



# Ethical ction Report

*A publication of the American Ethical Union (AEU)*

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Number 14-06

June 2014

## Welcome to the Ethical Action Report 2.0

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### ***Kids In Deed Community Service, Alison Pratt, Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island***

At the American Ethical Union Assembly in Chicago this May, there were lots of conversations about how to grow Ethical Culture. One *Ethical Action Report* contributor, Alison Pratt from the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, sent me this piece of sage advice:

“It seems that if we want to grow as a movement, we need to inspire the adults to create Ethical Action programs for children.” The Long Island Society has a successful program called *Kids In Deed* and we would like to share more about it today.

This program, taken from Felix Adler's admonition to place "Deed Before Creed," is small but active – they have many service projects throughout the year.



*Last year children engaged in a Thanksgiving project to make lunches for a local soup kitchen, complete with bags they colorfully decorated.*

The children also participated in “Valentines for Veterans,” a program popular on Long Island that sends Valentines to those staying at a local veterans’ hospital.



The most recent Kids In Deed event was a May 4 outing with *Youth in Ethical Societies* and parents. The group attended the Bayside Angler Group’s Annual cleanup of Little Neck Bay, which is situated on the north shore of Queens, NY. Alison shared,



*“With the Cross Island Parkway full of speeding cars to the side, we worked with other volunteers to clean the park and waterfront of debris.*

*We collected mountains of plastic and paper discarded from passing motorists or floated in from parts unknown.*

*Meanwhile, who knew that squid were part of our local eco-system?*

*We have been doing this event for about six years. Each year we see something new and interesting, have a great time with each other,*

*and leave the world in a little better shape!”*

## ***There is POWER in Philadelphia, a report from the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia***

This past December the Board of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia (EHSoP) voted to join POWER. **Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower and Rebuild** is a faith based, inter-denominational organization of 40 congregations with more than 25,000 individual members throughout the City. Charged with the intention of bringing people together across the lines of race, faith, income level and neighborhood, POWER is committed to justice in the greater Philadelphia metropolitan area. It demands that the needs and priorities of *all* Philadelphians are reflected in the systems and policies that shape the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection. POWER employs a model of organizing often referred to as “Faith-Based Community Organizing.” It draws from the spirit and lessons learned from some of the main historical movements for justice and progress in our nation’s history including the Civil Rights Movement.

On Tuesday, May 20, 2014, Primary Election Day, POWER, with union ally SEIU 32BJ, witnessed the passage of Ballot Question #1, raising the wages for thousands of Philadelphia sub-contractor workers to \$10.88 an hour. Eighteen members and friends of EHSoP participated in three months of systemic voter engagement, playing our part in making 50,000 calls and door-knocks and over 4,500 commitments to vote from Philadelphians who don’t regularly come out in primary elections. Ballot Question #1 won with approximately 93,000 yes votes, versus 30,000 no votes.

Two weeks prior, Mayor Michael Nutter signed an executive order aimed at broadening application of this higher *21<sup>st</sup> Century Minimum Wage and Benefits Standard* (\$10.88/hour plus benefits). Thousands of workers on publicly-subsidized contracts moved from earning poverty wages and relying on safety net programs like food stamps to earning a wage of 150% of the federal minimum. The broad margin of victory on Question 1 cemented this into the City Charter.

POWER stood out in this election thanks to their new voter engagement strategies, experimenting with decentralized approaches, as opposed to the “central command” approach used by many political campaigns. POWER trained each of its member congregations to form volunteer teams who created voter contact lists, organized phone banking and canvassing sessions and documented results in the Voter Access Network. “The result was direct democracy through the ballot, obtaining economic security and work dignity for many Philadelphians,” states Kate Esposito, outgoing EAC Chairperson. “Now onto full fair funding for our schools!”

The Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia is joined in its community organizing approach by the Washington Ethical Society, which voted a few years ago to become a member of the Washington Interfaith Network. Might your society find allies in your work for justice in a faith-based community organizing group? Has it already? Write to EAR and let us know about it!

