

The Polinger Pulse

A Publication of the Polinger Family Foundation

Winter 2008-09

Dance Place Moves to a Different Beat

A lively mix of concerts and classes, several resident dance companies, a dedicated afterschool program and summer camp, and a strong focus on youth are all part of what keeps *Dance Place* humming. But that's not what makes it special. Classes bear titles such as West African Dance, Urban Energy, Hip-Hop, Cuban Salsa, Capoeira, and Yoga, as well as the more traditional ballet and tap. And kids are offered the opportunity to move towards a career in

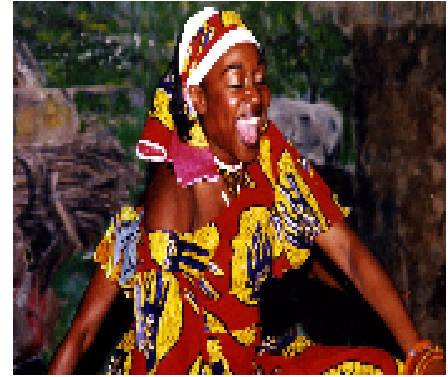
dance in a way that is unique in Washington and rare anywhere in the country.

Dance Place's "Next Generation" programs set their sights primarily on low-income inner city kids. There are dance classes and an award-winning afterschool program. Then comes the chance to be a junior staffer, which in turn can lead to joining a work-study program, where students perform jobs such as tech crew or concessions worker in exchange for unlimited free classes.

The final step is a dance administration internship. Interns live in a group house across the street, also owned by Dance Place, and take daily dance classes, while working 20 hours a week at the facility. The internship's joint focus on dance training and dance administration is one of only a handful in the country.

None of this would be possible without the leadership of Carla Perlo. Bursting with energy and a natural with kids, Carla believes in the ability of dance to provide direction for youth and a focus for their energies. Over 10,000 young people a year have been touched by her creativity and dynamism.

One example is Tracy Inman. While urban male youth are



KanKouran West African Dance Company performing at Dance Place

often seen as one of the hardest groups to reach with programs like Dance Place's, Tracy is one of the organization's many success stories. Under Carla's tutelage, he not only took classes at Dance Place but also danced with her resident company. Tracy then went on to both dance with the Alvin Ailey Company and teach at the company's school, where he currently directs the young people's program.

For the Foundation, Dance Place's stress on youth, and its focus on making dance performances, classes, and careers available and affordable, are significant assets. But it's the way the organization speaks to young people in their own language, while meeting their needs at the many different stages of their development, and the excitement and vision of its founder, that have really made it stand out from the crowd.

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Trio of Programs Focus on Youth

Linking history to moral choices today

What's the best way to teach a young adult how to make good moral choices? That's the challenge a Boston organization called *Facing History and Ourselves* has been meeting head-on for over thirty years. One of three youth-oriented programs funded by the Polinger Foundation in recent months, Facing History's approach is to engage a middle and high school students in an up-close and personal examination of racism,



Civil Rights marchers on the Washington Mall in August 1963.

prejudice, and anti-Semitism. By closely studying the Holocaust, the Civil Rights movement, and genocides such as that in Armenia, students learn to make the connection between the actions of the past and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.

The Polinger Foundation's abiding interest in working with vulnerable youth, coupled with its longstanding desire to promote tolerance among diverse peoples, gave it a strong interest in this organization and its programs. The Foundation's Board invited Facing History to its October meeting, where it gave a compelling presentation and was met with enthusiastic approval. The Foundation has agreed to support Facing History as it conducts exploratory research in DC and Montgomery County with an eye to potentially bringing its national programming to local schools.

But do the programs really work? A landmark study funded by the Carnegie Corporation found that students in Facing History classrooms showed significantly greater interpersonal understanding and negotiation skills and demonstrated reductions in fighting and racist attitudes. By deepening students' sense of empathy, the program creates an environment

where individual responsibility and civil discourse can form the foundation of academic and civic life.



Students in a Facing History classroom.

Facing History works by teaching teachers how to present its materials so that students can grasp them not only intellectually but viscerally. To help them do this, the teachers themselves undertake comprehensive training and have access to a dynamic support network that includes conferences and seminars, video feeds, newspaper and magazine articles, and online bulletin boards.

Facing History currently reaches more than 1.8 million students and 25,000 educators around the world. The organization also sponsors academic conferences, traveling exhibitions, and community-wide conversations about civic engagement, collective responsibility, and tolerance. You can learn more

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about Facing History's programs at: <http://www.facinghistory.org>.

