African American History Month Planning Committee

Tamara Xavier, Chairperson
Aishah Shahidah Simmons
Mary Hart
William Meek
Denise Jones
Linda Love
Nkosi Ali
Francine Cheeks
Dorothy Lazenbury-Gibbs
Bernice Smith
William Goldsby
Michael Simmons

THE
AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE'S
AFRICAN AMERICAN STAFF

PRESENTS

Solid As A Rock

The Struggles of People of African Descent

IN CELEBRATION OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH YOUTH ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES IN THE U.S.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1994
FRIENDS CENTER
RUFUS JONES ROOM
12:00 - 3:00 PM

SHAFIK ABU-TAHIR

Shafik was born and raised in Philadelphia. He is the biological father of one son but has been adopted by many of the youth both in his neighborhood and in his organization. He is the organizer of New African Voices Alliance and co-founder of Community Awareness Network. Both organizations have played significant roles in uniting people in struggle for better city services and around issues of social justice.

Shafik's energy and dedication on behalf of the Philadelphia community have not gone unrecognized. In 1988, he won the award for community organizing at the North Philadelphia "Celebration of Life" festival. In 1990, he was chosen by the Philadelphia Daily News as one of Philadelphia's outstanding community leaders. He was also chosen by Philadelphia radio station WXPN as one of the top six "up and coming" community leaders to watch and has received the State of Pennsylvania's Legislator's Award for community organizing.

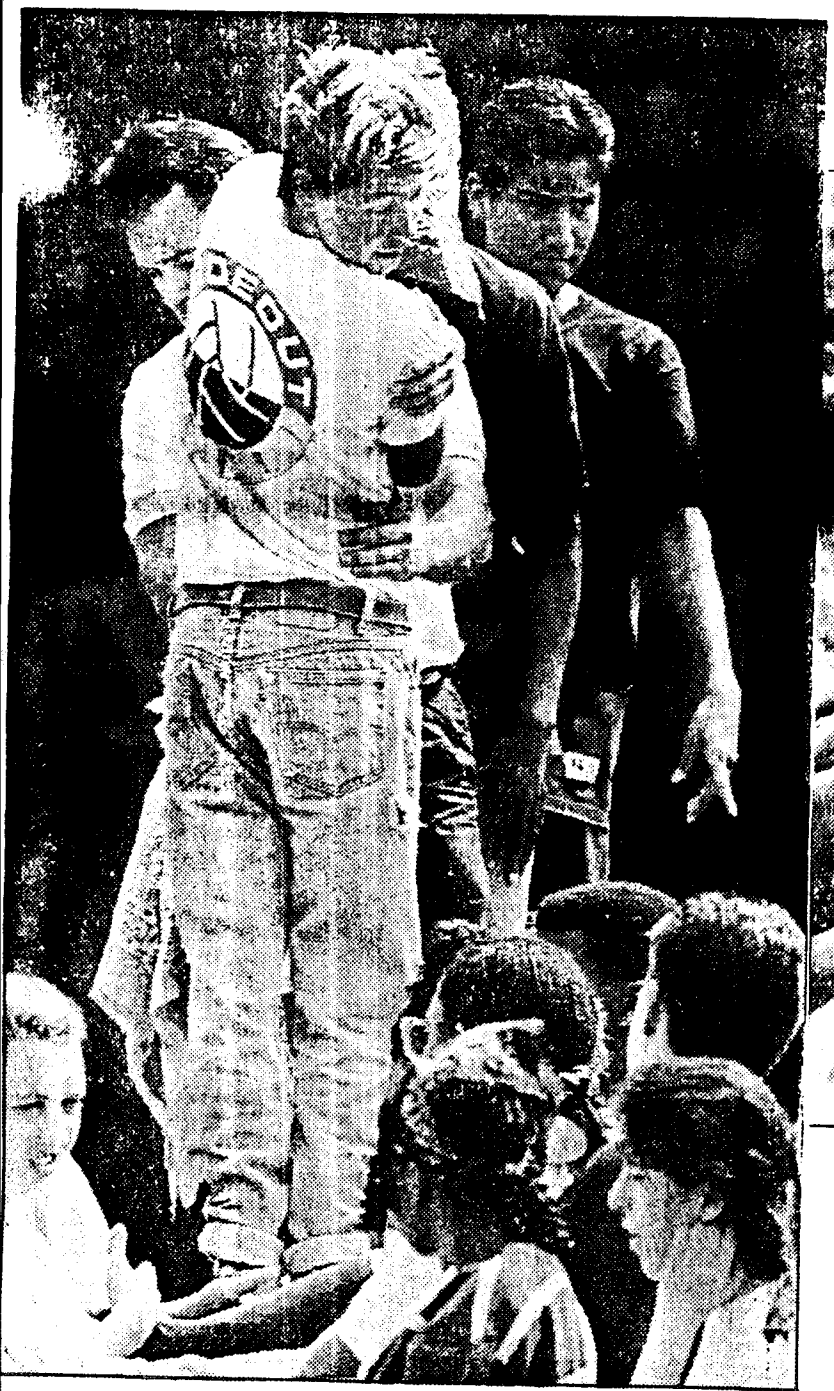
Quoted often in the Philadelphia press, Shafik has appeared and been featured on various local TV and radio shows. He has also spoken throughout the U.S. on a wide range of issues including the Movement for African Rights, the War on Drugs, Independent Political Action and the Gulf War. His writings on various social justice issues have appeared in many journals throughout the country as well as internationally.

