

Hands for a Bridge

2015 Annual Report



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Our Mission

Our mission is providing high school youth with opportunities to explore issues surrounding social justice in their local, regional, and international communities.

Our Vision

Our vision is a world where every student is an empowered global citizen with the vision and resources necessary to effect vital change in our world.

Our Values

We value:

- Using the arts as a lens through which social justice issues can be explored
- Creating dialogue across chasms of race, culture, class and privilege
- Cultivating leadership, confidence and greater awareness in youth
- Developing lasting relationships based on understanding through international and local exchange
- Empowering public school teachers to create innovative programming that extends outside the classroom
- Meaningful partnership with educational institutions, locally and internationally
- Equitable access for all students to participate

A Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe that Hands for a Bridge has been operating for over fourteen years. Each year has brought its own challenges and triumphs, but the most surprising and wonderful result has been the ripple effect our program has on so many people.

Each year we get to cultivate transformation in our Roosevelt High School students. Through the year-long program, they develop academically, emotionally, and personally. They form deep, lasting friendships with one another and with their counterpart students from South Africa and Northern Ireland. We see their worldviews widen, their interests spark in new directions, and their talents awaken. Today we have alumni who are teachers, social workers, world travelers, activists, poets, artists, and more, who each draw a line from their HFB experience to where they are today.

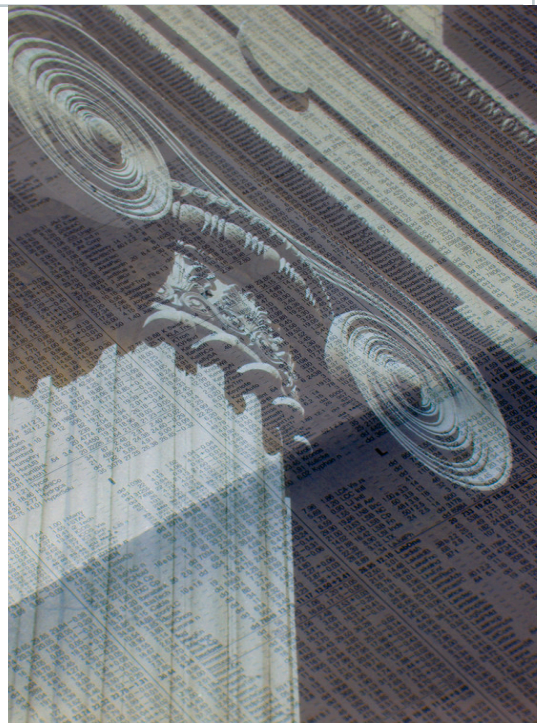
But we never anticipated how many others would be impacted. In recent years, we've seen what a profound effect our visits have had on our partner schools in South Africa. The bonds forged between the separated communities of Isilimela Comprehensive School and Bellville High School deepen after each of our visits, helping to bring together a singular community that has been apart for decades. In Northern Ireland, Oakgrove Integrated College students have formed a Hands for a Bridge group that provides venue for students to voice the difficulties of isolation and repression that perhaps is the consequence of the sectarian conflict resulting in the "Troubles."

We have broadened our local reach by including local high schools like Garfield High School and Rainier Beach High School in dialogue during the visits by our partner South African and Northern Ireland students. We have hosted community events that reach well beyond Roosevelt's walls, like our reading from Sherman Alexie and our recent production of *Sonny Sixkiller Buys the Washington Redskins* with the Lummi Nation. HFB has even inspired our own teachers in ways we never expected. Running this program empowers teachers to think outside the standard curriculum, innovate, collaborate to create a true global classroom.

Reflecting on all we have already accomplished, I am excited by what is possible in the coming years. We hope to grow our reach, inspire more students, and create a more just world. As we try to move forward, we hope that we can count on our community of alumni, friends, and supporters to help us push the ripple even further. Together we can use the power of arts, dialogue, and education to create a more connected and peaceful world.

Warmly,

Tom Nolet
Hands for a Bridge Co-Founder and Director



A Legacy of Service and Leadership: Interview with Courtney Lawson, HFB Class of 2007

Courtney Lawson participated in Hands for a Bridge during the 2006-2007 school year. Today she is 27 and pursuing a Masters in Social Work and is interning as a Child and Family Therapist, a choice she says is rooted in the social justice values she learned at 16 in HFB.

How did you decide to participate in HFB?

I wanted the opportunity to travel, but in a meaningful way. I wanted to learn, love and “feel” on my trip. I had no idea what I was getting into- participating in a program that ultimately changed my life path!

Did you visit a partner school abroad? What was the experience like?