The immigration experience

Social change of a different sort is on the agenda at the **Mental Health Association of Montgomery County (MHA)**. In Montgomery County, immigration accounts for nearly 90% of population growth since 1990. These numbers bring massive changes in their wake, and new arrivals often face significant challenges, including family trauma, language barriers, cultural differences, and poverty and discrimination. The MHA received funding from the Foundation to focus on the mental health needs of new immigrants.

MHA's **NCOMMON** program wanted to pilot a series of groups focusing on the experience of adjusting to a new culture. The workshops targeted middle schoolers and their families, highlighting issues confronting new immigrants: family separation and reunification, grief and loss, cultural and economic stresses, and navigation of community services.

Given the Foundation's deep roots in Montgomery County, and its long-standing commitment to mental health and family well-being, a project addressing the specific mental health challenges of newly arrived families was a natural match. The pilot program, which ran in two Montgomery area

middle schools through June 2008, was found to be helpful in increasing interfamily communication; as well as in helping families learn more about the community services available to them.

Youth at risk

A third project funded by the Foundation – a training program



Over 50% of Maryland's foreign-born population currently lives in Montgomery County.

for out-of-school-time providers in Montgomery County – also relates, at least in part, to the experiences of young immigrants.

Quality afterschool programs for minority and immigrant teens do exist in the County, but they are often designed without addressing the particular needs of immigrant youth. Similarly, ongoing training of any sort for out-of-school-time staff is currently a somewhat haphazard affair. A recent study by the **Montgomery County**

Collaboration Council found that only 38% of local youth workers had received any training at all in child or adolescent development in the previous two years. The Council, which funds partnerships for the well-being of area children and families, received funding from the Foundation to upgrade local out-of-school-time programs.

The Council proposed that the Foundation support training for area out-of-school-time staff in creating successful programs for young adults and in addressing issues of cultural sensitivity in working with immigrant youth. The first group of youth workers completed 20 hours of training, based on a national curriculum, in April 2008, followed by a second group in November. In May, 45 representatives from agencies around the county also met for a one-day conference on working with immigrant youth. Additional training is slated for this spring.

Out-of-school programs are considered critical in helping to
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Fall 2008 Grants

Polinger Foundation grant recipients for the Fall 2008-09 grant cycle are:

American University Center for Israel Studies: \$35,000

Impact Silver Spring: \$25,000

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Centropa Offers Glimpse into the Past

Family photographs. Oral histories. Films and videos. If you're **Centropa** (sometimes also known as The Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation), these are some of the things you collect as you strive to preserve the heritage of a people.

Founded in 2000 by Edward Serotta, an American photojournalist who has lived in Europe for thirty years and produced half a dozen books and films about Central Europe, Centropa calls itself "a digital bridge to a world that no



Celebrating Purim in Slovakia, 1941.

longer exists." The organization has made it its mission to preserve 1,500 life histories and 25,000 family photographs from a vanished era in Jewish European history.



Jewish family on holiday in Yugoslavia in the 1920s.

Unlike many such groups, its focus is not primarily on the Holocaust, but on the rhythms and experiences of everyday Jewish life from a vanished time. Family stories and videos are lively and engaging, showcasing the Director's film and television background.

When Centropa realized that it needed a new and more efficient website to showcase its large collection of videos, images, and narrated oral histories, it turned to the Polinger Foundation for help. The opportunity to assist an organization like Centropa in making its Jewish historical resources more accessible for general and academic audiences meshed seamlessly with the Foundation's focus on preserving and strengthening Jewish life.

The redesigned site features recipes and travel writing, as well as

a new interactive section where visitors can add family pictures and stories to Centropa's archives, thus adding their own family history to the organization's efforts to preserve the past using the tools and technology of the present. The new website can be found at: <http://www.centropa.org>.

Grantees in the News

♦♦♦ **Centropa and the Foundation for Jewish Culture** received **Sling-shot Awards** and Centropa also received funding from the **Sling-shot Fund**. ♦♦♦ **MHA Executive Director Sharon Friedman** received the **Community Leadership Award** from **Jewish Women International** at their **2008 Women to Watch** ceremony. ♦♦♦ **Dance Place** and **THEARC** were featured in the **2008-2009 Greater DC Catalogue for Philanthropy**. ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Focus on Youth (continued from p. 3)

build self-confidence, positive self-image, and the abilities needed for productive adulthood. The Foundation saw supporting these programs as part of its focus on positive youth development and as an opportunity to invest in the future of the young people of Montgomery County.

Immigration, accountability, and the afterschool lives of teens – three seemingly disparate strands woven together by the Foundation's mission into a tapestry of responsibility and commitment.