

## What Is The Wake Up! Campaign At Battle High?

The Wake Up! Campaign was started by a group of Battle High School students during the 2015 - 2016 school year and became an Interact club sponsored by the Columbia Metro and Sunrise Southwest Rotary clubs 3 years later. These students were frustrated with increasing racial tensions resulting from the events in Ferguson, Missouri and around the nation. Their greatest frustration was that no one in the adult community seemed willing to talk about the issues. To their generation it seems as though we've forgotten how to communicate in a manner that allows people to acknowledge disagreement, and begin working toward true solutions.

The Wake Up! team began implementing their action plan by applying the Stanford Design Thinking process. This problem solving method is centered on user based iterative design, which requires the team to collect and share user feedback concerning major issues surrounding the problem. They began interviewing students, teachers, administrators, and other members of their community to learn more about their views on intolerance and injustice in their neighborhoods. What they learned not only verified initial concerns, but was so powerful that the team decided to use their interview footage to begin creating a mini-documentary.

After problem solving through the design process these students determined the best path forward would be to begin organizing and hosting community wide discussions where civilized discourse was not only practiced, but actively taught. These students believe by challenging people in their community, nation, and around the world to 'Wake Up!' to the power of choice, people will begin to explore their own internal biases, will recognize/acknowledge them, and then begin to move beyond differences to communicate in a manner that allows our society to truly begin the healing process.

The core of the Wake Up! premise is that critical thinking, combined with compassion, leads to an openness of thinking that brings clarity, accuracy, depth, breadth, and significance to conversation. By acknowledging differences and seeking understanding we can develop well cultivated intellectuals who understand how to analyze and evaluate thinking - with a view to improve it. When left to our own devices much of our thinking is biased, and distorted; however, we can learn to engage in evaluative reasoning that allows people to develop the potential solutions and action plans required to move beyond intolerance, ignorance, and injustice.

In order to teach critical dialogue, the team needed to identify a local source of assistance who could help them learn the very processes they were interested in sharing through the campaign. They reached out to the The Communications Center. The team began learning the skills they would need to facilitate critical conversations surrounding sensitive issues such as race, gender identity, religious affiliation, and other highly charged topics.

The team began developing their new found skills by participating in the Community Commons Trib Talks sponsored by the Columbia Tribune. Students met with community members to discuss issues related to Citizen Centered Planning, Building Bridges, and Addressing Inequities. Citizens appreciated the ability of the youth in our community to engage in conversation in a manner that reflected the depth and complexity of their training.

The group then participated in the Multicultural Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars Activist Empowerment forum. Members of Wake Up! joined MAC Scholars, and students from the University of Missouri to discuss issues related to events on the campus of MU and around the nation. The Wake Up! team's message focused on the need to keep critical dialogue at the center of activism. That without civil discourse, the efforts of activists often become emotionally charged and polarization can have a negative impact on their cause. The goal of activism is not only to draw attention to an issue, but to gain a seat at the table with those who affect and influence policy change. Only through civil discourse will the efforts of activists create lasting change.

The team was then invited to participate in a discussion forum hosted by the Missouri Scholar's Academy during their annual summer program. Five panelists once again discussed issues of intolerance, ignorance, and injustice with the theme of making the choice to seek change as an individual first. Each of us has the power to choose to be compassionate, to choose to understand, and to choose to make a difference. This message was

shared with the students at MSA and an excellent conversation took place where personal solutions became the focus of discussion. Every member in the auditorium was encouraged to share the Wake Up! message and to become the change they wanted to see in their communities.

The team hosted a Neighbor2Neighbor conversation on Safety and Justice, following up on their participation in the Tribune's Community Commons, at the school on February 7, 2017. In th 2019-2020 school year, the team served as the table host-facilitators for the dialogues sponsored by the school districts Parent-Community University.

By engaging in civil discourse focused on personal awareness and understanding - and creating solutions rather than divisions - we can begin healing from our past - with the intention of moving forward into a better future. This is the mission of the Wake Up! Interact CLub.