Shafik served as president of the West Philadelphia Haddington Leadership Organization community center for two years and later became an advisor to the African Youth for Education organization. He also sits on the advisory committee of Asian Americans United. He is a leading member of the MLK Conflict Resolution Task Force and serves as a facilitator of the Organizing Committee for an African American Agenda which put in place a people's Human Rights Agenda.

In 1986, Shafik became co-founder of the annual Future Leaders Summer Retreat which brings approximately forty youth together from around the country at which time they learn community organizing and public speaking skills. He also led a major, successful campaign against SEPTA fare increases on behalf of the Consumer Education and Protective Association (CEPA).

From 1991 to the present, Shafik has been an advocate for people with disabilities. He serves a consultant for the Partners in Policy Making and the World Interdependence Fund. Both organizations work in the Disability Rights Movement for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of U.S. society. In 1977, Shafik was diagnosed with bone cancer.

Shafik travels throughout the U.S. working with various Gubernatorial Advisory Commissions facilitating workshops on a wide range of topics including Unlearning Racism; Discovering Diversity; Building Alliances; the War on Drugs; Violence, Crime and the Causes of Crime and Uprooting Handicappism.



The Philadelphia Inquirer / ED HILLE

Checking out the situation, *Julian Abreu (center) musters his trust and prepares to fall into his campmates' arms.*

The Philadelphia Inquirer / ED HILLE

Learning to trust, *Sevin Melton depends on his fellow campers to catch him as he falls into their arms. It's an exercise at the camp in Pottstown.*

Aug 23, 1993

DAILY TIMES-CALL
Denver, Co

Community activists get a summer camp

DOYLESTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Daniel Pedro and Jason Dov Danielson come from different worlds but share a vision: a nation improved by youth activism.

They and 50 other young people are attending a camp to learn how to organize communities to fight for societal change. The Future Leaders Summer Camp uses a '60s-style approach for problems of the '90s.

"I came here to learn how to better interact with people, and I'm here to learn how to empower myself," said Pedro, a 21-year-old Navajo raised on reservations and in ghettos in Santa Fe, N.M.

Danielson, a white, 17-year-old prep-school student from Newton, Mass., watches the world through privileged eyes but still sees the need for change.

"It's always bothered me that in Newton we have so much and in Roxbury ... only nine miles away, there are kids living in just unbearable conditions, with no health clinics or chances for a decent education," he said.

The campers' racial, economic and cultural differences are key, counselors said, because they can learn from each other.

The Future Leaders hike, swim, play tennis and basketball like at most other summer camps but also attend workshops and seminars to discuss issues such as racism, homelessness, sexism and rights for the disabled.

