

# DIVERSITY



Edward Nelson

“There’s a lot of racism going on in the institution,” said Steve Loveland, former inmate at the Racine Correctional Institution (RCI), Sturtevant, Wis. “I mean, a lot – behind peoples’ backs that they don’t know about. “You see guys that come in that you know – you’ve known them for three, four years and how they act. And you see them change within those five sessions.”

The five sessions Loveland is talking about are part of Diversity Circles inside RCI. The award-winning program designed to help dismantle racism through group discussion is under the direction of Roseann Mason and coordinated by the Center for Community Partnerships at UW-Parkside

“A Spanish friend of mine who I knew for seven, eight years, said, ‘They have a Diversity Circles going and you gotta sign up,’” Loveland said. “I was a tutor at the time and my experience is that if they offer something to you and it’s education, take it – take it. Because you can only learn.”

Once he became involved, Loveland worked to promote the program. “A lot of guys don’t know about (Diversity Circles). We needed to make a pamphlet to let the guys know that (Diversity Circles) is here,” Loveland said. “The guy that actually got me signed up for the group, we sat down at the computer and I gave him some of my ideas and he put it together and we came out with a really nice pamphlet.”

In addition to the printed piece, Loveland helped create and staff a booth promoting Diversity Circles at the RCI Father’s Fair.

Later, Loveland was invited to become a facilitator. A Diversity Circles facilitator is responsible for keeping group discussions on track, bringing up new topics, and keeping potentially volatile situations from getting out of hand.

“You have to listen to people and watch their body movements,” Loveland said. “It’s good to have a facilitator who has done time with the guys who are in the group to watch their actions. Because after you do time – and I’m not saying somebody who hasn’t done time wouldn’t notice it – but you notice little things like someone raises their shoulders or crunches their fists. You want to bring that down a level.

“Being in the institution and interacting with these guys, you know what sets them off.

You know when to say, ‘Hold on. Stop. Let’s take it this other way.’ And then the guy crunching his fists is going, ‘OK. All right. It’s over now, I’m OK.’”

According to Loveland, every Diversity Circles affects someone in a positive way. “Maybe (the group) didn’t affect everybody, but maybe two or three people in the group it did affect – and that’s what you go for,” he said. “Even if it only affected one person in the group – changed one person’s life – the group is worth it.

Facilitators who come in from the outside don’t always get to see the full results of



Bulletin board on racism at Racine Correctional Institution

the sessions, Loveland said. “I walk back with the guys to the unit,” he added, “and it’s always, ‘Man, that was a good group, that was really cool. Man, that changed my thinking.’”

Diversity Circles has also changed Loveland. “If I didn’t take the group and someone came up to me and said, ‘Hey, man, what’s Diversity Circles?’ I’d say, ‘Man, I don’t care, get away from me, I don’t know nothing about no Diversity Circles, who cares, I’m going home. Screw you, I’m done.’ But here I am out on the rec field, ‘Man, this is a cool group. Check it out; you gotta go check it out. I would have never done that, not in a million years – it changed my life.”

*Editor’s note: The day after Steve Loveland was interviewed for this story, he was released from the Wisconsin correctional system after nearly 13 years in various state institutions. One of his goals is to work toward developing a Diversity Circles at the correctional institution near his home.*



Steve Loveland



Wayne

## On the Inside

# DIVERSITY CIRCLES



Kathleen Reyheart, group facilitator



Personal Institution created by group members

Derek Brooks, Wayne Brunner, Leroy Kyles, Edward Nelson, Jesse Parra and Richard Samuels share something in common: Diversity Circles has influenced their lives. They also share something else: Each is currently doing time at the Racine Correctional Institution (RCI) in Sturtevant, Wis.

“(Diversity Circles) allows us to address, and it allows us to see and to feel the emotion and the compassion a person has,” Samuels said.

Samuels, 51, and Nelson, 33, grew up in the Cabrini-Green housing development of Chicago. Nelson stayed in the area, while Samuels’ family moved to Peoria, Ill.

