

# Vitamin L News

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Spring, 2005

## VL = Character & Moral Education

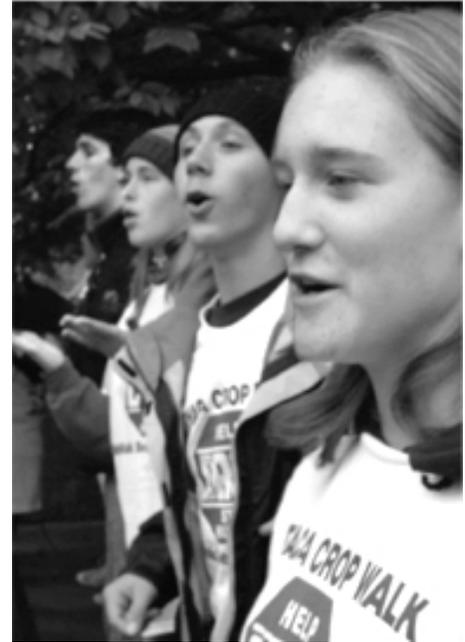
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Vitamin L is character and moral education. The lyrics provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own behavior and the actions of others, and serve as "metacognitive tools" or simple reminders for youngsters to act virtuously, with integrity, and to persevere. Working together, Vitamin L chorus members develop a sense of purpose, identity, and self-worth by being part of a project with positive moral purpose and that contributes to something greater than themselves.

Adolescence can be a time of self-discovery, joy, and freedom as children transition from the world of parents to the world of peer relationships-deriving a sense of self-worth and independence. Often, however, that sense of identity comes at a price for many children as they struggle with issues of intimacy and isolation; inclusion and exclusion; acceptance and rejection. Kids feel helpless, angry, sad, confused about who they are and where they fit into the world and their relationships as social stratification and hierarchies are played out. How children participate in these struggles and how they overcome challenges to their self-identities is part of moral development and character education.

Thinking about moral situations and participating in dilemma discussions are part of the cognitive-developmental approach to moral education elaborated by Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard University. Through this approach, youth develop their moral judgment, which increases the likelihood of acting morally. Moral thought and action safeguard against violence, preju-



dice, exclusion, injustice, and lack of care for others and our environment.

This is what the character and moral education movement is all about. Vitamin L, with its focus on early childhood development, encourages children to think about moral issues in a non-threatening, fun, and very personal way. By singing the songs, watching the Vitamin

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The Vitamin L Project is a non-profit Project of CRESP (Center for Religion, Ethics and Social Policy at Cornell University). We welcome tax-deductible donations to help further Vitamin L's work.

Dear friends of Vitamin L,  
We are welcoming spring with Vitamin L continuing to sow seeds of inspiration in the hearts and minds of young people, in our audiences, and in our chorus. We offer you our newsletter with gratitude for this unique opportunity!

- Jan & Janice Nigro



## VL Members Raise Money for Crop Walk

On the 24th of October, a familiar scene was forming in DeWitt Park. Two dozen Vitamin L members were gathering around a stage - laughing, talking, singing, and waiting for the concert to start. However, this performance was different - this performance was an opening act for the Crop Walk, an event in which participants get pledges from people for walking, in order to raise money for local hunger fighting agencies as well as international relief and development efforts for hungry people all over the world.

I became involved with organizing the Crop Walk at a Vitamin L rehearsal

one Saturday morning in early September. When Janice asked for volunteers to lead the Vitamin L team, Cassie Burkhauser and I raised our hands, enthusiastic about helping but unaware about the amount of work that would be involved. I attended some meetings at a local church to learn more about the Crop Walk and how to go about organizing a team, and Cassie and I began recruiting members of Vitamin L.

Although many members were excited about the idea, contacting them, circulating materials for gaining pledges, and organizing the team was easier said than done. We spent

hours and hours calling people, trying to get in contact with the dozens of Vitamin L members interested in the team. Some people were virtually impossible to reach by phone, and by the end of the process, Cassie and I had gained a little understanding of what Janice's job must be like!

