

1st Place
Emilie Willingham

OCT 22 2010

Kirkwood Human Rights Commission
11th Grade Essay Contest:
Blind to Privilege

Emilie Willingham, 16

Kirkwood High School

I love Kirkwood. While I was born in New Jersey and have also lived in Nashville, Tennessee, I moved to Kirkwood when I was in Kindergarten; I consider Kirkwood my hometown. So, I have to say that I am not crazy about doing this essay to explore the problems ingrained in the Kirkwood culture, especially problems about racial issues and ethnic divides. In fact, this is my fourth attempt to write this essay, and what I've finally figured out is that I haven't really seen a problem, and there I find my "writer's block". Sure, I've noticed that different kids hang with different groups. I've noticed that black kids hang out with black kids, and white with white. But I haven't really put much meaning to that. I think I may be colorblind. I don't see colors of skin; I just see different personalities. I don't see ethnicity; I just see people. But, I think that's the point. I've come to realize my blinding optimism about my awesome hometown may have kept me from seeing that people are hurting right here, in my town; I haven't seen that people are treated differently based on the color of their skin. I haven't noticed that families have been discriminated against for generations. While I have been stumped about this essay, I've discovered something very significant: the lack of acknowledgement toward the diversity in Kirkwood has to do with a term called "white privilege". Now that I know how white privilege is impacting me, I can make a change for the better.

There is a lot of good in Kirkwood. We have awesome neighborhoods, excellent public and private schools, a mixture of religions, a variety of shops, a conglomeration of food, and an abundance of new and classic housing. People want to live here. Kirkwood has everything to give to its residents, which is what makes such a cozy town appealing. We even have a town square, a water park, an ice rink, a lake, and a splendid collection of public parks. With so many great things available to us, of course there is a cost. The cost of living is difficult to manage for a heap of people living in Kirkwood and for those who are trying to move into Kirkwood. It's a little pricey here. The cost of living squeezes out lower income families and creates a more exclusive community, comprised of mostly white people of a higher median income. But I walk down the halls of Kirkwood High School and see different faces, social groups and mixtures of personalities. We feel like a community but, while I have not really noticed tension, there's some separation happening here.

Walking down the Kirkwood High School halls I see diversity— of personality. I realize now I do not see an extreme diversity of culture. And, I realize people of color are very aware of ethnic differences, and are actually treated differently based on the color of their skin. Looking at the statistics it is clear I was missing the big picture of diversity in Kirkwood. Residents in Kirkwood are 91% White, 7% Black, 1% Asian, with a very small percentage being Hawaiian and American Indian. I was blind to the majority/minority issue and, apparently, this is a common phenomenon among white people. "In critical race theory, 'white privilege' is a set of advantages enjoyed by white people beyond those commonly experienced by non-white people in the

same social, political, and economic spaces (nation, community, workplace, income, etc.). Theorists differentiate it from racism or prejudice because, they say, a person who may benefit from white privilege is not necessarily racist or prejudiced and may be unaware of having any privileges reserved only for whites” (McIntosh). Gee whiz. I’m not colorblind. I’m oblivious. Kirkwood is a white-dominated community with a majority of residents, like me, seeing the world through the lens of white privilege.

So here’s how I see it. I don’t think twice about walking into a store to shop and being treated as a good customer. But a friend of mine who is black is looked at with suspicion. Is he a shoplifter? I don’t think twice about walking in a park or down a street at night, but my friend who has black skin has been stopped by the police, for no apparent reason. I swear I haven’t been aware that this has been happening. The privileges I have had since birth because my skin is white are many, whether when shopping, how I am treated by a teacher, how I am judged when walking down a street, and how strangers assume things about me. I’m a white, blonde haired teenager with blue eyes; I’m an athlete and a good friend. I am automatically given a social “pass” because I am white. My black friends are not. They have to earn their social status every day. They didn’t get it when they were born with black skin. I swear I did not know this before.

Now that I am aware of white privilege, I am asking more questions and thinking about what I can do to change my perceptions. I want to see my community for what it is, and make it a better place for everyone who lives here. I am sorry for the existing racial tensions, and that people of color have been treated unfairly, and

sometimes do not have a voice. I am sorry for my part in this—for not seeing it. I'll bet that many Kirdwoodians have never even heard the term "white privilege"; I hadn't. The city of Kirkwood needs to help its citizens become more aware of the minority cultures around us. The best way to exhibit diversity is through a cultural festival that brings everyone together and presents different activities and cultures. A festival, similar to Greentree, represents the essence of community in Kirkwood and would be the best way to educate citizens in a fun setting. At this point in time such a festival does not exist and until then I need to become more aware of the diversity issues around me. My promise to Kirkwood is to understand more about white privilege, to engage in conversations about white privilege, to help educate our community about being colorblind, and about all that awaits us when we see Kirkwood through a new lens—a lens that helps us see people as people, not a color.

