan that included surveys, interviews, and traditional library research to answer questions. In



addition to their group projects, students gained a broader sense of education reform through activities and speakers who addressed local and federal school reform initiatives (No Child Left Behind and Renaissance 2010) as well as challenges schools are facing such as teacher retention, school performance, and funding discrepancies.

South Side

This summer the Comer/Revere CB interns worked on a community oral history project entitled "Pockettown: Past, Present, Future."

Their mission was to collect the stories of community members. Within small groups, the interns developed an inquiry focus question and created interview protocols to help answer those questions. Once the protocols were ready the interns set up interviews with a number of people including community residents, activists, and workers. Next, the interns went out in pairs into the community to collect the stories. By the end of the summer students collected more than 30 oral histories from their community!

Both sites also collaborated with artistic partners to work on a deeper creative expression of their topic. Each group had the opportunity to work with Umoja's long-standing partner, Jeff McCarter of Free Spirit Media, to create a documentary film centered on their theme for the summer. The Lawndale CB Interns worked with Adam Rangel at the Crib Collective to produce a spoken word and music CD and the Revere/Comer Interns created a digital photography exhibit with guest artist Jasmin Shah.

Both sites concluded their summer with a community showcase in which students presented the results of their research through group presentations, visual displays of their research, the premiere of the two documentaries, a photography exhibition (Revere/Comer) and performance and premiere of the CD (Lawndale).

College Class Summer 2006

My biggest fear is being able to complete college material.

My biggest fear is finances/tuition.

My biggest fear is being by myself for the first time in college.

My biggest fear is moving away from home.

My biggest fear is not making my dreams come true in college.

The above quotes capture some of the hesitations of Manley's 2006 graduating class. Although excited about what almost all consider to be their greatest accomplishment to-date, graduating from high school, the college experience loomed large in their minds as many prepare to become the first in their families to journey toward a college degree. The relative ease with which students expressed the anxiety they felt, their fear of the unknown, their hopes and aspirations is a testament to the relationship-building that has taken place as our College & Career team worked individually with every Manley senior on their post secondary plan, including applications, admissions, financial aid, scholarships, and job training and opportunities. At Umoja we know that making sure each student gets admitted to college is not enough, and as a result we facilitate the Summer College Class to aid Manley graduates in their

transition from high school to college. In a series of seven classes, graduates are exposed to college culture through college-style discussions, lectures, pop quizzes, assigned readings, and power point presentations. Participants are also provided with a toolkit of strategies for coping in college that are specific to writing, participating in class discussion, note taking, campus resources and additional supports for African American students, and common challenges faced by first generation college students. This year our guest lecturers: Professor Sam Fleischaker of the University of Illinois at Chicago, Professor Troy Harden of DePaul University, and Professor Andres Hernandez of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Umoja staff member, Ms. Carmen Mahon, worked with Umoja to demystify the college experience and put the graduates' fears to rest. As the College Class came to a close participants felt confident in their new skills

and were eager to step onto campus to dive into this new phase of their lives. Based on successful participation at the class, Umoja provided \$100 scholarships toward books for all attendees. Please join us in sending positive energy and thoughts to our young people as they transition from high school graduates to college students!

Save The Date....

**Come to our Annual Spring Fling
Silent Auction Fundraiser
on Friday, March 16th, 2007!!!!
Get great deals while supporting a
great cause, our youth!!!**

**For more information, contact
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