“By (my family) going away, a lot of things about me changed,” Samuels said. “I went to a private-parochial school, graduated, went on to college – 22 years



Brunner

in the military – stuff like that. (Nelson) stayed in the projects. It doesn’t make me any better than him, but it desensitized me as an individual. I didn’t feel what he felt until I sat down and listened to him.

“And we do that as a society – once we leave something we desensitize ourselves and we don’t feel or we stop caring.”

Brooks, 41, credits Diversity Circles with allowing individuals, including himself, to be more open to the opinions and beliefs of others.

“(Diversity Circles) challenged me in such a way that I could take someone’s or listen to someone’s comments and see where their compassion is, their emotion. And I can also give them mine,” Brooks said.

“It challenged me to be more empathetic of another individual as opposed to feeling that my way is right. Here in America, I think that the norm is to be viewed as right versus wrong ... opposed to just saying, ‘OK here’s an opinion.’”

Diversity Circles allows group members to examine their own beliefs. Malcolm X is credited with saying: “A man who stands for nothing will fall anything.” Before Diversity Circles, Kyles said he hadn’t thought about what he really stood for.

“You don’t really know your true outlook because you never stepped back and eval-

uated your own opinion ... nor of others around you,” he said. “Diversity Circles made me look at others and their opinions and values, and what they care for and don’t.”

For Kyles, 20, the youngest member of the group, Diversity Circles also taught him something about the efforts of previous generations. Rap music and the messages contained in the music have been a major influence in Kyles’ life. The lyrics of many rap songs contain the word nigger.



Richard Samuels

“I use the word nigger a lot, even when I’m talking to my guys,” Kyles said. “I never knew that another black man had a dislike for that word ... it was just my ignorance to it. The way (Samuels) broke it down and told me about it, it made me really want to take the word out of my vocabulary.

“I mean, you can’t make me stop saying something in one night, but I’m trying at least to remove the word because that’s hurting us, too. Here we are as black people, we tried to overcome all these prejudice words and views and outlooks and here I am, everything that we fought for, I’m going against the grain. But now with everything I’ve played a part in it’s opened my eyes.”

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## Changing Attitudes Creating New Behavior

# The Bray Center

by Jean Goers

## GEAR UP:

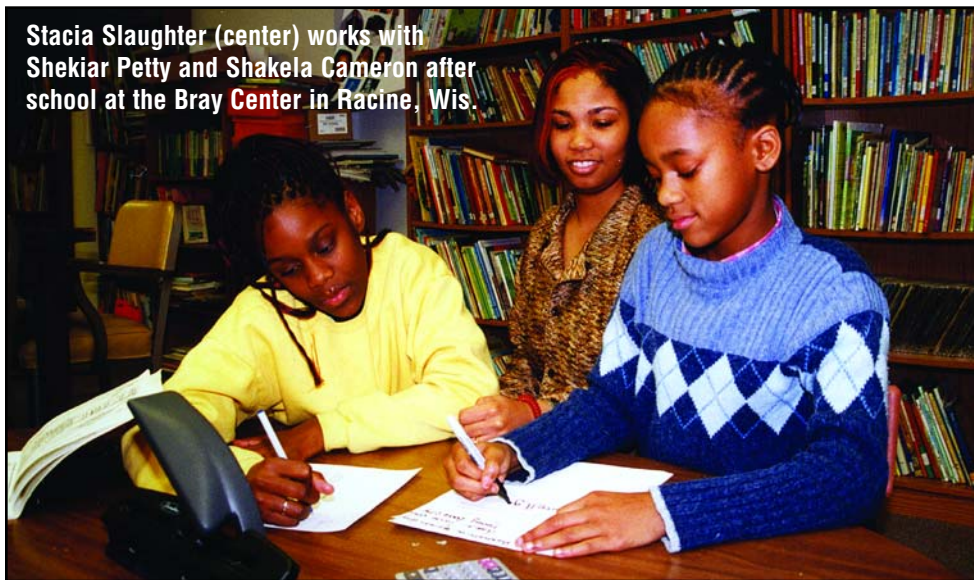
Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

Shakela Cameron, a seventh grader at Starbuck Middle School in Racine, Wis., attends the Gear Up program each week. "The teachers are nice and treat you with respect," Cameron said. "It's a place where I feel safe and I am taught how I can get to college."