<http://www.deanza.edu/faculty/leeethan/glossary.html> McIntosh, Peggy. "Intercultural Studies Glossary—White Privilege". DeAnza College. Copyright September 29th, 2010.

2nd Place
Emily Goyda
(2 in this category)

OCT 25 2010

Kirkwood Human Rights Commission 11th Grade Essay Contest
Discovering Diversity

Emily Goyda
Kirkwood High School

When my editor at *The Kirkwood Call* approached me one day last January and assigned me to cover what he described as “some race mediation thing between Kirkwood and Meacham Park,” I quite literally scoffed. Why in the world did Kirkwood need a racial mediation agreement? We seemed to get along just fine. As a good little staffer though, I grudgingly obliged. After reading up on my new topic on the city website, I packed up my notebook, tape recorder and camera and flitted on over to City Hall for what I assumed would be a quick story on the proceedings of the night. Alas, as soon as I sat down next to a veteran reporter, soon to become my mentor through the process, who was already deep into a series on “Kirkwood’s Journey,” I knew I was in for a long trek. I spent four months picking my way through paths that led me to stories of conflict, discrimination and anger, of success, determination and happiness, and what I learned in the process was invaluable. Any marker which may have pointed vaguely toward racial conflict, I followed and along the way familiarized myself with the stories and opinions of countless African American people living in Kirkwood. From my experiences I concluded this: everyone in Kirkwood has an identity, defined by elements like gender, socioeconomic status and background. Above all, though, Kirkwoodians tend to struggle with defining themselves by race. Recognizing that race plays only as much of a role in defining a person as all other characteristics, no more and no less, and should be treated as exactly that, will help Kirkwoodians move toward creating a community more sensitive to all citizens.

Recognizing a division between African American and white citizens of Kirkwood does, in fact, exist, will play an instrumental role in closing that gap. So many meetings I sat through involved skirting the issue, referring to problems in cryptic terms and never quite coming out to say, “There are black people in Kirkwood. There are white people in Kirkwood, and some of us

do not like each other.” By ignoring the fact some people feel an issue exists, those peoples’ feelings suffer another blow and the rift deepens. When writing an editorial for a school paper, the second paragraph should consist only of a concession to the other side. That way, the other side goes into the editorial built up, unoffended and less likely to notice a dismantlement of their viewpoint. Often the most-ignored element of scholastic editorial writing, this concession allows papers like *The Kirkwood Call* to garner national recognition. In the same way, I urge Kirkwood citizens who want to move past the issue of racial division to allow concessions to the opposition. Unless compromise occurs, both sides will spout their arguments all day long. At too many of the meetings I attended regarding the mediation agreement, community members who vehemently regarded the actions taken as ineffective talked in circles that ran far over their five minute time limit while members of the mediation team attempted to continue to maintain complete opposition. The method failed to get anything accomplished for either side, and both returned home that night with only more hurt feelings. Kirkwoodians who want to make the community inclusive of all diversity, especially race, need to stand up and admit a problem exists in Kirkwood. Then, stressing the point that every person in Kirkwood belongs here plays a crucial role to creating an inclusive environment. I heard the reason why people live in Kirkwood repeated over and over again by my sources. When I asked them why they live here, though they feel treated differently by the white majority, they all agreed on one thing. One African American girl made the point especially well. “Well,” she said. “I have a mom and a dad and a dog and two older brothers, and we own three cars and a big house and have plenty of money to spare. It’s not like some upper-middle class people like us can just live in Webster.” In that statement, she embodied the Kirkwood spirit of contentedness, community pride and an intense disdain for

Webster. The Kirkwood community needs to let all citizens know that despite any fears they may have, they live here as valued members of the Kirkwood community.

