

many voices, one movement



# First Generation

a performing arts project

A newsletter for ensemble, families and friends of First Generation

JANUARY 2010



## A LOOK BACK ... HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR FIRST YEAR!

**2008 SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER** Our journey started in September when we put the word out to youth, families and community organizations about First Generation inviting Hampden and Hampshire County youth to join. The excitement, support and interest were overwhelming! Between October and December, we held an open mic event, inviting Springfield youth groups, a welcoming celebration for the First Gen members and their families, and went on many field trips to see theater and dance performances. In December we went on our first weekend retreat. A deep appreciation and thanks to Nancy Tolson, who helped begin First Generation and braved the first bumpy steps with us!

**2009 JANUARY – JUNE** The First Generation ensemble continued with artistic training, attended many theater and dance performances, and went on intensive weekend retreats. The ensemble had the opportunity to work with artists Maria Luisa Arroyo, Paul Dennis, Leslie Farlow, Evelyn Harris, I-SHEA, Anibal Jimenez, Max Lee, Elsa Menendez, Heshima Moja, Jo Sallins, Steven Sapp, Nancy Tolson, DW Walker, Carla Wojczuk and facilitators Beth Mattison and James Arana.

**IN JUNE** we had a Benefit Concert and Sneak Preview of work being developed by the ensemble. It was a powerful evening of music, dance, theater, and spoken word hosted by Julius Ford, introducing the First Generation Ensemble. There were performances by Julius Ford, I-SHEA, DW, Nancy Tolson, Julissa Rodriguez, Jo Sallins, Sana Ndiaye, the All Star Dancers, Paris Holmes, and a dance group from the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Society.

**IN JULY** First Generation members and Rebecca M Johnson School collaborated on our pilot Summer Arts Program focusing on inter-generational mentoring and leadership development through the arts. After a week long intensive training, the FG members became teacher-apprentices, mentoring 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in theater, visual art, writing, music and dance.

**IN AUGUST** Our work culminated with performances of through the eye of bakok, an original First Generation creation of theater, storytelling, spoken word, and movement to honor the past and inspire the present. "bakok" is a Dinka word meaning, "One who must leave their home and travel to another place."

**IN DECEMBER** Carla Wojczuk, artist, and Performance Project and First Generation member facilitated a mural project collaborating with Gesenia Gutierrez, Jesenia Paredes, Fernando Ortiz, Elahn Santiago, and Andy Maldonado, five mural artists from Holyoke High School. This phenomenal and powerful mural can be seen on the wall of the Victory Theater on Suffolk Street in Holyoke.



**We would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the ensemble, families, mentors, artists, friends, volunteers, and supporters that have believed in First Generation. Thank you for believing in our work, and believing in the power of ART to connect us and help us celebrate our full humanity!**

**Our heartfelt thanks to Ms. Francine Pina-Council, Dr. Edison Santana and the Rebecca M Johnson School for partnering with us, providing us with a home, and sharing our passion for the arts, inter-generational mentoring and social justice!**



**A LOOK FORWARD ... NEWS, EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS!**

**2010** A new year for First Generation, and a new group of 20 first generation youth! As Springfield welcomes the newly arrived Bhutanese community, First Generation is joined by 12 Bhutanese youth who are sharing their culture, language and first generation experiences with us through their artistic talents and explorations. Our group continues to meet at Rebecca Johnson on Mondays and Thursdays from 3:30 to 5:30.

**WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS:**

- |                   |                                |                       |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Jhuma Acharaya    | Iyawna Burnett                 | Gita Koirala          |
| Devi Adhikari     | Joanna Bynum                   | Parshu Koirala        |
| Lakshima Adhikari | Mohine Gorshi                  | Shakurah Abdul Raheem |
| Devi Basnet       | Prakash Gurung                 | Krishna Rapal         |
| Bhima Basnet      | Shareef Ibrahim, (coordinator) | Monti Watson          |
| Devron Brady      | Chabi Lal Khadka               | Monique Wilson        |

**COMING UP**

**FAMILY WELCOME AND OPENING CELEBRATION:** February 11<sup>th</sup> 6:00-8:00pm at Rebecca M Johnson School. Families are invited to bring and share food, music, song, dance, and poetry! We hope all families will come and celebrate with the new First Generation members who are beginning their journey as artists and leaders!

**AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT TO SUPPORT EXTRAORDINARY VISIONS:** APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup> at the Northampton Center for the Arts, you are invited to an evening of performances in which you will learn about a most extraordinary journey that the ensemble has begun! This evening will be a fundraiser for First Generation.

**THE ENSEMBLE**

Building on the success of *through the eye of bakok* we are continuing to work on the play with a permanent ensemble composed of existing cast members and several new members. Weaving in new stories, the cast of Bakok will continue to develop the play into a professional-quality production. The expanded cast ranging in age from ages 17 to 54 includes Abolish Lual, Shareef Ibrahim, Ito Udofila, Kinnethia Tolson, Paris Holmes, Ago Garung, Ashley Gadson, Chiino Rios, Rabin Adhikari, and Yussuf Kassim. We welcome Ingrid Askew, who joins Julie Lichtenberg as co-director of the ensemble. Ingrid is an actress, director and cultural activist, whose work has spanned over 20 years in the New England area. Ingrid has recently returned from 10 years in South Africa, where she developed cultural exchanges and programs with township youth, South African and American artists/activists, and refugees. The First Generation community is honored and excited to have Mama Ingh on board!

**JULIUS FORD**

The Performance Project has been shaped over the past ten years by the talents and vision of all the individuals who joined and worked with the project. Among the many, there is one person, Julius Ford, who shared his voice and vision as he MC'd all our concerts and several of our performances. His gift to us, every time he spoke, sang, and praised, was to remind us that we are part of a movement, and we are building a movement. That we should always stretch to hold the larger picture, and keep faith that our power is gathering momentum. Thank you, Brother Julius. We are forever touched by your wisdom and faith. Julie



**Thank you Reza, of Tiger Press, for your generosity!**



This program is supported by the Springfield Cultural Council, a local agency supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council

**First Generation** is an intensive, arts-based and youth leadership-development program.

**First Generation** provides a platform for young people to have a public voice in their community, and beyond, through creative expression and thoughtful exploration of what it means to be **First Generation**.

The Performance Project creates theater about oppression and liberation. Through our multi-generational collaborations we examine the effects of racism, economic oppression, bigotry, and violence, and create compelling works of theater, movement, and spoken-word. Our performances engage audiences in dialogue about critical social and cultural issues.