Cameron is not alone. More than 200 students participate in the weekly program during their study center or lunch period. Gear Up is targeted to sixth through 12th grade students at the public middle and high schools in Racine and is designed to assist students in their preparation to pursue higher education.

Participation is by choice, yet students rarely miss a class. "I made friends and we all remind each other that 'group' is today," Cameron said. The program is offered to students from families of financial need. If a student qualifies for reduced or free lunch, they qualify for the program. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction provides the funding.

Stacia Slaughter, Gear Up program facilitator, said students are taught life skills including self-esteem, studying, healthy living, and goal setting. Gear Up includes



college tours and an occasional field trip. Once a year, at Days of Discovery, people from different professions come in and give the students a broader perspective of obtaining higher education.

"When students get good grades early on, they can make their career choices, and choices don't have to be made for them," Slaughter said. "If a student graduates, who may not otherwise, that is a huge accomplishment. Most students give back to the program by recruiting or tutoring other students after they graduate."

Gear Up encourages its students to participate in the Precollege program run through the Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. The CCP also helps

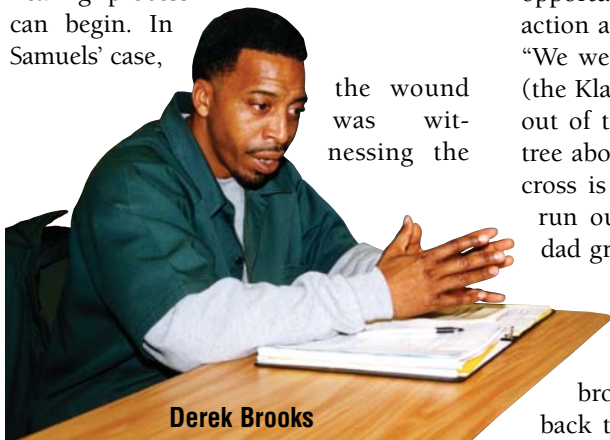
Gear Up program facilitators. Margaret Gename, professional development, and Shannon McGuire, youth programs, coordinate and offer training courses designed to enhance the ability of facilitators, like Slaughter, to work with youth participating in the program. "The CCP training programs help us develop activities which in turn allow us to offer more to the students," Slaughter said. "Our goal is to make a difference by helping someone succeed who otherwise would be left at the wayside."

"Each day we wear a different hat: mentor, surrogate parent, guidance counselor, or just a shoulder to lean on. Training through UW-Parkside's CCP helps the Gear Up staff to do a better job working with the students and their parents."

## DIVERSITY CIRCLES

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Diversity Circles also has the power to open old, deep wounds – but in doing so a healing process can begin. In Samuels' case,



Derek Brooks

the wound was witnessing the

murder of his great-grandfather. "When I was in Dyersburg, Tennessee, I got the opportunity to see the (Klu Klux) Klan in action at the age of 8 years old," he said. "We went down there for a funeral, and (the Klan) snatched my great-grandfather out of the back door and took him to a tree about 150 yards from the house, the cross is burning and all this. I broke to run out the door behind him and my dad grabbed me. Nobody moved, at all, they stood and watched.

"And I had no idea that that hatred was still there until I brought it up one day. When I went back to my room I could feel it like it

was just happening. And I think that's what we, as a society, need to do – in order to feel, we need to talk. Because as long as it stays reserved and locked up in our minds and in our hearts, those feelings will go untreated for the rest of our lives. (Diversity Circles) is about treating feelings. By participating – you may not always feel good right away – eventually you will start to feel better. That doesn't mean I have to love you, but it does mean that as I start to feel better I'll start to respect you and start to understand you."

For more on Diversity Circles at RCI see *Fresh* PERSPECTIVE [www.uwp.edu/fresh](http://www.uwp.edu/fresh).