True sensitivity toward diversity comes from recognizing diversity and embracing differences rather than ignoring them. Male and female diversity demonstrates this concept all too well. Rather than ignoring the fact genders exist and attempting to treat all people androgynously, society has come to embrace the differences in genders in all their glory. Women experiment with make up and wear their hair long, while men wear pants and indulge in sports. Just because society embraces certain gender roles, though, does not necessarily mean they must be followed. Women become carpenters and men become ballerinas. Since there such a comfort with diversity in elements of an individual such as gender, less tension exists in the community setting. The Kirkwood community needs to be certain to weight race no more or no less heavily than other defining elements. This level of comfort has yet to be reached in the Kirkwood community when defining the role of race, though. "So many people try to act black around me," said one African American girl, an AP student, who I talked to. "They do things like the head-nod they think are black. I've even had a teacher try to say 'yo' to me." These kind of actions demonstrate the lack of sensitivity that exists toward diversity. Males do not tend to try and act more feminine around females, or vice-versa. A general acceptance exists for people on an individual basis rather than letting them be defined by their gender statuses. The Kirkwood community needs to make sure not to make race the foremost defining element of character, despite a more outward visibility.

The main problem I have found with overcoming the problem with embracing race stems from the lack of willingness people have to listen to each other. If only people would take the

time to listen to those on the opposing side of this argument, they would learn far more than by attempting to share their own opinions all the time. The most enlightening day of my entire writing process came early on, when I sat down in the dingy back room of the Kirkwood journalism building with five African American girls at Kirkwood High who wanted to make a difference for themselves. I asked one question. "What role do you think your race plays at Kirkwood High?" Then I pressed record and sat back as their conversation bounced about the room. After four long hours of just listening and recording, I was startled when the drone of the bell pierced through the conversation, signaling the end to the school day. The veteran journalist I had befriended complimented me as I walked out. "You can really interview," he said. "I would have never gotten some of that." The only thing I could think to say was, "No. I can really listen." By hearing those girls talk, I could clearly define my own role in what they identified as their problem. In this fashion, Kirkwoodians need to sit down and look at their own roles in the problems with racial diversity, and they need to admit those roles. I could see the girls' points and empathize with them. Listening to my sources ignited a passion in me, directed toward helping people of all races in Kirkwood feel as if they belong. As an individual, I plan to intensify the curiosity I built up regarding people's views on racial diversity in Kirkwood. I have already made a point to go out of my way and learn people's opinions on the matter. When surveyed, 82% of a sample portion of Kirkwood High students said they feel there at least some racial discrimination exists at our school. I personally want to talk to every person in that 82% and get to know why they think that. Just having the knowledge of how others feel about the issue has allowed me to go about my daily life in a much more open and sensitive manner, and I want to give other people the same chance to change their attitudes as I had. So far, I have begun

informing people who do not want to sacrifice as much time gathering information as I did, for information allowed me to understand how to help the community. So I wrote an article. I labored over designing my spread in a way that would draw readers in, because more than anything I wanted this article to be read. When the paper hit newsstands, I knew I had started doing my job properly. People approached me and said, "I never realized that some people feel this way," and how they continued on made me glow more than anything else. "How can I help?" they asked me. I told them what I had learned: "Listen to people. Accept them. Most of all, identify what you yourself are doing to contribute to their plight." And I saw a change. One of the five girls I had sat down with told me, "I had a teacher apologize to me for things I said had happened in the article." Based on these responses, I plan to continue to tell the stories of the diverse students, starting with those who are African American, because to me, their stories make up the bulk of the conflict in the community, at Kirkwood High school. By telling these stories, I can open the eyes of the students around me, who, like I used to, know very little about the lack of sensitivity some students face due to their diversities.

As a whole, the Kirkwood community needs to stop talking and listen. By truly listening and processing the concerns of citizens, Kirkwood eliminates a large part of the conflict seen at City Hall meetings today. By listening, leaders can come to accept how their actions impact others. Most of all, by listening, those who take the initiative to learn valuable information can in turn share facts with those around them. Each and every Kirkwoodian has a duty to learn and share the concerns of all Kirkwood citizens so everyone can make an effort to remedy their role in problems and come to value each and every person as an individual. I see look at the situation way: if people creating a newspaper did not recognize the value of black and white and all the

shades in between, newspapers would not be able to tell their stories, and only when all of those elements come together do the most priceless tales of all play out. In the Kirkwood community, a chance to reach a less conflicted status exists if only citizens invest the time to learn the value of each other and themselves.