As the Crop Walk grew nearer, things finally fell into place, and everyone on the Vitamin L team was hopeful that the event would be a success. At last the day arrived, and the Vitamin L team rose to the occasion: because of everyone's hard work, we

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“...Crop Walk....  
is a tangible  
manifestation of  
the Vitamin L  
message...”



## Alum's Values Spring From VL Roots

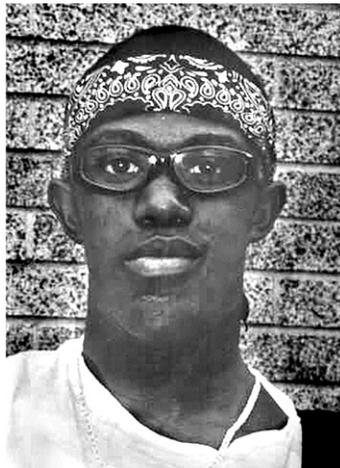
I joined Vitamin L in 5th grade at the age of nine. When my mother and I arrived at Jan and Janice's house for the audition I was a bit nervous and unsure of what to expect. After singing a few songs Jan and Janice decided that I was a welcome addition to the group. I was very excited to be a member of such a positive project.

The next few years allowed me the opportunity to travel with the group across NY State and perform at festivals and elementary schools. Throughout the entire span of my Vitamin L career I met many great people and partook in several amazing events. For example, we traveled to New York City to perform at the United Nations, and at another performance we were given the privilege of playing with Pete Seeger.

While at the time I didn't fully understand the significance of these events, I did know that I was a part of something special that was helping the world. Aside from introducing me to talented individuals and exiting experiences, Vitamin L also taught me a great deal about myself. I often found myself in positions that pushed me to excel as a person. One example is the day on which I was given my first vocal solo. A member had retired from the group, leaving me the opportunity to sing solo on an entire song.

In order for that to happen I had to run through

the piece in front of the whole group with no backing music. Despite having played in front of several large audiences, I still had a lot of anxiety about singing solo in front of such talented kids. I remember that everyone at practice that evening could see my apprehension and joined



Disashi Lumumba-Kasongo

in encouraging me to face my nervousness. Eventually, I did, and afterwards I was no longer anxious about singing that solo. It was seemingly small instances such as this that helped me grow as a person and gain confidence, as well as an understanding of teamwork and support.

Around the age of 13 I stopped performing in Vitamin L, and joined a local band called Earl's Garage. I was in the band for much of my high school and college career. I took much of the stage and singing experience that I had acquired in Vitamin L and applied it to the band's performances and recordings.

I'm currently finishing my undergraduate degree at Cornell University in Psychology and Information Science, while touring across the country with a hip-hop band called Gym Class Heroes for which I play guitar and sing.

Thanks to the training provided by Vitamin L, I was well prepared for the intimidating audiences of up to 2,500 kids. In the summer of 2004 the group was signed by an independent label called Fueled by Ramen Records, and in February of 2005 a CD was released nationwide. I am also currently working on a rock side project called The Midnight Society on which I sing, play guitar, and program the bass and drums on a computer.

While Vitamin L was indeed a group of individuals who came together with a common goal, it was more than that to those involved. Vitamin L was a thriving community and with each performance we invited listeners to join us in our effort to view the world as an optimistic and promising place.

I commend every individual who has been a part of the project in the past as well as those who are presently taking Vitamin L to new heights. I would also like to specifically thank Jan and Janice for their perseverance and passion.

I will never forget the experiences gained or the positive lessons I learned from Vitamin L.

-Disashi Lumumba-Kasongo

“(Encouragement from Vitamin L members) helped me grow as a person and gain confidence...”



Vitamin L will perform at parties as a fundraiser. Call Janice at 273-4175

## A Unique Fundraiser

Last fall Lucy Rose Davidoff and I had a ball doing a special kind of Vitamin L show. We performed for a 7 year old girl and a bunch of her friends surrounded by cake, balloons, and smiles. A Vitamin L birthday party is a dream come true for a young child. A chance to meet a few of the Vitamin L crew is something a younger child would want to top off their big day.

As a Vitamin L member, its fun to perform in front of the kids on a more personal level, take specific requests from the kids, teach them all the dances and sing Happy Birthday with them. I think any kid who gets the chance to have a Vitamin L birthday is one lucky kid, and any Vitamin L member who gets to perform is just as lucky!

