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## Making Strides: Students Tackle the Landmine Awareness Problem

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# Making Strides

## Students Tackle the Landmine Awareness Problem

by Virginia Saulnier,  
MAIC

Extending beyond the normal boundaries of education, a growing number of educators are widening their students' knowledge base to include the landmine crisis plaguing multiple countries, thereby raising the global consciousness of this humanitarian problem. Commendably, students around the world are assuming an active role in the crisis, aware of the potential damage waiting to strike at the heart of their generation, as landmines and UXO annually claim numerous children as victims. Teachers, employing accepted pedagogical techniques, are educating their students about the devastation inflicted by mines and UXO by introducing them to landmine-oriented magazines and literature. Teacher Mark Hyman is a prime example of such a case.

### Human Rights Day

Hyman assisted his students at Tenafly Middle School in Tenafly, New Jersey, in designing an 18-minute multimedia presentation detailing the landmine crisis. Hyman and his students' efforts originated with a Human Rights Day to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. The school hosted 30 speakers who held presentations on a variety of human rights issues, including the landmine threat.

### Podzvidz: Tenafly's Sister City

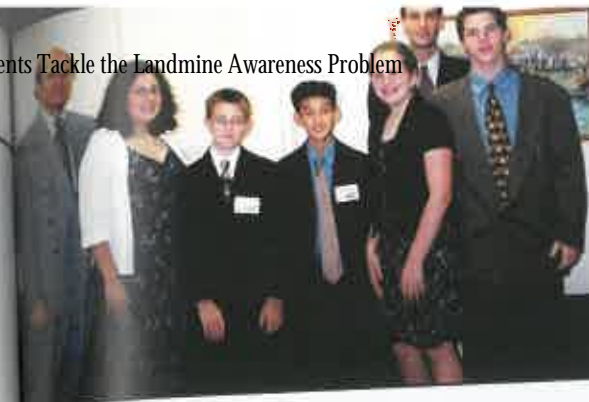
Hyman also sponsored the "Heroes of Conscience Club" for kids who wanted to learn more about people who pursued avenues advocating moral and ethical action. "Once the students learned of the landmine issue from the Human Rights Day, several wanted to work specifically with landmines; thus, we formed the [Landmine Awareness Club]." Through Handicap International and APM (Action Against Mines), Hyman and the Landmine Awareness Club located a school in Podzvidz, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which, unfortunately, was in close proximity to a mine field. In addition to committing a year to educating fellow students and the surrounding community about landmine awareness, Hyman and the 10 students involved in the club have forged a relationship with the school and are in the process of raising \$30,000 to clear the mine field.

### Humanitarian Demining Multimedia Presentation

To accomplish the task of raising the necessary funds, Hyman and his students designed a comprehensive 18-minute multimedia presentation "that puts landmines in the context of human rights," described Hyman. The students narrate the four components, which are interwoven throughout the presentation and are described as follows:

- Personal essays and poetry about the landmine threat;
- Global facts about the landmine crisis;
- Excerpts obtained directly from the Internet from landmine survivors in their own words; and
- Articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The presentation also features a visual display with musical accompaniment throughout the 10 students' alternating speeches. To relay the worldwide burden of landmines, the presentation attacks the



Following the students' presentation to his office, Ambassador Steinberg takes a moment to pose with the students and teacher Mark Hyman.

Photo c/o Mark Hyman

landmine issue from more of a global perspective rather than concentrating on Podzvidz. But at the conclusion of the presentation, the students do implore potential donors to contribute specifically to the effort to clear the mine field in Podzvidz.

### Global Care Unlimited Inc.

To manage the raised funds, Hyman and the students created Global Care Unlimited Inc., "a non-profit organization established to support the fundraising aspect of the project." With the inception of Global Care Unlimited Inc., the club is able to apply a broader mission statement to its overall objectives by addressing additional humanitarian concerns with its first project being the Landmine Removal Initiative. The project has provided the opportunity to gather parents, students and interested community members intent on satisfying the financial goal, enhancing community spirit as well. For example, the corporation's Board of Trustees consists of local community members.

Hyman stated, "I think the landmine issue is ideal for a community to become involved in, as it does not necessarily require political affiliation but focuses more on human rights overall."

## Risk

by Jeanetter Hong, Grade 7

I am a lonely child that cries inside,  
I try to run, but there is nowhere to hide.

