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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Faith in Action Board President Tom Gelinis sat at a table 'typing' feverishly onto a cardboard keyboard, while Eric Cowgill, Youth Coordinator for McHenry County Mental Health Board Family Care sat off to his left tapping wildly onto a cardboard 'laptop'. The two men were engaged in a dramatization depicting an angry internet exchange based on racially derogatory language instigated by Cowgill's character. The interchange was supported by three McHenry County student 'actors' and one senior citizen. The script was one of four based on novellas designed to address different elements of discrimination which was the centerpiece of the 'We R All Targets' program presented by Faith in Action McHenry County (FIAMC) Legacy Corps and Family CARE-AmeriCorps of McHenry County in January.

The initial concept for this event, which involved participants, ages 10 through 80, grew out of a brainstorming session that Elizabeth Bean, AmeriCorps Program Coordinator, McHenry County Mental Health Board Family Care, had with several of the youth at Willow Brooke (WB) Neighborhood Resource Center. The students had expressed a desire to share their ethnic culture with the greater community, after undergoing some negative experiences with community members that the students felt only reinforced prejudice.

"The youth were very vocal about how they felt, what they saw as solutions and stated that a day talking about prejudices and sharing positive aspects of ones cultural experience would be a way to foster greater understanding," says Bean.

While Bean was thinking through strategies to help the students communicate their thoughts and feelings about personal discrimination, she was contacted by Karla Chandler, AmeriCorps Program Coordinator for FIAMC, who asked about the viability of combining volunteer resources for the purpose of enhancing the programs that Bean coordinated through McHenry County Mental Health Board Family Care. Joined by Eric Cowgill, Youth Coordinator for McHenry County Mental Health Board Family, the two women met and developed the concept for the 'We R All Targets' program.

The concept for the event was to develop four novellas based on real accounts of McHenry County residents who have experienced different types of discrimination. The novellas were acted out by students who participate in after-school tutoring and mentoring programs from the WB Neighborhood Resource Center, run by the Youth Service Bureau in Woodstock, Garden Quarter (GQ) Neighborhood Resource Center, run by the McHenry County Latino Coalition in McHenry, and an after-school program housed at Hannah Beardseely Middle School, run by Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA). AmeriCorps Volunteers from FIAMC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing no-coast services to care recipients 60 years of age and older who are living in their home, were available to participate as well.

In addition to constructing the dramatizations based on the novellas, students and AmeriCorps volunteers from both agencies were invited to toss a beach ball which had questions written on it related to their experiences about the day's events or regarding an incident of personal discrimination. Participants were encouraged to read one of the questions as they caught the ball, and to then share their answer with the group. The responses and attentiveness to the responses reflected the position mood and group synergism created by the interracial and intergenerational drama teams that had worked together earlier in the day.

"I'm impressed with Gill," said Meghan Sullivan, Program Director for the Garden Quarter Neighborhood Resource Center, of one of the students. "He's the youngest one here and he really did a good job!" The crowd laughs approvingly and applauds.

"When I was young, I was not targeted because of my race," said Chandler in answer to her 'beach ball' question, 'how have you been targeted?' "I was targeted because of my acne. I would go to the beach and I would hear people say, 'Why does she have scars on her?' It made me want to go and hide." Chandler continued with the students listening with rapt attention.

"This is a great event because it got people of all races together and there was cooperation!" said AmeriCorps volunteer Joe Tambone.

At the conclusion of the day, both Bean and Chandler were pleased with the outcome and have already begun collaborating on future events.

"This event is the beginning of the planning for National and Global Youth Service Day (NGYSD) on April 26, 2008," says Bean. "I would like to involve our youth and Legacy (the FIAMC AmeriCorp volunteers) with another co-sponsored project."