2nd Place
Ellen Fritschle
(2 in this category)

OCT 22 2010

Erasing the Line

Ellen Fritschle

Kirkwood High School

Invisible and unofficial lines, that sunder the races, run through Kirkwood. People think of areas like Meacham Park and immediately think, "Black." Kirkwood citizens see the primarily African American community of Meacham Park and predominantly Caucasian community of Glendale and make assumptions based on race. Judgmental and racial comments flood our schools and society, instilling beliefs of superiority in select groups. Prejudiced jokes and degrading comments enflame the magnitude of racism. Students tend to sit with groups primarily of their own color. Although they associate with other races, they do not construct the same type of close relationships that they do with others of their own ethnicity. The citizens of Kirkwood can try to deny the fact that racial lines ramify the city, but the brazen boundaries still exist. So when did it become okay to categorize groups and make assumptions about people in certain areas of Kirkwood? The inner problem lies within a lack of understanding, and ultimately results in a lack of sensitivity. Socioeconomic and cultural differences racially divide Kirkwood; however a community group serving Kirkwood can eradicate racial lines and develop understanding.

This astounding city of Kirkwood offers much to its residents however, all the wonderful conveniences of such a special town come at a heavy price -- a financial price. According to a real estate search engine, Zillow.com, homes in Meacham Park cost between 30,000 and 500,000 dollars whereas, homes in Glendale cost between 150,000 and 1.2 million dollars. Socioeconomic differences between Caucasians and African Americans help separate races. Housing in some parts of Kirkwood costs less than housing in other parts of Kirkwood.

However, all too often, one group assumes that since another racial group lives in an area with cheaper homes and ranks lower on the social scale, they deserve less respect. Many of the people who live in Meacham Park cannot afford better housing, but a vast majority just happen to belong to the African American race. Demeaning views and discrimination of other groups gives one race an overwhelming egotistical feeling which can result in omnipotence.

Unfortunately, in Kirkwood, one group does have a more powerful status in society than another. When one coterie already has power, its members rarely give up that sovereignty willingly to accept new people and ideas. The citizens of Kirkwood need a way to experience life from the perspective of another race to develop empathy. Empathy leads to understanding and understanding leads to sensitivity for one another.

To solve the issue of a lack of perceptivity, we must bring people of all races and ethnicities together. Through communication and hard work for a common cause, barriers will disappear and skin color will fade in the forefront of people's minds. For this reason, I would take action by starting and leading a Kirkwood Youth Human Rights Organization.

Encouragement through the school to get involved would persuade students to join for a common cause: community diversity. The group would focus on advocating for human rights however, actions speak louder than words. Volunteering within the community would take precedence over simply telling the community how to fix the problem. I would organize fundraisers so the association could earn money for beneficial projects and groups in the city and also volunteer to improve Kirkwood. Volunteers could participate in many different forms of community service, like tutoring younger children, helping businesses and charities, cleaning projects and planning fun activities to encourage involvement of other students. The necessary teamwork in these activities would strengthen the group of volunteers. Taking the initiative and starting the

Kirkwood Youth Human Rights Organization encourages involvement from many different groups. In order to begin a massive change in Kirkwood and persuade others to join, the students and I must show other citizens the possibilities of such a community group. Through the students' teamwork, not only will racial barriers fall due to more open communication and interaction with other cultures, but Kirkwood will have a group striving to benefit the community. Our strong city will continue to flourish, not only architecturally, but socially as well.

Beginning with a school organization can travel much farther than Kirkwood High School and its students: the younger generation can inspire the adult community to participate in community service projects, since adults can make differences that students cannot. By doing so, the older generation also has an opportunity to engage in social improvement. Through a group like the Kirkwood Human Rights Organization, adults could also play a role in bettering Kirkwood. This association could improve many areas around the city through building projects, legislative acts and participation in the same community service activities as students. Working for a common cause brings everyone or at least a fair number of Kirkwood citizens together to enhance the feeling of community. The motto of Kirkwood is "Where community and spirit meet." Advocating for human rights and equality also congregates many different groups. Enriching the city also develops a prominent sense of spirit, and common spirit and pride decreases the importance of race or ethnicity. Less emphasis³ on social differences increases sensitivity and ultimately results in an equal and strong community.

Creating groups to integrate the community will bring people, no matter how different, together for a common cause. We all take pride in the wonderful city we live in, so let us all work together to heighten that spirit. By working together, we can form ties to others and begin

learning more about the other person. Communication cultivates realization and empathy, and eventually, race and ethnicity will gain less importance. Through empathy and understanding, all the citizens of Kirkwood will develop a sensitivity towards diversity. After all, Kirkwood is “where community and spirit meet.”

