



Echo Of Inner City Youth Reflected In Poetry Book

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The Council for Unity's accomplishments ranges from mediating violent gang wars to helping transform rural and inner city children into productive citizens. The program's alumni have gone on to become Rhodes Scholars, judges, lawyers and educators.

According to the New York City Board of Education, 94% of Council for Unity participants' attend college and 70% of participating school principals reported a decrease in violent crime in their schools with police precinct figures showing a



*made bail
Before you a piece of me
was missing.
Before you I had no
direction.
Now that I found you I'm
never letting go." (By*

been polished, edited or vetted to remove or sanitize the genuine words of the children expressed in their own words. Noguera says simply, "These are the unvarnished expressions of young writers who are struggling to find their voices."

Not all of the expressions these children write about are dark and despondent. In one poem, "Checkerboard" a young middle schooler writes of tolerance and different races joining together...

*"Inside we are all the same.
No checkerboard is present there.
We're all siblings in our minds
Although we are of different kinds." (by Arina Bykadorova)*

Others write about emotional uncertainty and a search for acceptance from one's own family in "Dreams of Light" ...

*"I have a vision of you
smiling, saying that's my son.
But in the back of my mind,
do you really mean it?
I'm so confused. So much
emotion in my head.
I look to God for answers,
still questions in my head.
My mind's in the clear
some light's seeping
through." (by Ralph Gaetan
and Jean Marie)*

In "You Make Me Better," a young person writes about the help he received....

For youngsters, expressing one's self through poetry is not limited to those attending upscale suburban or private schools. A local anti-violence and anti-gang program, the Council for Unity has published "THIS IS ME" a 58 page anthology showcasing the work of 62 youngsters ages 8 to 18. The works, written by many at risk and disenfranchised youth covers a range of personal experiences, thoughts and raw emotions from deep darkness and anguish to discovery and enlightenment.

The group, headed by founder Robert J. DeSena, a retired New York City English and Mythology teacher, is a mentor and surrogate father to many kids who come to his organization's door.

The Council Program uses teachings about such things as ancient mythology, poetry, and bolsters each young person with the vital pillars of family, unity, self-esteem and empowerment, that they often lack, to turn their lives around.

In the forward in the book, Pedro Noguera, Professor of Urban Education at New York University says, "For young people who so often find themselves silenced and talked about, who are the objects of suspicion and even scorn, poetry can be a way of reminding the world that they too have thoughts, feelings and dreams."

The verses in "THIS IS