I dare to live when the soul's life is gone.  
I run from the valley of pain,  
I hide in the shadows of the dead,  
I have become a prisoner in my own mind,  
I try to escape,  
But the more I run, the easier it is for my life to be taken.

I have lived to this point and I wonder,  
"Where did my childhood go?"

Lost in a time of blackness,  
All I see when I look back to my past,  
Is a blackness of hatred,  
A nightmare that hurts,  
And nothing but those long-lived killers,  
Still lurking in the midst of every step that I rise.

The hunters of the innocent,  
The abductors of my childhood,  
And the controllers of my life and mind...  
Those long-lived killers people call...  
Landmines.

### Presentation to the Office of Global Humanitarian Demining

Throughout the past year, the students presented their work to social service clubs and NGOs, in addition to the 600 students of Tenafly Middle School. This fall, the students intend to focus on houses of worship and to involve youth groups and other schools in their work. In July 2000, the students had the unique opportunity to present an abbreviated version of their presentation to Ambassador Donald Steinberg, Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Global Humanitarian Demining (GHD). The GHD, established in 1997, "formulates and leads an international process to better coordinate, fund, publicize and accelerate worldwide humanitarian demining assistance and clearance operations" to accomplish the "Demining 2010" Initiative, which seeks to eliminate the landmine threat to civilians by the year 2010. The GHD cooperates with the U.S. Humanitarian Demining, supplying aid to 37 mine-infested countries.

Hyman expressed his thoughts on the experience saying, "Ambassador Steinberg's office was moved by our presentation. I have yet to see one adult not moved by the kids' work." Steinberg appreciated the

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Students from the Landmine Awareness Club examine landmines in a mock mine field created by the club to educate fellow students and members of the community about the dangers of landmines.

Photo c/o Mark Hyman



## My Only Remedy

by Jian Lann Chang, Grade 6

I live in a place where I cannot learn.  
Where I live, education is a dream.  
A dream that I and many others are forbidden to pursue.  
I live in a place where education is non-existent.

People in my village laugh at me  
for believing in education.  
They believe it is a myth,  
something that our village will never have.  
I refuse to surrender to them and say that  
we will never have an education.

These landmines do not control any part of me.  
They are not my master.  
I will not allow them to confine me to my life of torture.  
I will not allow them to deprive me of education.  
I will not let them steal the only remedy I possess.  
I will not surrender to their tyranny.  
I am the dictator of my own dreams.  
I am the dictator of my own soul.

I will not let them steal the only remedy I possess.  
I will not allow them to deprive me of my education.



Students perform demining procedures to publicize their Landmine Removal Initiative.

Photo ©/o Mark Hyman

students' civic mindedness and recounted his personal experience with landmines in Angola, specifically the devastating effects when civilians attempt to return to their homes, schools and fields even after the resolution of the conflict. He also complimented the students on the originality of their presentation, commenting that it "should help Americans who have never been in mine-affected nations understand the profound problems caused by these 'hidden killers.'"

### Achieving the Financial Goal

Presently, the students have raised over \$17,000. Hyman remarked, "We started raising funds in April [2000], and our goal is to be finished by December 2000. Through April to June, we raised \$13,000, so we feel confident we'll meet our goal." Positioned to succeed, the students have extended their campaign to reach throughout Northern New Jersey in hopes of attaining the \$30,000 goal.

Not only acting as a service-oriented club, the Landmine Awareness Club also functions as a medium through which the students can educate themselves and others of international issues while developing leadership skills applicable to all areas of life. Throughout the cycle of the project initiated by the 10 students active in the Landmine Awareness Club, "the students have learned they can have a meaningful impact and a powerful voice," Hyman emphasized. "The entire process was very empowering, as it encompassed a spectrum of moral and ethical values, including human rights and non-violence. They learned they can have a global impact and are not confined to their immediate surroundings. They have begun letter exchanges with the school in Podzvidz, and several hope to join me on a trip to Bosnia tentatively planned for the spring/summer of 2001."

Uniting the community to accomplish a common goal, the project "has widened the scope of global awareness for the students and the town," Hyman articulated. "The project has involved the entire community: the community has taken an interest in the kids' efforts and there is an active parents group." Not only is the landmine issue ideal for a community, asserted Hyman, "It is also a great topic for students. Getting involved in demining equals saving lives." ■

### Contact Information

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