3rd Place
Dajae Williams

OCT 25 2010

Dajae Williams

Kirkwood High School

Dajae Williams

The City of Kirkwood strives to provide quality services responsibly and ethically, honoring our heritage, encouraging citizen involvement, respecting all views, supporting thriving neighborhoods and successful businesses, and promoting a sustainable environment. Fifteen years ago Meacham Park, a thriving neighborhood, was annexed into the city of Kirkwood allowing services to them like trash pickup, police, fire protection, etc. I'm neither a member of Kirkwood or Meacham park, but I've notice that although provided with all the same privileges as other citizens of Kirkwood, the people of Meacham park play close to no role in the larger community. Those citizens of Meacham Park receive none of the attention they need until devastating events occur, giving them a bad reputation. This causes some citizens of Kirkwood to falsely call the community of Meacham Park "A Problem," when the real problem is that crime and catastrophe acts as their only solution to demanding attention. To avoid this lack of sensitivity towards diversity solutions integrating a since of kinship and unity should take place in the city of Kirkwood.

As many of us know Meacham park was intervened by eminent domain a few years after the annexation into Kirkwood, in 1992. The development of Kirkwood commons sparked many disputes between the people of Meacham Park and Kirkwood. The disputes came about when residents of Meacham Park wondered just who the people of Kirkwood were talking about when they say that Kirkwood would "strive to...Honor our heritage". The members of Meacham Park felt that Kirkwood cleared no space for them at the table where real decisions are made. Better yet they are being hidden by the big commercial areas containing places like Sams Club, Walmart, and Target. Sarah Tucker, a junior at KHS, was not even aware that Meacham Park existed until middle school, partly because the big commercial areas put

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Meacham Park in Kirkwood's shadow. No one wants to feel out of the loop or forgotten, so they turn to outrageous gestures, such as the Killing of William McEntee or the shooting at Kirkwood's city hall. If only Meacham Parks heritage was honored by creating Jazz venues or beauty salons that reflect them maybe crime in that area wouldn't be so prominent; they would have a place to go hang, a place to fit in, something they no longer have due to the commercial development where they failed to respect all views.

A simple name can change so much. For example Kirkwood's high school football team, a well organized group, play under one new name: Pioneers, stick together as a one, and try prove that they are the best together. This same idea needs to take hold in the city of Kirkwood, so everyone as a community can stick together and prove that the city of Kirkwood is the best. The first step to making this team is collecting players. Some people who live in sub counties such as Des Peres, Glendale, and Oakland "consider themselves part of Kirkwood" say Paige Crowley, a member of Glendale, so they should definitely be a part of the team.

Meacham Park, often on the sideline, is already part of the team but has slowly drifted away, so communications with them should be rebuilt. After collecting players the teammates must get to know each other. No more "Glendale recycling tours" or "Meacham Park homecomings," activities held in Kirkwood should honor all heritages, and encourage all citizens' involvement, not separate counties. The next step is to build the team. Yes, some independency will be taken away but one soldier is not nearly as powerful as a whole army: meaning that the communities will be a lot stronger and influential if they work together. Communities will no longer be divided between social differences or city borderlines but will create a new definition for everyone, deleting past connotations that came with each name. No, this solution will not be

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easy, but by taking away the privilege of separate naming will “Promote a sustainable environment”. The old and new members of Kirkwood will come together and fight the same battle, leaving all other disputes behind.

Geographical and all other technical changes may look to be a start in the revolution, but solutions must start on the personal level. I also understand there is no sure way to convince citizens to change, so I plan to begin with myself. In Meacham Park the members celebrate many festivities such as Meacham park homecoming and parade, a day where all citizens of Meacham Park come together as one community. I didn't go last year because I believed a comment that was made about the event telling me that the parade was uncivil and not fun. This year I will not only attend the homecoming I plan to encourage a couple of friends from Kirkwood to attend with me. At Kirkwood High, a place where the two parties Kirkwood and Meacham Parked interact, I've noticed that during school the parties seldom communicate whether we're at lunch or in class. To change this I plan to randomly sit at lunch with them or be their party during an activity during class. Hopefully my friends from Kirkwood follow my lead and give their neighbors a chance. I hope Breaking original cliques in the younger generations will not only help gap the bridge between students at Kirkwood high but be set as an example for the older generation who reside in Kirkwood. In my A.P. (Advanced Placement) Language class, the class which assigned this essay, I see no one who resides in Meacham Park and during preparation I wondered what a student from Meacham Park would suggest as a solution. As an underdog in the problem they may possess solution that will not be heard; in order to make their voices be heard I plan to ask teachers who educate these students to consider assigning this essay, So all opinions can be heard. Every change in the world could

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be made to the Kirkwood community but if the people don't make an effort to change, the changes will be as effective as the annexation, barely.