I was fortunate enough to participate in a visit to Isilimela Comprehensive & Belville High School in South Africa. My experience in Cape Town could be described in three words: bewildering, colorful, and transformative. I witnessed palpable inequality- such as the freeway dividing mansions on one side and shanties on the other, and I laughed and sang louder than I can remember along side a group of full-hearted global learners. All of my senses were activated, and my heartstrings were changed forever.

What do you remember about the South African students' visit to Seattle?

Their visit collided with our Winter Ball Dance, so we all dressed up and went to the dance together! It was such a unique experience to share a high school tradition at RHS and dance the night away!

What is your strongest memory of HFB?

While I had incredible moments in travel and in classroom learning with my cohort, I'll never forget flying back home and understanding that



things were going to be a bit different on my return back. I was sitting on the plane writing notes back and forth with a friend- writing our feelings on an intensely beautiful open mic we experienced the night before- we both knew that we were going back to sheltered lives that did not echo the stories we had heard from some of the South Africans. In that moment, leaving on the plane, I knew that I had the made commitment to continue to travel, learn, serve and to *hear* the truth in the world.

How did HFB help you develop personally?

My involvement in HFB and my trip to Cape Town was incredibly transformative. It began a momentous shift in how I think about my surroundings, relationships, my social responsibility and involvement in my own local community. HFB helped me launch into conversations and circumstances that force me to use a critical lens and respond thoughtfully and lovingly.

How did your experience in the program shape your academic and career choices?

HFB was my first opportunity to discuss, understand and strive for social justice. It inspired me to serve others, who perhaps didn't win the conception lottery as I did. After

serving 2 years with AmeriCorps, I chose to get my Masters in Social Work because of its commitment to social justice and hope for change. My graduate program and career choice is rooted in being a life-long learner, something that HFB instilled at me at age 16.

How are you involved in social justice today?

I see my social justice involvement in both little and big ways- such as supporting a family and helping them find services that they've been denied (by systemic, geographical, mental health, etc. barriers) to going to Olympia to march and advocate for educational changes. But I've also learned that being involved in social justice for me can also be as simple as being quiet and listening. This action is more powerful than I had ever imagined, and can engage and empower others to join in the fight for social justice in our communities.

How are you involved in the arts today?

Currently, I use art therapy in my internship. HFB taught me that art is a tremendous instrument of expression. I am now able to use art as a

therapeutic tool that helps my children and families work through feelings, pains and past traumas.

Has HFB influenced your interest in travel?

Absolutely! I was lucky enough to travel in Western Europe after my undergraduate graduation. And last summer, I participated in a "Work-away" volunteer program in Ecuador. HFB's introduction of travel allowed for me to be open and prepared for rich and engaging experiences. I am always planning for my next adventure!

Who have you kept in touch with from the program?

Some of my best friends and life-mentors are from HFB! These relationships from HFB are life-long. No matter how long it's been since I've seen someone from the HFB community, it's like time has never passed! With that said, I'm grateful for Facebook- it has helped me keep in touch with my friends abroad as well as those still in Seattle.

Building Cultural Understanding *Local Connections with the Lummi Nation*

This fall, Hands for a Bridge was honored to host the Lummi Nation for a production that reached out to the Seattle community. Members of the Lummi Tribe and the Lummi Youth Academy traveled to Roosevelt High School for a series of performances of Darrell Hillaire's play, *Sonny Sixkiller Buys the Washington Redskins*.

The play challenged the audience to consider the ways that sports mascots impact our culture. The cast and crew invited the audience to join them for a post-show discussion in the theatre.

Both the play and the resulting dialogue left a strong impression. It was moving to hear the ways that language and iconography can be a negative – or positive- force in our culture. We look forward to



coming together with the Lummi Nation again soon, to build a stronger connection between our students and the many facets of our local community.

Student Reflections from the Class of 2015



On Poetry

From the very first day of Hands for a Bridge, Mr. Nolet had a message for us: “Assume the attitude of the poet.” With this favorite catchphrase, he meant for us to apply poetic concepts and intention to all of our writing, and as we moved through everyday life as well.

To be honest, it was a completely confusing direction at first. Accomplishing this goal required each of us to answer the question of what a poet is, and what sort of attitude separates a poet from other kinds of writers. As we start to move through our poetry unit, it’s become clearer than ever to me that everyone finds a different answer to the question of poetry.

Personally, I’ve always liked reading poems - recently I’ve started to like writing them too. I like searching for the right words, the ones that landed with force and precision on a reader. To me, poetry is finding the language of a feeling: sharp words that bite in rage, or floating phrases that sing like love. It’s a challenge, because so much of what’s going on inside our heads is buried in subconscious. I like trying to look past the curtain, and I like writing down what I see.

A couple days ago, when we were starting our group poetry readings in class, someone found the following quote by the Lebanese poet Adonis: “A poet is a guard who understands the rhythm of this world. He travels with history and feels the rhythm of history.” It’s a quote that seems to sum up the attitude of the poet quite well.

