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## Citizens for Peace Minutes 4-13-11

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CITIZENS FOR PEACE  
Minutes  
**April 13, 2011**

Our meeting opened at 7:00 pm with a welcome by President, Colleen Mills. She was pleased to see so many in attendance for our Special Presentation by David J. Harding, PhD, on Unmasking Youth Violence.

**Special Presentation:**

Dr. Harding, a Harvard graduate, author and researcher, has studied urban poverty, inequality, incarceration and prison re-entry for the past ten years. He was here to share the research he did as part of his dissertation in Boston, Massachusetts from 2003-2004. The data was collected among the families of black and Latino boys living in three neighborhoods (two high poverty and one low poverty). The 60 males studied were aged between 13-18 yrs old. In addition to the boys and their families, Dr. Harding interviewed 50 community leaders and activists. Over 300 interviews were conducted, in total.

He noted that in the high poverty neighborhoods, defending one's turf and continuing what's been passed down through generations is quite prevalent. And it exhibits the following behaviors:

- The importance of establishing and maintaining a tough reputation.
- The neighborhood becomes the central organizing category and form of identity.
- Neighborhood rivalries exist and carry over from generation to generation.
- Kids who are not actively involved are affected.
- The small group of "impact players", drive much of the violence.
- The violence is not necessarily gang violence.

Dr. Harding also spoke about the Boston Miracle, a year in which there were no youth homicides. He shared some of the positive strategies that impacted violent neighborhoods:

- The need to intervene with the "impact players". His researchers spent a lot of time on the streets, at night, observing who the impact players were. They also gained knowledge of when violent conflicts might occur.
- You can have the carrot (opportunity) or the stick (prison) strategy of solution. Traditional social services will not help the impact players. Service providers must go to them and build relationships.
- There is a great need to reduce the amount of unstructured time in the streets, such as keeping kids in school longer or other places to go and interact in a positive way.
- There is a great need to expand kid's horizons. Many don't feel they will be able to leave the neighborhood. (When discussing the future with many of the kids, they all wanted to go to college but they didn't know how to get there.)
- They need to be shown they can get "out" for periods of time and be shown that opportunities do exist for them once they finish school.
- The entire community needs to play a role, which includes police, clergy and community run centers and family.

Dr. Harding mentioned that he is currently studying prison re-entry. He said we have the highest amount of prisoners than anywhere in the world, and Michigan is among the highest in the U.S. Also noted: In our country, we spend more on incarceration than on higher education! "We're in this pessimistic political era, where we don't want to waste our time on this issue of youth violence." But he closed in saying "we need to try."

The members and guests thanked Dr. Harding for his very thought-provoking presentation. A Q&A period followed. All were invited to enjoy refreshments and continue the discussion.

**Business Meeting / Announcements:**

- DoP State Coordinator, Kevin Szawala, will be the speaker at our May 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. He will be traveling the state starting July 4<sup>th</sup>, with an exhibit to create awareness of the cost of war. It will culminate on Labor Day with a Peace Walk across the Mackinac Bridge.
- Join us Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, at Livonia's Civic Center Park for the Arlington-Michigan event.
- The Peace and Justice Film series continues – see the flyer on the information table.

With no further business to conduct, the meeting closed at 8:20 pm.