



SERVANT-LEADERS IN ACTION: PHILADELPHIA FREEDOM SCHOOLS FOSTER SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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I recently had the distinct privilege of visiting the Philadelphia Freedom Schools (PFS), where I learned about a significant and inspiring program underway to encourage young people in their understanding of servant-leadership, and to live their lives as exemplary servant-leaders.

“It always begins with a vision,” said Sedrick Miles, Philadelphia Freedom Schools Manager. “For a great institution like Philadelphia Freedom Schools, any worthwhile contribution to the collective vision of the community must be equal to the legacy passed down from servant-leaders who came before us.”

Philadelphia Freedom Schools exists “to build intellectual, cultural, and civic engagement of children and youth in order to make meaningful change in themselves, their families, schools, communities, and larger society,” said Miles.

The PFS program was inspired by the historic mobilizing efforts organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi during the summer of 1964. The original Mississippi Freedom Schools of the 1960s served as inspiration in the creation of Philadelphia Freedom Schools.

Led by Communities In Schools of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Freedom Schools operates a two-tiered training program for young servant-leaders. A cadre of young trainers—called the William Still and Fannie Lou Hamer Trainers—range in age from 15-32. These are high school, college, and young professional staff who are trained using a curriculum that



includes servant-leadership, service-learning, and social activism. In the summer of 2008, it is anticipated that some 250 people will undergo this week-long training program.

During the latter half of this week, these young trainers work with a roughly equal number of high school students in a servant-leadership intern program. High school students are paid minimum wage and work at a wide range of organizations throughout Philadelphia. The high school students, called “Junior Servant-Leader Interns,” in turn, work with younger students (K-8), called “Scholars.”

“We ask each group of trainers and students to recall a time when students were leaders who made change happen,” said Miles. “We believe that which is truly believed will come true.”

Supporting Partners in this program include Communities in Schools of Philadelphia, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Frankford Family Support Services, Friends Neighborhood Guild, Netter Center for Community Partnerships, Say Yes to Education, and United Communities Southeast Philadelphia.

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