- Ava Sullivan

## VL Members Raise Money for Crop Walk

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raised over \$800 dollars to help make a dent in the tragic masses of hungry people in the world.

Watching the Vitamin L team walk around Ithaca, united with the other teams from Ithaca to help stop hunger was truly beautiful.

Seeing such a tangible manifestation of the Vitamin L message made all of the work everyone put into the process more than worth it. I had a great time working on the Vitamin L team, and hope to be able to do it again next year!

- Lauren Meador

## 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.



## Essence of VL: Character & Moral Education

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L chorus act out scenes of things like the consequences of "jumping to conclusions" and having opportunities to talk with Vitamin L chorus members, young audiences see the importance of valuing positive character and moral behavior. And the chorus members themselves feel like moral educators, and gain a sense of pride and purpose in their own lives.

Character and moral development happens in every day in schools, homes, and communities, whether explicitly stated or part of the "hidden curriculum."

The hidden curriculum is that which is learned from the nature and structure of schools or classrooms, as well as from the behaviors and attitudes of the people within them. In schools, students learn respect when teachers respect each other and treat all students, staff with appreciation and support without special preferences for race, gender, ability. Conversely, students

also learn intolerance, violence, prejudice when people are gossiped about, looked down upon, mistreated, or ignored-knowingly or unconsciously. Sadly, prejudice, bullying, and other more subtle forms of social and relational aggression pervade lives of children and affect children's friendships and relationships.

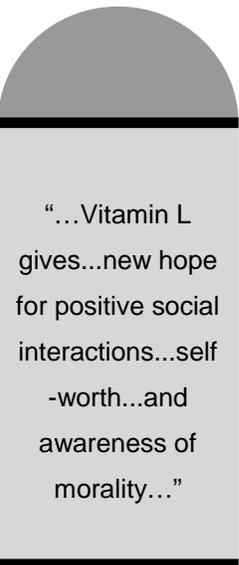
Schools often feel unsafe for kids, and create a sense of anxiety that permeates their feelings of self-worth and academic success. Character and moral education makes the hidden curriculum explicit, asking children to think critically about things such as who is called on in class, for what, and why.

It also teaches children to speak up and stand up for themselves and others when someone is criticized for one's dress, choice of activities or friends, or just by being who they are-which are some of the bases for inclusion, exclusion, and prejudice that pervade childhood and adolescence.

Vitamin L songs address many of these issues. They help children realize

that the issues they face are things everyone deals with, and that there is a moral way to think about what to do. The public demand for character and moral education exists because people see the decline in positive behaviors and attitudes. Making connections amongst people, encouraging understanding, and pro-social action builds community and trust. It also gives young people a sense of purpose, which William Damon of Stanford University deems essential to positive development and moral behavior. Vitamin L gives its chorus members a sense of contributing to something greater than themselves, and it gives the audience it reaches new hope for positive social interactions, a sense of personal self-worth, and an awareness of the morality of their own actions and how their actions influence others. It is a model program, and an inspiration to children everywhere.

-Dawn Schrader, associate professor of Learning, Teaching, and Social Policy at Cornell University



"...Vitamin L gives...new hope for positive social interactions...self-worth...and awareness of morality..."

### 2004 Vitamin L Accomplishments

- \* Performed 49 concerts
- \* Reached 12,000 youth and 4,000 adults in concerts
- \* Performed at 26 schools, and at community events, festivals, camps, and an education conference
- \* Visited numerous classrooms
- \* Gave leadership and performing opportunities to 70 chorus members



**The Gratitude Report:**

The Vitamin L Project received a \$15,000 grant from a foundation that wishes to remain anonymous. Vitamin L also received a \$3,000 grant from the New York State Legislature, a \$3,000 contribution from the Blank family, a grant of \$2,500 from the Triad Foundation, a \$2,000 charitable contribution from Target Stores, and \$7,095 from our annual fundraising appeal.

Thanks to all of our supporters!

CRESP  
**The Vitamin L Project**  
Anabel Taylor Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
(607) 273-4175

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