Final Action Plan Report

After attending the course ‘Women in Leadership’ offered through the Brown Leadership Institute, I developed an action plan to reduce prejudice experienced by refugees in my community. My town, Concord, New Hampshire, is a town with a population of about 42,000. Concord was a racially homogenous community until the recent influx of refugees from camps in Africa and Nepal. Though most of the community is welcoming to our new neighbors, stigmas and stereotypes about the New American population existed. I realized that stigmas about refugees were rooted in ignorance. These attitudes also exist in my school community. To address this problem, I needed to work to increase multicultural education and open conversation between the refugee and native-born American populations in my school. I have taken four major steps in my action plan thus far: the creation of a leadership summit, the development of a club, the revival of the weekly “Be the Change” lunches, and the production of a community discussion. Working on my action plan has helped me become more introspective about my leadership style. It helped me learn more about other cultures and it helped me further discover the power of education. My work on this project has spread education about new cultures to other students at my school. By finding inspiration from fellow Leadership Institute alums, working with people who are passionate about this cause, and working on something that is important to me, I have been able to continuously work on and see progress as a result of my commitment to my action plan.

Problem Addressed:

Before I started my action plan, I had to identify a social problem in my community that I felt should be addressed. While I was at Brown I changed my action plan several times. I left with the thought that I would do workshops to educate girls in my school about media messages that are directed toward young women. When I returned home, I realized that the required English class for juniors at Concord High School already covered media literacy. I decided to change my action plan yet again. I was uncertain about what I wanted to do. My hometown, Concord, is the capitol of New Hampshire. As someone who had grown up in Concord, I always noticed the lack of racial and cultural diversity in my community. The capital area in New Hampshire is traditionally a homogeneous region of the State. Within the last ten years there has been an influx of New Americans from refugee camps in Nepal. Concord High School, the area’s largest high school (about 2,300 students), now has a New American population of about 10%. With the steep rise of New American students, there was a rise of prejudice and stereotypes from native-born Americans. A strong divide among the two groups of students exists due to cultural barriers. I realized that I was someone who greatly valued diversity in learning environment. I had the understanding that people from different backgrounds bring different views to conversation because ultimately culture shapes world view.
In the fall of 2011, there was a hate crime in my community directed at the New American population. I realized that I wanted to center my action plan on multicultural education. The hate crime involved vandalism that consisted of racist graffiti being left on three houses of African refugees. This caused the community became much more aware of the existing racism directed toward the New American community. It was because of this event that I began to make a concrete action plan focused on addressing racial prejudices in my community.

Strategies Used:

Students at Concord High School, myself included, had been working on planning a youth leadership summit. I had been leading this planning committee. The original intent was to provide a youth leadership educational experience for 50 students from Concord High School and create a club from which students could create and initiate their own action plans. With news of the hate crime, the planning committee decided to change to focus of the summit to now focus on diversity education and leadership skills. The committee agreed that through education and conversation we could help eliminate prejudice toward the New American population. My new action plan took three major steps: host a leadership summit centered on multicultural education, create a club focused on celebration of diversity at Concord High School, and to revive the ‘Be the Change’ lunches started a year ago at our school to encourage cross cultural communication.

People Working with Me:

Since I was already working with a planning committee on the summit, I didn’t have to create a group of people to help me on my action plan from scratch. This committee consisted of five students: Hema Gautam, Bhola Gautam, Raman Sandhu, Evan Grennon, and me. It was advised by Anna Marie DiPasquale, the school’s social worker from Lutheran Social Services, and Barbra Thomas, the school’s newly retired librarian. This committee focused on the planning of the leadership summit.

For the leadership summit there were two student led workshops. One workshop was focused on developing youth leadership skills. I lead and planned this workshop. I used the knowledge I had gained from the Brown Leadership Institute to fuel the outline for this workshop. I helped people to think about their leadership styles and how to be effective leaders. The second workshop was focused on multicultural education. This was planned and lead by Hema and Raman. Both Hema and Raman are New Americans. They taught about their experiences entering Concord High School. Bhola and Evan focused on the technical logistics of the day. They organized the rooms where the workshops would be helped, set up the sign-in table, and handled evaluations.

The leadership summit was attended by over 50 students. There were the same number as New American students and Native-Born American students. These students were involved in the activities and the development of the club action plan.
Steps Taken:
Once I had created my action plan, I needed to initiate it. The leadership summit was the first step of my action plan. We named the leadership summit “Be the Change” Leadership Summit after Gandhi’s quote, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” The summit consisted of two student led workshops, an adult facilitated activity called “The Power Shuffle”, and key note address from Chastity Lord from the Posse Foundation. The leadership summit concluded with a design for a club that would focus on multicultural education in the school community.

This organization was named “Be the Change Club.” The students from the youth leadership summit and planning committee decided that the best way to combat racism within the school community was to address stigmas about New Americans. These stigmas were rooted native-born students’ ignorance about the new cultures at CHS.

Once the club was formed, the group began to revive the weekly lunches that were originally started in 2010 to address the need for dialogue between African Refugee and native-born Concord High School students. These lunches were originally intended to provide an intimate setting in which New American students and native-born students could sit and talk. It had been identified that a cause of the divide between the two groups of students was the language barrier. The club used the idea of this and evolved the lunches so that they became a space for which ideas centered on culture and race could be discussed and processed while developing new friendships. The club continued to grow and become more organized.