## ***Aging – A Celebration and a Challenge: A National Ethical Service report from the United Nations, Dr. Sylvain Ehrenfeld, the IHEU and National Ethical Service Representative to the UN, and Dr. Reba Goodman, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County***

*Will you still need me?  
Will you still feed me?  
When I’m 64?*

This Beatles song was composed in the 60’s. If it was updated now, 64 would be 74, perhaps 84 (like the authors of this essay) and maybe even 94. By the year 2050, for the first time in history, seniors over the age of 60 will outnumber children under the age of 15. We are living in the midst of a dramatic silent revolution, sometimes called the “age quake.”

The “age quake” is due in part to the fact that women are having fewer children and people are living longer. Longer lives are the result of improved nutrition, medical advances, health care, and most importantly, sanitation and public health measures. Since 1950 life expectancy has increased globally by approximately 23 years, from 47 years old to 70 years old. In the developed world life expectancy is about 80 years. In 1940, in the US, only 30% of people lived to the age of 65. Today in the US, as well as in many countries, over 80% of people will live past 65. By 2050, demographers estimate that one-third of the world’s population will be over 60 years of age. Increasing longevity is one of humanity’s greatest achievements. We must not let it become a handicap!

Unfortunately, according to a recent UN report, the world is aging so fast that many countries are not prepared to cope with the basic concerns of older people, especially concerns about income, health, and physical disabilities. The golden years of the elderly are not so golden for many. Only one-third of all countries have a social protection scheme. This is particularly important in the rapidly aging population in the underdeveloped world.

The aging phenomenon is bound to impact pensions, social security, and housing. Most importantly, laws against elder abuse - which is becoming more and more frequent - need to be developed. Poverty among the increasing number of elderly must be put on the front burner and attacked ASAP. Worldwide more than 46% of people over 60 years of age have disabilities and 53% find it difficult to pay for basic services. Even in rich countries like the US, it is a scandal that over 23 million Americans over 60 years of age are economically insecure.

Let’s look at some specific cases. Truong Thao runs a small teashop on the sidewalk in Hanoi, Vietnam. He is 65 years old and acutely aware that he and millions of others are plunging into old age without a safety net. Abdul Wasay in Afghanistan is struggling to survive. At 75 he spends most of his day trying to sell toothbrushes and toothpaste on a busy street corner in Kabul.

With the help of the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and other UN agencies an index was constructed. The *Global Age Watch Index* is a composite of income, health, education, employment and age-friendly environment. Wealthy nations are in general better prepared for aging than poorer ones. Sweden is ranked first in coping with an aging population, followed by Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada. Prosperity in itself does not guarantee protection for the old. For example, rising economic powers like Brazil, Russia, India, and China rank lower than some poorer countries like Uruguay and Panama.

Equally as important for seniors as income and support services is remaining connected, relevant, and useful. Seniors need family and friends. A decline in mental and physical capacities that can come with aging can lead to loneliness and/or depression. During our middle years we worked and raised families and our life was structured and felt complete in many respects. After retirement we often lose these anchors.

Some seniors, who are more and more aware of our mortality, shift from “doing” to “being,” becoming more focused on our interior life. But others reach out to contribute our years of doing and learning to others, such as to young people eager for wisdom the elderly can offer. Unfortunately, often when we reach out to younger people we are met head on by ageism. Ageism is extremely prevalent in the United States. TV and movies imply that there is no role for the elderly. This is due in part to the fact that, for many of us, our presence does not make money.

The transition to retirement is often difficult, but must be met head on and with optimism. Retirement isn’t the end - it is the beginning of something new and there are many years available for us to see what the new is going to be. We should adapt our institutions and attitudes so that seniors can more easily contribute their time, talent and experience. This would lead to a better quality of life for everyone.



## ***Making a Difference* - The Future of Ethical Societies (FES) Conference, Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Society**

On the morning of Saturday, May 24, fifteen members of the Future of Ethical Societies—the movement’s organization for Ethical Culturists aged 18-35—gathered at 1554 Oakdale Street in North Philadelphia, an area known for nights filled with gun violence. There they met Terry Starks, founder of, and life force behind, the innovative *Urban Crisis Intervention Center*.

