

Child abuse

Essential question: "What is child abuse and what can be done to prevent it?"

School: Albert M. Greenfield Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA

Appropriate for grades: 7-8

Year of project: 2001-2002

Subjects: English language arts, art, communications, social studies

It can be difficult when students choose a complex and difficult issue like "child abuse" as the focus for their service-learning project. The springboard for learning in this case was a two-part series in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that graphically detailed a local case of child abuse. The award-winning journalist who wrote the story shared his experiences with the class.

The story described the circumstances surrounding the starvation death of a five-year-old, who spent her final days locked away in the basement of her home. The students read the story and wanted to know more.

The journalist, Shankar Vedantam, who had moved to the *Washington Post*, agreed to communicate with the students via e-mail, giving them the chance to discuss aspects of the case – an unusual opportunity, given the sensitive nature of the problem. They also met with the clergyman who counseled the child's mother, to learn about the situation from his perspective.

An attorney from the Support Center for Child Advocates talked with the class about local child abuse policy and the Center's services.

To raise awareness about this complex problem, the students created a calendar with information, artwork and poetry about child abuse, and a local copy center generously printed copies.

"Teachers struggle routinely to get students excited and motivated about work. That was not the case with this project, as it generated a lot of enthusiasm."
— Renell Hollis, teacher