"We're not teaching the kids here to reject society, but we are teaching them to reject injustice," said Atiya Upendo Mosely, a co-founder of the 10-day retreat at Delaware Valley College.

"What we do is give information and spark discussions," said Mosely, who has been an activist in Philadelphia for 10 years. "But I tell them, 'Don't just take our word for it, check it out yourselves. Don't just be a follower ... be a leader.'"

The camp was formed in 1988 after activists from around the country met to discuss the lack of a formal training ground for budding young activists.

Participants in the Future Leaders Summer Camp run through a cooperation and teamwork drill during the 10-day retreat.

AP photo

Campers learn a craft: Community activism

By Karen Quinones Miller
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

"Black people can't get jobs because they're lazy!" shouted a blond girl to a group of teenagers surrounding her in a circle of chairs.

"All white people are racists!" screamed a dark-skinned girl standing next to her.

"Women get raped because they like it," a male African American teen sneered as he too faced the circle.

Suddenly another African American teenager walked in among them, looked at the three solemnly, then turned and addressed the others in the room.

"What do all of these people have in common?" he asked, then paused a moment before answering.

"They're all ignorant to the fact that the stereotypical statements they've said are not true. Ignorance is bondage, and the purpose of this, the Fifth Annual Future Leaders Summer Camp, is to show you that through education you can set yourself free."

Speaking was Tahir Wyatt, 15, of the Germantown section of Philadelphia, one of 35 teenagers attending the camp designed to train young community activists.

Wyatt, a youth counselor, has attended each year since the camp opened in 1988. The camp fulfills a dream of several longtime activists — including Wyatt's father, Shafik Abu-Tahir — who were concerned about the lack of training for youngsters wishing to, in a sense, enter into their line of work.

"These are our future leaders, and we wanted very badly for them to reproduce the things that we have been struggling for, such as respect for life and certainly respect for the environment," said Abu-Tahir, one of five adult counselors at the camp.

And so last week at the Fellowship Farm in Pottstown, on a 120-acre grassy retreat miles from the big city and its problems, the teens were taught how to organize community groups in their neighborhoods, how to sensitize their peers to the differences of other cultures — even how to chair meetings using Robert's Rules of Order.

Of course, they also played basketball. And swam, and hiked, and saw farm animals, and did what teenagers do in a summer camp.

■

One goal of the 10-day camp is to teach the teenagers to work together rather than individually to accomplish things. This isn't just an abstract concept. Early on in the session, the campers took turns being blindfolded and led a short time by a peer.

"Man! Where the heck are we going?" a blindfolded 19-year-old swore at a 15-year-old leading him around.

"It's OK," the younger one, a three-year veteran of the camp, answered soothingly. "We're just going to go a few more steps, and we'll be at the table and you can sit down."

"This exercise is really good because it teaches the kids about trust," Atiya Mosely, a counselor, said as she watched the two teenagers go through the exercise. She said these kinds of exercises also helped the teenagers understand what it feels like to have another dependent upon them.

The campers also attend workshops to discuss a variety of social issues, such as abortion, racism, sexism, AIDS, homelessness, and the rights of the disabled. Heady material for 13- to 19-year-olds, but they seem to handle it well.

"We deal with the problems that exist in the world, which I think is good, because if you don't face the problems, the problems are going to face you," said Wyatt, a student at Central High School.

"Sure, talking about some things can be depressing," he added. "But it's a depressing world that we live in, and we have to be equipped with the tools we need to change it."

Wyatt, like many of the campers, seems unusually mature for his age. But although he displays a vast knowledge of current social issues, he also shares the usual teenage concerns — like going to parties, talking to girls, which rap artist has the best "jam."

Nathan Smith, 14, of East Oak Lane, also considers himself a pretty normal kid. But he maintains that he has benefited enormously from his three summers at the Future Leaders camp.

"When I was young I lived in a neighborhood where the kids would call me names like *chink*," said Smith, whose father is white and whose mother is Asian. "I would yell at them, 'I'm not Chinese; I'm American!' "

Smith said he realized now that he should be proud of his Asian heritage, as well as his white ancestry, and he credits this camp with teaching him that. "When you're around so many other kids of different cultures who have such pride, it makes you proud of your own heritage," he said.

