

## Hispanic youths in Morristown learn leadership skills this week from Wind of the Spirit

Posted by [jjduffy](#) July 01, 2009 08:46AM



Jamie Duffy Sixteen Morristown youths are attending a leadership seminar this week at Wind of the Spirit headquarters, learning about international human rights declared 60 years ago. Working on a collage are left to right: Michelle Vargas, Aura Blanco, Cynthia Vasquez and Wilmer Granda.

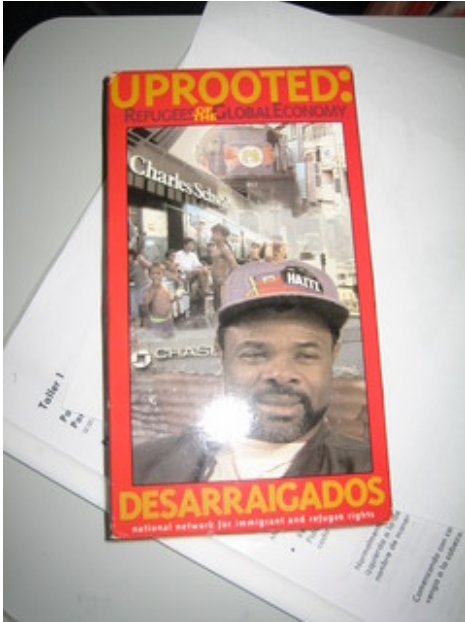
For three days this week, 16 bright Morristown students ages 13-21 are listening carefully to what **Diana Mejia** has to say.

"I really like listening to her," said Melissa Avila, 17. "They way she talks makes you want to listen."

Mejia, a founder of [Wind of the Spirit](#), a Morristown community rights organization, works as a community organizer with the Newark-based American Friends Service Committee. She is teaching this human rights seminar, based on a Friends curriculum, to students whose parents come from Peru, Honduras, Colombia and Ecuador.

Avila and her group of about six girls are working on a collage that emphasizes Articles 16-22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established more than six decades ago. They have chosen to spotlight sections dealing with the right to marry and have families and the right to choose a religion.

One of the photos in their collage is the violet-colored domestic abuse poster published recently by the Jersey Women's Battered Service and the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and mounted on Morris County billboards. A troubled Hispanic woman's face dominates the photo and the girls' collage.



Jamie Duffy The three day seminar opened with a 22-minute video on the global reasons for immigration. *Uprooted: Refugees of the Global Economy* is distributed by the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and the American Friends.

Offered free of charge, this seminar gives students "the tools to be able to understand how the system works," says Mejia.

Monday's class began with a 22-minute AFSC video entitled, *Uprooted: Refugees of the Global Economy*, circulated by the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. *Desarraigados* (in Spanish) explains why Central American farmers, among others, have been forced by global economic forces to look elsewhere for work.

The students have also learned some history. For Avila, the lesson on the Patriot Act created after 9-11 and recent deportation of Mexicans (*los braseros*) was particularly memorable.

Aura Blanco, speaking from another group, said the current crop of Hispanic immigrants will most likely flourish "later on and become respected."

For now, Avila says her parents - one from Ecuador and one from Colombia, - tend to keep a low profile. They have legal status in America but have friends who are not so lucky.

Avila has big plans for the future. "I want to go to college," she says, to become a doctor, probably a surgeon. Several of the students at the seminar boarded a bus last week and traveled to Washington D.C. for a United We Dream rally.

At least one seminar student, Diego, 18, is collecting scholarships in the hopes that he can attend college. A longtime resident here, Diego speaks perfect English and his clothes and hair are neat and trim.

