

Susan Ulrich

Action and Growth Among Youth in the Inner City: Learning How to Grow and Thrive Through Adversity

Project Goals

- ◆ Mentor young people facing poverty, drugs, lack of access to adequate education or healthcare, teen pregnancy and gang violence among other things
- ◆ Assist in developing a safe and trusting environment for young people to thrive
- ◆ Develop an understanding of how trust and human connections are essential to coexistence and peace work

Personal Goals

- ◆ Gain experience in organizing for positive change
- ◆ Allow myself to trust people and accept the possibility that things can change
- ◆ Achieve a balance in my life through finding peace with my past and living in the present in a positive way



Above— Roca members during a peacemaking circle, a method of communication and problem solving from native traditions used in relationship development, healing, and community building

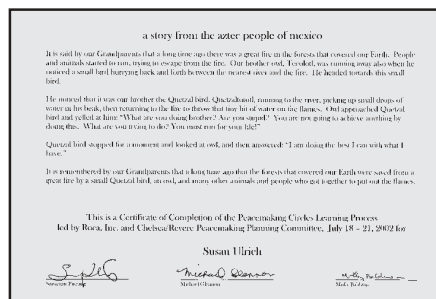
Right— Certificate of completion of the Peacemaking Circles Learning Process

Activities

- ◆ Collaborated on community service and personal development projects with a group of ethnically/racially/religiously/culturally diverse people who care about community and the lives of young people
- ◆ Supported the young people in the organization with the implementation of workshops for community members
- ◆ Fostered a process of growth and development for members through trainings, community service, community outreach, and relationship building
- ◆ Taught a GED class

Key Dilemmas

- ◆ Although I was in the United States, language was an obstacle because I worked in a community that was predominately Spanish speaking and included languages such as Khmer and several African languages.
- ◆ Learning to trust other people and allow people to support me in the work that I do was a major challenge; this involved developing the ability to ask for help.
- ◆ Establishing a clear line between myself and those I support was a challenge because I often identified with their experiences.



Key Learnings

- ◆ I must allow myself to make mistakes and then learn from them.
- ◆ There is a limit to what I can do for myself and for others.
- ◆ Achieving balance in my life is integral to supporting myself and others.



Top— Gathering with members of the Environmental Crew

Right— Youth STAR graduation: Young people receive a scholarship after completion of the program.



I was 16 when I had my first experience with Roca. My neighborhood was experiencing what the media called a "suicide epidemic". I was introduced to Molly Baldwin, Roca's Executive Director. She worked with the most amazing group of young people I had ever met. They were so motivated to live and create positive change in their community. As soon as I walked through the door this summer, Molly and others at Roca offered me unlimited support. Support is paramount at Roca. Everyone there has the same vision and accepts that no one person can do it alone. Everyone supports each other, pushes each other, and respects each other. Roca serves as a haven for young people to deal with problems, seek guidance about their future, spend time with peers, and experience a variety of cultures. I think that Roca is an example for all organizations. They make no judgments and no one is excluded from the community. Unlike the community where I was raised, Roca is comprised of people of all colors, faiths, and backgrounds. It is truly diverse and I am grateful that I found my way back to it.