■

Diversity is an important theme for these future leaders. For next year's session, the camp is making an all-out effort to accommodate youngsters with disabilities.

The campers come from all over the nation, some paying the full $350 cost, some on scholarship. Scholarships are provided by local businesses and other sponsors. Some come at their parents' urging and, because they are teenagers, at first they aren't too happy about it.

On Day One, Bobby Youngblood, 15, an African American from the South Bronx, said firmly that he would never have come to the camp had he known what it was about.

"I didn't know anything about having to attend sessions," Youngblood said with a scowl. "I thought we might have to take a couple of nature hikes or something, but not all this stuff."

By the next day, however, Youngblood had changed his tune. "These kids ... sometimes in the sessions they use big words, and I don't always understand all that they're saying, but when we're hanging out in the rooms or playing basketball, I see they're just like me," he said slowly but with great emotion.

"And I'm finding out I am interested in what we're talking about.... I never knew that I cared about things like racism or abortion, or even that I had an opinion about it, but that's because nobody ever asked me. Now when I hear them talking about these things, I realize I do care."

The adult counselors, who stay at the camp 24 hours a day, are not paid for their time. But Mosely, a registered nurse, says she and others with a history of activism don't mind.

"It's worth it to me," she said as she watched the campers leaving a workshop on racism and running toward the basketball courts to get in a couple of hours of play before dinner.

"If there's one thing that keeps me inspired to continue in the struggle for a better world, it's the youth that are coming up behind me."

Or, as Bianca White, 15, of Germantown, said: "It's really different to be around people my age who care about the things that I do. For the longest time, I thought I was the only kid that had these thoughts, but now I see I'm not."

For More Information

■ Call Shafik Abu-Tahir, Philadelphia coordinator of the Future Leaders Summer Camp, at 215-472-4024.

SHAKING THE ROOTS OF THE TREE OF OPPRESSION

Twelve parents of children with differences gathered at the Variety Club Camp and Developmental Center for a weekend workshop, the first of its kind. Just being together was a moving event. We discovered, however, that we have something to say not only to each other, or other parents but to everyone who is interested in ending oppression .

What parents have in common is the work we do and how that work is viewed and valued by the societies we live in. What parents of children with differences have in common in addition is more work; our children require more work. Although parenting in general is given the status of a hobby in most societies and parents are not given the support, pay or time off that they need, the work is nonetheless valued and respected if only superficially. What makes our work as parents of children with differences seem unbearable much of the time is the attitude in society that our work is completely worthless. At its most vicious, the message goes," If you work hard enough your child may not be a burden all his or her life, but for the most part it would have been better if he/she had never been born. "

With this attitude put into words , many of us saw for the first time that our childrens differences or disabilities ARE NOT THE REASON OUR LIFE IS SO HARD. Our lives are hard because we have more work to do than can be done without great cost to ourselves, and because of the general attitude that this work we do is considered worthless. As we thought further on this it also became clear that there is a societal assumption that underlies this attitude that is detrimental to everyone- that people are valued for what they can produce., (and what they produce is valued according to how it contributes to maintaining the society as it is.) At this point we realized that we were down to the roots of oppression, and that this is one root that we will gleefully shake, until the tree falls down!

People are valuable simply because they exist. We are each valuable because we were born, because we are human, because we are unique. Each of our children with a difference or disability is a gift, there was never anyone like them before and there will never be anyone else exactly like them again. Infact their difference or disability is a uniquely interesting example of being human. The limitations they struggle with are more visible examples of the struggles that everyone deals with who was born into the current societies, rife with oppression. When Kate, my daughter with Down Syndrome figures out a solution to

a problem she is confronted with, when she wins a battle, it is an inspiration for me and could be for everyone.

From this came some attempts to create a commitment for us. The following is my own personal offering, since we could not agree at the workshop:

From now on I will joyfully remember that my child is a treasure, that his or her disability or difference is not the cause of hardship in my life, and that the work I do as a parent deserves complete respect- there is no more valuable work that anyone could do.

Amy Kietzman
Philadelphia, PA