

Vitamin L News

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Fall, 2003

Vitamin L Support Network Growing

Last fall a strategic planning committee was formed and has been meeting throughout the year to identify short and long term goals and priorities for The Vitamin L Project. Chuck Geisler, Coert Bonthius, Rick Bonney, Sigrid Kulkowitz, Rob Harris, Bob Frank, and Elizabeth Stilwell have put considerable time and effort into the work of this committee. As a result, we've identified the top three goals that we will be focusing on this year.

The first goal is to establish organizational stability through a structure capable of carrying out the Vitamin L Mission.

- Build a Board, mindful of Vitamin L values, with financial and intellectual connections
- Establish "Friends of Vitamin L" list and newsletter.

- We extend a warm welcome to 25 new members of Vitamin L who received training this summer from several experienced Vitamin L members. We are excited to get them on stage and watch their talent blossom!



Vitamin L's growing network doesn't rely only on the members — some of whom were clearly providing support at the New York State PTA Conference in August,

- Create a diagram of the organization which clarifies the relationships among the various working parts/committees

The second goal is to establish financial stability for the Vitamin L organization.

- Establish active fundraising committee
- Bring together internal grant writing resources and people

- Explore personal links to funding

The third goal is to integrate Vitamin L families into the mission of Vitamin L.

- Identify specific different opportunities (levels) of participation
- Recruit family coordinators/liaisons
- Create and deliver family packet (Vitamin L-ders)

Newsletter Launched to Expand Vitamin L Community

As we embark on our 15th year with Vitamin L, we are excited about new developments in our organization. We are working towards more parental involvement in The Vitamin L Project

and we look forward to tapping into the many talents of the Vitamin L-ders in our midst. This newsletter will update you on highlights of the past year and outcomes of our strategic planning

process. We give thanks to our many supporters and friends who enable us to carry on our work of character education through music!

-- Jan and Janice Nigro

Highlights of the Past Year

October, 2002: Vitamin L performed at Character Education Partnership's national character education conference in Atlanta, also at Nickajack Elementary School for 800 children. One meaningful, moving highlight from the trip was a visit to the Martin Luther King gravesite and historical center.

November, 2002: Vitamin L performed for 800 people at the New York State PTA convention. The audience rose to a standing ovation after the first song!

March 2003: Vitamin L traveled to Arkansas to perform at three schools and at a youth leadership conference. Vitamin L reached 1,200 youth on this trip! We learned a great deal at the conference and came back inspired. We met so many young people and adults who are trying to make a positive difference in this world. An added bonus was that our Vitamin L chorus kids had invigorating exchanges of ideas with teens from Arkansas



about Iraq, racism and other subjects that are important to them. Our kids were thrilled (and somewhat amazed) that these discussions took place with total respect and no arguing!

May, 2003: Vitamin L performed at the 20th anniversary celebration for Ithaca's Community Dispute Resolution Center.

July 2003: Vitamin L gave a keynote concert, a workshop for educators and a workshop for teens at the Community of Caring National Conference in Arlington, Va. . This fantastic organization uses

character education to help create caring communities in classrooms and schools. Eunice Shriver, founder of Community of Caring, spoke at the conference. In her 80's, she is still actively involved in service to humanity! What an inspiration!

August, 2003: Vitamin L gave a concert and a workshop at another New York State PTA conference in Morrisville. The audience was quite enthusiastic! It was a privilege to be with hundreds of people who are volunteering their time to help children.

"Words alone cannot express the inspiring message and impact ... it was just AWESOME"

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Vitamin L project is to encourage positive character development through music, by uplifting and inspiring young people with lessons that are meaningful in their daily lives. Our goal is that young listeners absorb the lessons of confidence, kindness, persistence, cooperation and forgiveness presented in the songs, and weave those concepts into the fabric of their character in ways that help them make positive choices and have healthy relationships with their families, friends and the world around them. Our goal is to reach and positively influence as many children as possible.

