

Warriors for Peace

by Tanna Howard

Born in 1958 in the middle of segregation, yeah that was me. Trying to make sense of who I was, and where I belonged. All I knew was that I was this little colored girl in the middle of a segregated community in Asheboro, N.C. where signs read, "For Whites Only." "Why?" I didn't have the have the answer then. I don't now. Signs may no longer be posted but, for many, the heartfelt hatred still exists.

Today I live in the midst of one of our poorest communities: Hartford, CT, a place where poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, drugs, and violence define my neighborhood. A place where I'm trying to raise three sons. A place where I anxiously yearn for the presence of my sixteen-year-old when he is not at home by 9pm. A place where gangs are now considered "family" because for many youth family does not exist—may have never existed. A place where I hear my people silently crying out for help except no one else seems to hear them.

Peace, yes peace. What does it mean for us? I want my children to know what love feels like. I want them to feel contentment in their souls instead of fear. I want to see smiles on the faces of the children that I see each day instead of anger and disgust. I want to sleep at night knowing that we are okay.

But how do we get there? I have learned over the years that education is a tool that one must learn to use constructively to make change throughout our communities. I entered college at the age of 42. While I was attending school I realized that I had internalized a lot of resentment toward white people for the conditions in which my people lived. I later understood that it was not only about black people, but about poor people. My social justice courses at school provided me with a great depth of knowledge about our economic systems and how they work. I real-



Tanna Howard at work in Hartford, CT.

ized that there is economic warfare in this country—the poor have to remain poor in order for the rich to get richer!

Now that I've graduated I want to be an advocate for the poor. I want to give back to my community. I want to preach the value of education to adults, their children, and their children's children.

I believe that if we gain a meaningful understanding of how the present came to be, we can generate endless possibilities for the future. I believe that it is my responsibility to help people realize that we cannot destroy this pit from hell to which we have been relegated unless we possess the knowledge to seal it up.

We need a new civil rights movement! We need to march for peace and put an end to poverty. We need jobs, not prisons! Education can help us understand the causes of the poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, drugs, and violence that we live in and it can inspire in us a desire to make a difference. If we say that we are activists for peace then let's prove it!

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