The planning committee had the opportunity to speak to the Governor and Executive Council about the benefits of diversity in educational environments in late November. The committee spoke about the importance of being culturally competent and described the steps “Be The Change Club” was taking to educate students at Concord High School.

Most recently, the “Be the Change Club” also received a grant to fund a viewing of the PBS documentary Not in Our Town. This event is occurring on Saturday, May 12th. It is going to be open to the community. The viewing will be followed by a discussion about the movie and diversity within the Concord community.

Future goals of the club include the development of public service announcements focused on the positive impact of diversity, creating out-of-school volunteer opportunities, hosting another leadership summit, and working on a sustainability plan for the club. Though I have initiated my plan and executed the original steps, I know that I can do much more to establish the social change I wish to see.

How I Have Been Affected:
Through working on my action plan I have discovered a lot about myself as a leader and a person. First of all, I have learned more about my leadership style. Ultimately I find myself preoccupied on the steps of getting to the final result. When someone shares an idea I immediately think of a “to-do” list to achieve that goal. Through working on this project I have realized that while the way I analyze ideas is helpful for achieving the final results, I need to make sure that I do not undermine the thought process. From working on this project I have been able to improve my leadership style by working on encouraging brainstorming in meetings. As my action plan has evolved, it has become larger. Working on my action plan has pushed me to delegate work. I am passionate about the club. I want it to grow. For this to happen, more people need to be engaged in the club’s activities. Secondly, this project has broadened the scope through which I see the world. My understanding that culture shapes world view has deepened as I have worked with students from other cultures. During weekly planning sessions New American students have shared their stories of growing up in refugee camps and entering a school where they didn’t know the language speaking. Through hearing their perspective of the world, my perspective has been widened. Finally, learning about their experiences has helped me discover that I am passionate about education. Through learning my perspective has been shifted and through teaching I have been able to shift the perspective of others. Working on my action plan has pushed me to improve my leadership skills, widened my view of the world, and helped me discover my passion for education.

How My Community Has Been Affected:

My action plan has affected my school and community. The work of the “Be the Change Club” has spread awareness about diversity at Concord High School. During the lunches, cross-cultural friendships have been made. Though the club has much more potential, the base has been laid for future social change. I have talked to many New American students who are excited that harassment that has been directed at them is being addressed. Further, many native-born Americans have shifted their views about New American students. This club has not abolished racism amongst students. But the club shows the student population that diversity is something to be celebrated. “Be The Change Club” is known in the community. It is showing Concord that youth care about social change and are taking steps to improve our city’s social environment. “Be The Change Club” has started to spread the message that diversity should be celebrated to our school and city community.

Sources of Motivation and the Impact of the Symposium:

Motivation for this project comes from being passionate about my action plan, working with other passionate people, inspiration from my fellow Brown Leadership Institute alums, and attending the Leadership Institute Symposium on Social Change. I changed the action plan three
times. When I finally wrote my current action plan, I knew that I had a social change initiative that I needed to address. I am always excited to work on this project. My passion for my current action plan helps motivate me to get through the less glamorous parts of an action plan. Also, the people I work with are amazing. They are equally as passionate about seeing a change in attitudes toward New Americans. Their drive helps motivate me to keep working on new projects. I know that if I let go of working on my action plan, they would be disappointed. Their passion for the cause keeps my passion alive and keeps me motivated. Motivation has also been found through keeping in contact with friends from the Brown Leadership Program. When I talk to them, I remember how excited I was to go back to my community. They are absolutely spectacular individuals. Talking to them inspires me to work as hard as I can on my project. Finally, attending the symposium helped me examine the goals in my action plan and revitalized my plan. Ultimately, the insanity of starting back to school can be quite the speed bump.

Through attending the Leadership Institute Symposium on Social Change, I was motivated and I received the advice I needed to overcome road blocks that were slowing me down. Workshops on communication helped me reevaluate how I was advertising the club and small groups helped me narrow my goals. I entered that weekend with the goal that I was going to rid Concord High School of racism and I was becoming discouraged that this wasn’t happening fast enough. I left the weekend with the understanding that through education, I could help address negative stigmas toward the New American community in my school. Through having passion for my action plan, working with passionate people, keeping in touch with friends from the Leadership Institute, and attending the Symposium on Social Change I have been motivated to work on my action plan.

In Conclusion:

Through education and conversation, my action plan addresses negative stigmas about the New American population at Concord High School. Thus far as a result of working on my action plan I have helped plan and initiate a leadership summit centered on multicultural education, created a club, revived lunches that encourage cross-cultural friendship, and planned a community movie viewing and discussion to address refugee immigration. By working on my action plan, I have improved my leadership techniques, expanded my cultural understanding, and have discovered my passion. This action plan has started a celebration of diversity in my school and community. I sought motivation to continue working on my action plan through working on a plan I was passionate about, working with passionate people, keeping in touch with friends from the Leadership Institute, and attending the Symposium on Social Change.

\[\text{New American is a term used to describe immigrants and refugees. It originates from Anna Maria DiPasquale who discovered after talking to refugees that they were offended by the term refugee. Refugees felt were no longer refugees because they were no longer fleeing, but people who were permanently settled in America.}\]

\[\text{Native-born Americans refer to people who were originally born in the United States.}\]