Our Audience Speaks:

"Words alone cannot express the inspiring message and impact that Vitamin L had on our delegates in their fantastic presentation at our NYS PTA Convention in Rochester. I would say that it was just AWESOME!" – Ron Moore, New York State PTA Vice President

"It was the most enjoyable school event I witnessed in 23 years of teaching/ administration." – Mark Parrillo, elementary principal, Baldwinsville, NY

"The young age of the performers inspired my kids. It let them know that young people can do great things. – 2nd grade teacher, Windsor, CT

"The members of the group demonstrate teamwork, respect, and gratitude during the performance and are wonderful role models for our students. The songs teach such great values and are presented in such a professional manner that we can never seem to get enough!" – Jennifer Coyne, music teacher, Phoenix, NY

"The lyrics touch so many aspects of the students' lives that in today's world are ignored (justice, truthfulness, gossip, making mistakes). The songs had great appeal to all our students no matter what their culture or socio-economic background." – Carolyn Smith, music teacher, Liverpool, NY

Letter from a Vitamin L Member

Each issue of the newsletter will feature a Vitamin L member telling the story of what involvement in the group has meant for her/him. Here's what Menna Mulugetta has to say:

The impact and the heart touching lessons that Vitamin L offers in a fun loving manner are profound. It allows children of any age to grasp rather complicated ideas of life in ways that are understandable and applicable to their lives. Vitamin L provides substance for children to drop back on through whatever endeavors or situations they may encounter. It gives many kids strength to be who they are and believe in – what they think is right. I've been a member of Vitamin L for 5 years, and not only have I been able to spread important ideas to others, I have also been able to grow as a person and learn more about myself. As a child I sometimes felt unsure about myself because I lived in a

rural town, with 99% of its population Caucasian and rather old-fashioned. Growing up, I was not always accepted because I didn't have the same color of skin as the other kids. Entering middle school I was called a derogatory term for African Americans. This was an unforgettable incident; I felt as though my integrity was being torn from me. But even through this I had the loving words of Vitamin L to fall back on. I knew that I was worth something, and I knew that I was proud of myself for being a strong person. I went on and continued to have faith in my dreams and fostered my inner strength and courage. Through these experiences I decided that I would break the malicious stereotypes of African Americans in my town. My actions would make me capable, and not the color of my skin. With that, and my diligent work in school, I gained wisdom, respect, leadership, and a

voice among not only other students, but also community members. I knew through my own experience that Vitamin L could really make an overwhelming difference. I was able to gain self-confidence, and I knew that I wanted to create the impact on other youngsters that Vitamin L made on me. This is when I decided that I wanted to join a group with such a beautiful message. Vitamin L reaches out and touches so many lives. The message is so real and so close to so many people's hearts. The understanding of an open-mind, self worth, tolerance, and empathy are only a few of the insightful messages that are spread among a vast majority of people. It is absolutely important for our society to give confidence to the people who will soon be the leaders of our country. Vitamin L is a substantial contributor to this message that is critical for today's youth.
~ Menna Mulugetta

"It was the most enjoyable school event I witnessed in 23 years of teaching/ administration."

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Visit our website! The Vitamin L website went up last fall. It was designed by Ben Jackson, a Vitamin L alumni, and is being maintained by Chris Frank, a current chorus member. The site has sound samples, photos, info for teachers and more.

We're on the web!
www.VitaminL.com



Vitamin L at the National Conference of the Character Education Partnership held in Atlanta in October, 2002.

New Affiliation

In March of this year, Vitamin L became a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy (CRESP) at Cornell University. CRESP is a non-profit agency that includes 20 other innovative projects that address social change. We are very happy to be a CRESP project!

Fundraising

Our first ever fundraising letter to community members in December raised over \$1,000. In April our

first ever fundraiser event, "L-ectrified!" – a dance and a fantastic raffle – raised over \$4,000 and at the same time helped spread community awareness of our work. We are deeply grateful to the 65 businesses, 35 volunteers, and assorted musicians who made this a success. It was a real community effort and lots of fun! In May we received a \$500 grant specifically for a van to transport chorus members to concerts. With the help of this grant and the April fundraiser, we purchased a low mileage 2002 seven passenger van. This van is a great help!

In 2002, Vitamin L:

- ◆ performed 66 concerts
- ◆ reached 19,000 youth and 5,000 adults in concerts
- ◆ performed at 38 schools, 4 national education conferences, The New York State PTA conference, festivals, and camps
- ◆ led workshops for a youth leadership conference and for the Utica NY School District
- ◆ visited numerous classrooms and after school programs
- ◆ gave leadership and performing opportunities to our chorus members