

LIVONIA OBSERVER

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Livonia group kicks off youth series with 'Mr. Peace'

Sharon Dargay, Staff Writer May 29, 2015



Colleen Mills hopes a combination of music, poetry, hip hop artistry and motivational messages will inspire teens to follow their passions this summer. "It's basically to get the kids involved in something that touches their hearts to improve the world. We're trying to encourage students to get involved in something important, like their future," said Mills, president of Citizens for Peace, a Livonia-based organization dedicated to the practice and principles of non-violence. "So, we're drawing them in with Kevin Szawala, who has devoted his life to peace activism for young people." Szawala, 30, of Redford, is a motivational speaker known as "Mr. Peace" and a youth minister at St. James Catholic Church in Novi. He'll kick off the organization's "Summer of Youth," monthly meetings that will focus on youth issues. His free concert, with poetry, hip hop and inspirational message starts at 7 p.m. Tuesday, June 9, at Unity of Livonia, 28660 Five Mile, Livonia. Betty Appleby of Detroit will be on hand to talk about a peace quilt she created. Although the meeting is aimed at youth, it's also open to adults. Young attendees will receive guides with ideas for getting involved in peace-related activities, along with a pack of "conversation starter" cards about love, forgiveness and compassion. "They'll be getting a lot of cool stuff and hopefully they'll take it home with them and think about what they can do this summer. That's what we're hoping to motivate them to do," Mills said.

Inspirational speaker

Szawala, who presented an anti-bullying program May 22 at Franklin High School in Livonia, started his motivational speaking forum, Being Who I Want 2 B, in 2006. He found his passion for peace activism while studying economics, Spanish and global change at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. "I think it was through a series of meeting certain people. You know, you're called to do something greater and act on it. It was one of those things that I had gone to some life-changing workshops...I was off and running and started to go after my passion. It was peace for me." Szawala started a peace day event on campus that will celebrate its 10th year in September. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he spent five years working in management and marketing for a corporation, but used his days off for peace work and motivational speaking. He earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Wayne State University before leaving the corporate world in 2010. As the state coordinator for the national Department of Peace campaign, Szawala traveled throughout Michigan in 2011 promoting the idea of a state peace and justice commission. "By 2012 I was pretty much a full time speaker. You can't put a price tag on passion. I ended up going another route," he said, reflecting on his split from his management and marketing work. "And I haven't looked back since. My spirit and soul have been fulfilled since then."

Get involved

In his talks, he encourages students to discover and follow their passion, to consider their dreams. "Ask yourself, what makes you come alive. Tell me something you're passionate about. My greatest passion is helping other people find theirs or begin the search." For more on Citizens for Peace, visit www.citizens4peace.com, or for 'Mr. Peace', visit: www.mrpeace.net

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