– Karinna Gerhardt

Content

Every note that collectively rose,
Each snap, siding off fingers and plucked twang
of string
Stayed for a moment,
Hovering.
Underneath we swayed,
Cemented in time
Held in place by squished bodies
Full stomachs.
A sense of belonging in a room
That less than two weeks before
We'd been strangers to.
Now it was home, in a way
Home to the open arms we'd race to find
Home to spontaneous song and
Hips bumping together
Home, because we filled it with our voices
And we were content.

- Elizabeth Cox

Uncovering the Memory of Race

I was raised to be colorblind.
One person is the same as another,
but being equal in one place is different than in
another.
Distinct views separate cultures, not one
alike. Some are looked down upon
as people of lower class and value,
lesser humans. In the South,
my mom grew up with these views
so peculiar to me, to you, where it was normal
to call those people with dark skin names,
to stereotype, to segregate schools and homes,
drinking fountains and busses.
I remember walking into the Atlanta airport for
the first time,
my eyes got wide—everyone working at the
airport
was the same color,
black. Confusion filled my mind.
Why is it like this? Are some jobs only for people
of color?
Why is it different than home?
I wouldn't get my answer until later,
and just accepted this is how it was, that this
was normal and would always be like this
when I came to visit, unchanging as the heat
and humidity of a Georgia summer.
I blew this whole moment to the curb,
an observation from my past

I wouldn't come to terms with until I grew up.
I was raised to be colorblind, to see
the world from a new perspective,
to sit above the clouds and look down below,
to believe I was better than people who saw color as
what defined others, a memory buried.
Innocent or oblivious as a child,
I saw my visits as experiencing a new culture,
a different way to live, something for my relatives to
complain about—whether it was the loud music of
their Hispanic neighbors, or the need to shop for
groceries during the week to avoid the weekend
crowds of Blacks and Hispanics, their strange
voices filling the air like litter in store parking lots.
My mom left her home to escape this culture,
a way of life that seemed wrong,
out of place in this land of prejudice and
discrimination.

I was raised to be colorblind.
Paying attention to race as a child was uncommon to
me,
but older now and reflecting on the past,
I realized I noticed race,
not just as a simple observation or memory,
but as a way of life I did not like,
forcing myself to hold back my fight to visit family,
placing myself into this established culture,
peering in from the outside, never quite fitting in,
putting up an imaginary wall to resist,
to disagree politely, to close my mouth, to think
better
of causing a scene. Having no right to control,
having no right to say what is good and bad,
what is true or false, accepting that it's difficult
to change those with strong ideals and morals,
I believe now you should voice your opinion,
show how hate is not blind but blinds us
to the pain racism has caused, and then walk away,
into a world of color and light.
We come from different worlds—
assuming the worst, without learning the best.

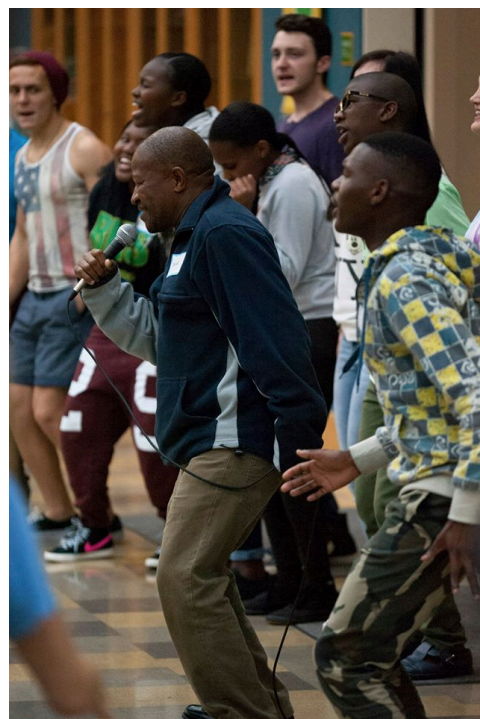
- Arendje Louter



Reflections on Exchange

The visitation by the South African students was really the catalyst for us students at Roosevelt. One of the focal points for the entire visitation, though it occurred near the very end of our visitors' stay, was the retreat. Heading over to Warm Beach, the class had no idea what would occur at this retreat; we'd only been in the class for a handful of weeks, and none of us were extremely close to one another. By the end of that weekend however, that took a change of the best. Going through multiple sessions of journal writing, being enclosed in an environment that facilitated connection and conversation, and participating in activities that really allowed us to put away insecurities and self doubt, allowed all of us Hands for a Bridge members to really accept one another and break down barriers that we once built high.