Many Citizens of Kirkwood may think I have nothing to do with the lack of sensitivity towards diversity in their city because I do not live in Kirkwood, but maybe thoughts from someone on the outside looking in can help. I know how hectic conflicts can become, and usually with a mediator, who looks at both sides equally, a fair solution can be made. Through these solutions I attempted to bring Meacham Park from behind the scenes, which will hopefully kill the unwanted attention Kirkwood has received because of crime in Meacham. Not saying that my solutions are perfect but I strived to provide the most unbiased solution I could to help out a fellow provider and friend to me, Kirkwood.

Honorable
Mention
Rachel Kibby

OCT 25 2010

Empathy Through Experience

Rachel Kibby

Waiting for the abuse to cease I sit dumbly on the gym floor, ignoring the threats and insults. Through my teary eyes, I can see color. I can see four black girls verbally attacking me, the one white girl. I began to see the people from Meacham Park as one big group, a gang. I resented them. I became distrustful of them. Most of all I did not understand them. Why do they act the way they do? A year later, I found myself in Meacham to complete 12 hours of tutoring for a community service project. I feel uneasy. Although I go to the same school as many of the people who live there, I have never entered any of the homes, never spent the night, and never attended a birthday party. Inside the tutoring building, an eager fifth grader meets me. She stares up at me with her bright brown eyes and smiles. *Something looks oddly familiar about her. How do I know her?* The tutoring session ends; the kids dismissed. I open the door to leave and come face to face with one of the four black girls. The girl takes up the hand her sister, the fifth grader I had been tutoring, smiles, and says "Hi Rachel." I began to see the girl as Jasmine, rather than one of the black girls from my school. I now saw her as an individual and perhaps she saw me the same way. I learned a very important lesson that day; changes in perception can happen from experiences.

Before Kirkwood can mend the racial rift in the community, the dividing preconceptions and stereotypes must be squashed. Changes cannot be taught; they

must be learned through an enlightening experience. The Kirkwood school system turns values into definable teaching points and espouses them in a classroom with phrases such as "You Belong at Nipher" or "The Bullying Stops Here." Teenagers in particular generally make a mockery of the conveyed values and disregard them completely. However, by encouraging interracial interactions, rather than just teaching a dictionary definition of acceptance, Kirkwood will see the needed change. Even small experiences such as a "hi" from a middle school tormentor can break down the judgements that prove deleterious to black-white relationships.

Easing the tension between the two races that make up most of Kirkwood can be as easy as starting a Facebook group. Facebook has gained rampant popularity among the teens of Kirkwood High School. Why not use the already well-known website as a way of advancing the black-white relationship within the Kirkwood community? The group would be comprised of Kirkwood teenagers who wish to improve the interracial relations in the community. I would serve as the moderator involved in deleting disrespectful posts, soliciting appropriate topics for discussion, and actively participating to help model positive dialogue. To measure the success of the group, I would set a goal to have at least 100 members in the group within four months. The group will be interracial. Empathetic posts will be exchanged and an honest discussion about personal issues will take place.

While the micro-community develops on the internet, a face to face gathering can be arranged as the long term goal. Many of the white kids have probably never stepped foot in Meacham Park, so a barbecue will take place in the park at Meacham. Since the barbecue would be the first actual meeting of the group, an icebreaker would be

required. An effective way of becoming comfortable with new people would be the use of "Touch Groups." Touch Groups consist of about ten people who get to know each other on a more intimate level through typical get-to-know-you games: two truths and a lie, would you rather, and truth or dare. Although seemingly childish, the little moments of laughter and exchange of interesting tidbits of information can surprisingly build new perceptions and a new understanding. After 20 minutes or so, the Touch Groups will again convene into one larger group. The Touch Group ensures that everyone has at least a small friend base within the crowd of people. If all goes well, the group will schedule another meeting and hopefully continue to meet every two or three months.

The benefit of the Facebook group can be described in one sentence. A group of Kirkwood teens from two different races would come to know each other as individuals, just as I came to understand Jasmine.