



Students study genocide to prevent bullying
By Sally Hunter, The Minnesota Daily
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World Without Genocide hosts a summer program that inspires students to stand up against hate.

Last fall, Rachel Beecroft found herself awake at midnight with an idea to teach high school students about bullying and genocide.

This idea came to Beecroft, a 2010 University of Minnesota graduate, hours after she heard Ellen Kennedy, founder of the nonprofit World Without Genocide speak at an event about empowering community from the ground up.

Beecroft, an education outreach associate at World Without Genocide, emailed Kennedy her idea to spread the message to high schools. There, she said, students can start battling hate from an early age and in a more prevalent form: bullying.

“Ultimately, it all comes down to hate,” she said. “Someone’s not letting someone else be who they are.”

After months of planning, World Without Genocide is ready to host a three-day program called Child Soldiers and Bullying Aug. 16 to 18, which will teach high school students to stand up against hate at a local and global level. It’s the organization’s first annual summer institute.

So far, about 15 high school students are signed up, Beecroft said.

These students will gather at the William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul for about 12 hours each day to learn about African genocide and child soldiers. They’ll also learn about bullying in their own American communities and how to stand up against hate.

“I hope it will create ‘upstanders’ in our communities,” Beecroft said, using a term the organization uses for those who stand up to bullies — the opposite of bystanders.

The students will hear from survivors of the Cambodian and Liberian genocides as well as the Holocaust. They will also listen to human rights activists, watch films, learn leadership skills and act out plays.

On the third day, students will present what they’ve learned to parents and to local government officials, Beecroft said.

“We’re hoping that these students will become leaders in their schools for advancing human rights,” Kennedy said. Students will learn to create an environment in their own schools where people feel safe and are treated equally, she said.

“In both bullying and genocide, you have an ‘us-versus-them’ kind of relationship,” said Greg Stanton, founder of Genocide Watch, an international alliance to prevent and stop genocide.

That type of relationship is the first of eight stages in genocide, which can be paralleled with stages of bullying, Stanton said.

Traits like dehumanization, group organization, polarization and preparation occur both in genocide and in bullying.

The final stage of genocide is denial, Stanton said, which starts from day one and continues for years after.

For example, mothers will deny that their daughters have bullied other girls, just as there are deniers of the Holocaust or the genocide in Rwanda, he said.

“Thinking back [to high school], I saw bullying and didn’t do anything,” Beecroft said. “It’s inspired me to inspire other people to stand up when I didn’t.”

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