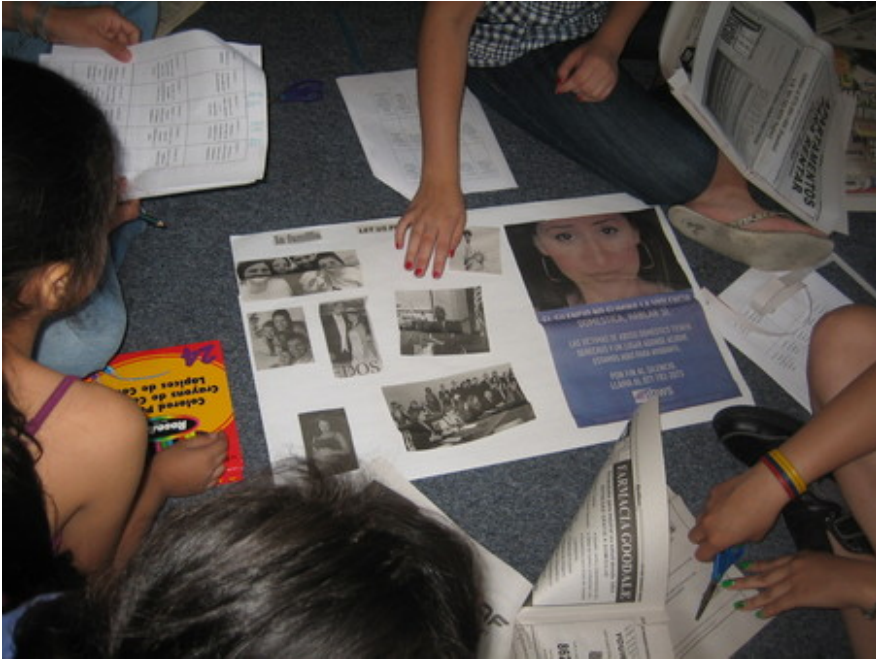
It bothers him when he hears about mistreatment of Hispanics. Recently he witnessed two Hispanic men pushed around by police as they sat on the curb in plastic handcuffs. It was a painful sight for one with big dreams.

He called the seminar "really interesting."

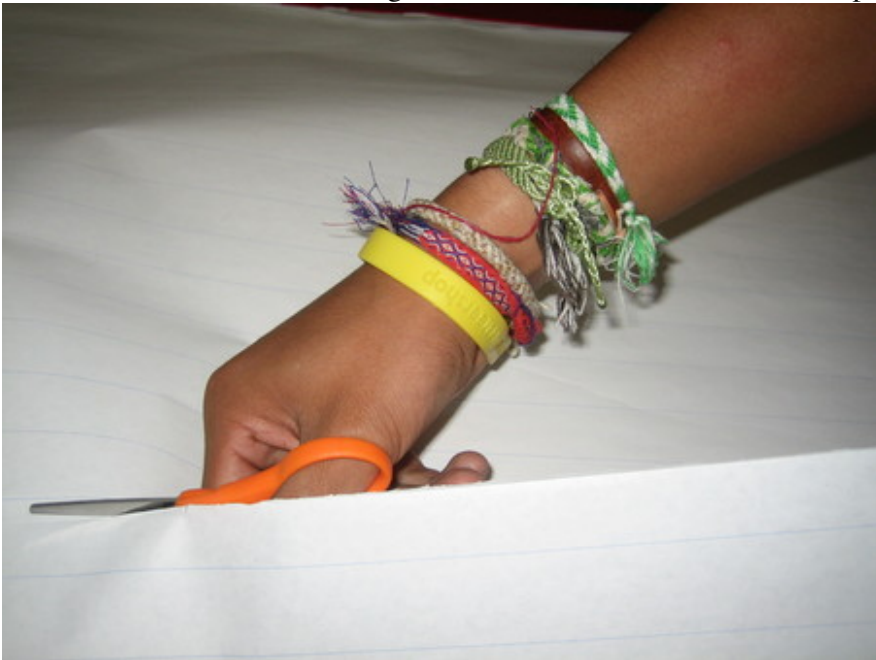
"It will help you with the future," Diego said.



Jamie Duffy Diana Mejia, co-founder of Wind of the Spirit and a community organizer with American Friends Service Committee in Newark, led the seminar.



Jamie Duffy At the right of the collage is a poster from a recent campaign by the Jersey Women's Battered Service and the Morris County Prosecutor's Office, to encourage victims of domestic violence to report their abuse.



Jamie Duffy Getting started on the collage.