March 2008

Proud Students Against Landmines

CISR JOURNAL

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol12/iss2/18

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
Against Landmines

What began in 1998 as an art project with old shoes became an inspiration for social justice and change at St. Francis de Sales Central Catholic School in Morgantown, West Virginia, which has students ranging from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. Today, a small organization of students at St. Francis, known as the Proud Students Against Landmines (PSALM), meets once a week in the school art room to work on projects related to mine action.

by Kateland Shane [ Mine Action Information Center ]

While St. Francis art instructor Nora Sheets asked her students to create a sculpture using pairs of old shoes, she unknowingly inspired a new cause for her students. The goal of the art project was to educate the public about a very serious global issue: the devastating effects of landmines. The result was a massive, brightly painted sculpture of 500 shoes. Students researched facts and stories about landmines to add to the sculpture, which was designed to “represent the indiscriminate nature of the weapon through the use of various sizes and types of shoes. We had everything from soccer shoes to represent the children who had lost their limbs.” Sheets says the students enjoyed playing to boost their self-esteem in a difficult environment.

The shoe sculpture was such a success that it traveled to other regions in West Virginia and all the way to Washington, D.C. It was featured in a book entitled A Mine-Free World: Through the Eyes of Today’s Children.

PSALM actively creates art projects, writes letters, prepares presentations, makes posters, attend conferences and organizes events to raise awareness about this important international issue. Sheets helps her students stay informed by representing them around the world at mine-action workshops, presentations and conferences. The goals of PSALM are:

1. To educate the public about landmines and cluster munitions
2. To raise awareness about victims’ issues
3. To encourage all countries to accede to the Ottawa Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions

Past Projects and Activities

Members of PSALM, as well as other students at St. Francis, are actively involved in humanitarian relief efforts for landmine survivors. In 2001, St. Francis students raised enough money to buy a new prosthetic limb for a landmine survivor in Bosnia. Nora Sheets met the survivor while attending a humanitarian mine-action conference in Bosnia. She and her students still correspond with him to stay updated on his progress. Under the supervision of Sheets, students have also collected prostheses and medical supplies to send to landmine survivors in Nicaragua.

In 2006, PSALM sponsored a “Starfish Day” to raise funds for the construction of a water well in Cambodia. The project, known as Project Safe Water, is headed by the organization Landmines Blow!, and was developed to benefit landmine survivors, internally displaced persons and refugees. PSALM sponsored a second “Starfish Day” in 2007 to again raise funds for Project Safe Water.

PSALM members are also reaching out to the public to raise awareness about the affects of landmines and cluster bombs. In 2001, a student member of PSALM appeared on both C-SPAN and CNN to discuss St. Francis students’ work with the Campaign to Ban Landmines. St. Francis students have given presentations to members of Congress, Queen Noor of Jordan, and Nobel laureate Jody Williams, who wanted the school to speak with and commend the students for their activism.

PSALM members continue to educate the public through the original medium of expression: art. St. Francis students still use the original shoe sculpture every year to show the effects of mines. Seven students from St. Francis won a poster competition in 2005 sponsored by the Landmine Resource Center at the University of Baltimore in Beirut, Lebanon. As a result, their work is featured in a book entitled A Mine-Free World: Through the Eyes of Today’s Children.

Recent Projects and Activities

2008 has been a busy year for PSALM and St. Francis. In May, St. Francis students’ artwork, banners and sculptures were displayed in Washington, D.C., for Cluster Munitions Awareness Day, which was held in conjunction with The Dublin Diplomatic Conference on Cluster Munitions. PSALM recently hosted a “birthday party” to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ottawa Convention. On 10 May, the students traveled to Washington, D.C., to deliver a presentation on landmines and cluster munitions to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

For additional references for this article, please visit http://mineinfo.com/Psalm.

Nora Sheets and her students wearing the “hand”-painted T-shirts they made for Cluster Bomb Awareness Day at their school.

Proud Students Against Landmines

What began in 1998 as an art project with old shoes became an inspiration for social justice and change at St. Francis de Sales Central Catholic School in Morgantown, West Virginia, which has students ranging from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. Today, a small organization of students at St. Francis, known as the Proud Students Against Landmines, meets once a week in the school art room to work on projects related to mine action.

by Kateland Shane [ Mine Action Information Center ]