Raised by a single mother with five siblings, Terry got caught up in drug-related violence. By the age of 25 he had been shot four times. Eventually, with children of his own to raise, he sought a change of direction in his life and became an urban activist. Purchasing and renovating an old corner building, he created a safe place for his children and their friends where they could feel safe enough to build a positive future.

The *Urban Crisis Intervention Center* offers free food, job training, and mentoring to anyone in the neighborhood willing to take a stance for good. Working with the Temple University Ceasefire program, Terry has poured his time, energy, and resources into offering a recording studio to young artists and producers called “Express Urself,” as well as a print shop for creating t-shirts, a clothing store, and a barbershop that gave one FES member a trim during a break.

Coordinator of the FES conference this year, Christian Hayden, succeeded admirably this beautiful May morning at creating dialogue and partnerships across racial and economic differences. Other FES participants at the service project included Leader-in-Training Paulo Ribero (Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County), Kaitlin Wright and Anya Overman (Ethical Society of St. Louis), Tyler Lurie-Spicer and Kevin Brennan (Brooklyn Ethical Society), Julia Julstrom Agoyo and Heidi Brown (Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago), Annika Schneider and Svenja Schneider (Ethical Society of Northern Westchester), Justin Taft-Morales (Washington Ethical Society), and from the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, Christian Hayden, Leandra Handfield, Xavier Mack, Lauren Strong, and Max Finkel.



Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, Hugh Taft-Morales, joined in on the project. He said he was proud of the energy and enthusiasm of FES volunteers, and humbled to see how Terry Starks, with limited resources, has done so much for a neglected neighborhood. Hugh hopes to continue to support such important work for the young people of Philadelphia.

## ***Save the Date! People's Climate March Sept 21-22 in NYC*** **Abby Scher, Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture**

Let world leaders know during the UN Climate Summit that  
***we need to take action to prevent climate catastrophe.***

Join the Brooklyn Ethical Society, 350.org and a host of groups for

**The People's Climate March** on Sept 20 or 21 in NYC

(negotiations for the permit are still underway so the date isn't quite set).

Puppets and a festive atmosphere will rekindle your juices for the hard work ahead.

For more information on this event, see [www.peoplesclimatemarch.org](http://www.peoplesclimatemarch.org).

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### ***Ethical Action Spotlight***

*With many thanks to Alison Pratt, Sylvain Ehrenfeld, Reba Goodman, and Abby Scher for contributing text and ideas to this month's EAR. Let's continue the dialogue in our national movement – submit comments, articles and suggestions for future EAR editions! ~ Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Society.*

### **The Ethical Action Report 2.0**

As Ethical Societies around the country continue their 2013-2014 program season, the EAR is evolving to try to be more useful to you and to generate more constructive, engaged dialogue about “deed before creed” throughout the movement. We hope this new format offers stimulating ideas and practical hints that make ethical action more effective and rewarding at your societies and in your lives.

#### **EAR 2.0 hopes to offer:**

- More in-depth analysis of particular social justice issues.
- Stories of ethical action projects that worked well at one of our societies and might enliven your home society.
- Discussion of ways to frame Ethical Culture's commitment to Ethical Action
- Excerpts from recent Ethical Culture platform addresses or statements from around the movement about civic, social, or ethical issues.

#### ***Join the fun! Offer your thoughts and news items for the July/August edition.***

- Write about an issue with which you are familiar due to your professional life or private interest.
- Share news about an interesting ethical action project at your society, current or from the past.
- Write a “letter to the EAR editor” addressing any articles in this or future issues, or about other issues relating to our commitment to action.
- Do a historical reflection on an Ethical Action moment from Ethical Culture's history.

The pieces can range from 250-1000 words, and if you submit them early, the editorial volunteers can help polish your offering. Feel free to float your idea by me at [HughTM@gmail.com](mailto:HughTM@gmail.com) or send something to me by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to publication. All final copy has to be sent to me no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month. Sincerely, Hugh Taft-Morales - Ethical Culture Leader and *Ethical Action Report* Editor

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