Two activities during the retreat really accomplished this feat; the mask dances, and the open mic. The mask dances made us create a small, four-piece dance that we would have to teach other individuals, and also learn one another's dances as well, which we would have to teach to other people. Learning other people's dances and teaching them to others really helped break the ice between all of us, and created a fun environment to be a part of. The second event that really stuck out to me was the open mic. While people shared songs of their own, and pieces of spoken and physical art, some brave individuals took the stage to really show the group a part of them that had not been witnessed before. These instances really helped the group see deeper into one another's hearts, and fostered the beginnings of a community that would soon grow to make us become inseparable. That weekend was the real beginning of Hands for a Bridge for many of us, and has created one of the most thoughtful, caring, and accepting group of kids that I have ever witnessed. — Justin Pederson



Being faced with the question "what was your favorite part about South Africa?" has been very difficult. There is an infinite amount of moments over the two weeks that could be categorized as my favorite. From the greetings at the airport that were full of song and cheers, to the church service in Gugulethu, to having long talks with my mama in Langa, to listening to the beautiful languages of Afrikaans and Xhosa, or going up Table Mountain with the Roosevelt students and singing and dancing with everyone. Looking back on it now, some of the parts that I remember the clearest were the hardest parts. While listening to Nolet's phrase "switch-on", us Roosevelt students tried to bring the Isilimela and Bellville students together. While it was hard, I realize the amazing work that was done. In trying to unite these two cultures, our connections with each other increased. The moments are endless, both fun and challenging, but every

memory that I think of surrounded the unforgettable and unbreakable bonds that I created with the people in South Africa. I will never forget how quickly we connected with each and every person. We became a family, and the sense of community that encircled us the entire time made me realize that this is something I should try to bring back to Seattle. Whether it is in the way I meet new people or understanding old friends, the importance of community and the feelings I felt in South Africa are ideals I can and will take anywhere. — Abby Merritt

My two weeks in Northern Ireland is something that will be stick with me for a lifetime. Leaving for the trip, I wasn't really sure of the impact it would have on me. But I never knew that it would be as impactful as it was. One of the things about the trip that I cherish is the immense amount of knowledge I gained. Having a long conflict of trouble based upon hundreds of years of religious divide, Northern Ireland is a brave place that continues to struggle with peace. It was truly an amazing opportunity to talk with various people who have either been a part of the conflict or was just a bystander. It really put my life into perspective, to see how I lived in a bubble, here in Seattle. And to never know about how it is to live in an area that is uneasy. But what I saw was that Northern Ireland and all who inhabit it, are a big uniting force of love and peace.



My time with the students at Oakgrove Integrated College is a other big part of the trip that hold a special place in my heart. I never knew how much love and kindness people could have. Welcoming us with warm (amongst the cold weather) arms, the first week of the trip was a time that I got learn and grow as a person and students with the help of everyone around me. Not once did I feel homesick during the trip because the people who surrounded me were my family, Roosevelt and Oakgrove. The trip was a great learning experience, that when I left, I had a wider view on issues in my community especially at school. It also gave me a chance to meet and get to know people that I thought I would never come in contact with in my lifetime. It really gives me the push to strive and make a difference in my life with the people I meet, and the issues I face. I can't even imagine what it would be like if I hadn't gone on the trip. — Julian Saquic-Ray

Support Our Work

Donate

Gifts from our community make our work possible. With your support, we can achieve our vision of a brighter more connected world where every student is an empowered global citizen with the vision, resources and opportunity to effect change in their communities. Please consider making a donation by visiting www.handsforabridge.org. With your gift of:

\$1000: We will be able to develop innovative partnerships and community-building projects, like our recent production with the Lummi Tribe of *Sonny Sixkiller Buys the Washington Redskin*.

\$750: One student from our partner schools in South Africa or Northern Ireland will be able to travel to Seattle to participate in our transformative programs.

\$500: We will be able to facilitate a retreat between our own students and group of visiting students where dialogue and relationships are developed.

\$250: One of our outstanding teachers, who volunteer their time to HFB, will be able to have one day of travel covered by a substitute teacher.

\$100: We could pay for transportation of HFB students to other Seattle Public Schools to develop relationships in our own community.

\$50: Students can purchase and provide a backpack full of school supplies for a student in need at a partner school abroad.

\$25: We could expand our library of educational materials on social justice, conflict, and forgiveness.

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Sponsorships

Your business or community organization can also sponsor Hands for Bridge events and activities! Contact info@handsforabridge.org for recognition opportunities.

Stay in Touch

Alumni, community members, and friends of HFB can stay in touch with us:

- Visit our website, www.handsforabridge.org for the latest news
- While you're there, sign up for our email newsletter.
- Find us on Facebook! We have a Hands for a Bridge page, as well as an active alumni