

# THE IMAGINE SOCIETY

APRIL 28, 2022



SPECIAL ISSUE CELEBRATING **GROWTH**  
KIDS APRIL EDITION VOLUME 32!




"For there is always light, if only  
we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it."  
- Amanda Gorman

## The Ethics Project Presents: the Youth Art and Writing Project on Gun Violence, Peace and Hope Exhibit

by Jack Gaffigan

A few months ago it was Black History Month and in the February 2022 Imagine Newsletter, there was a republishing of an article report I did on **The Dred Scott Heritage Foundation**. Also please note the important \*correction regarding that article at the end of this story.

One of the updates to that article was regarding an art exhibit produced by The Ethics Project, the "Youth Art and Writing Project on Gun Violence, Peace & Hope," featuring the voices of youth from the St. Louis Public School System centered



**Missouri History Museum**

THE ETHICS PROJECT PRESENTS

## GUN VIOLENCE, PEACE & HOPE

The writings and artwork of St. Louis area students on the impact of gun violence and their vision for hope and peace in the region.

**JANUARY 14-16TH, 2022**

This exhibit will open January 14th and will run through January 17th in the Grand Hall of the Missouri History Museum. On January 17th, Lynne Jackson, the great-great-granddaughter of Dred Scott, will join Dr. Christi Griffin, Founder & President of The Ethics Project for a discussion and Q&A. The date and time TBA due to COVID.

Presented by **THE ETHICS PROJECT**

Co-sponsored by **St. Louis Community**

Original Funding Provided by **ReCAST**

**VPCC YVPP**

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around the issue of Gun Violence. With the theme of last month's anniversary newsletter being, "Celebrating Youth Voices," we couldn't let the opportunity pass us by to dig deeper into the exhibit. What was discovered was powerful and surprising and deserves your immediate attention. We reached out to the founder and president of **The Ethics Project, Dr. Christi Griffin**, to investigate the genesis of the project, its challenges and most importantly, its future life.

Dr. Griffin is a speaker, lecturer, author, and retired attorney who practiced law for 23 years. In one of her books, **Incarcerations in Black and White: The Subjugation of Black America**, she addresses topics related to a criminal justice system that has witnessed a staggering 500% increase in incarcerations since private prisons began in 1984. It is my honor and privilege to share with you how she started working with youth and why it is so important and necessary to amplify young voices now more than ever.

**JG:** Dr. Griffin, What is **The Ethics Project**?

**Dr. Griffin:** **The Ethics Project** is a non-profit organization founded to address the impact that mass incarceration has on children, families, and communities. We engage in a number of programs including our annual National Youth Summit on Education, Justice, and Leadership. (TheNYS.org) held in cities around the country.

**JG:** What was the origin of the focus on gun violence and what other groups sponsored this important project?

**Dr. Griffin:** Our summer 2021 gun violence prevention program was created when invited to participate in a city-wide youth gun violence prevention effort funded by the **Missouri Health Board**, the **St. Louis Violence Prevention Commission**, and the **St. Louis Violence Prevention Partnership**. Additional funds for the resulting art and writing exhibit were provided by the **St. Louis Community Credit Union**. Participants in that program were high school students from **Roosevelt High School**, **Gateway STEM High Schools**, and the **Visual and Performing Arts Center**.

**JG:** The first incarnation of this endeavor was **The Ethics Project** designing a summer Saturday's program. Can you describe the plans for that program as well as the challenges you faced in getting it off the ground?

**DG:** **The Ethics Project's** summer Saturday program was designed for youth to work with law enforcement, psychologists, and artists to help build relationships between youth and the police, to give youth an opportunity to address unidentified traumas suffered due to a proliferation of gun violence and to help beautify surrounding neighborhoods with art and clean-up efforts while listening to the tune of a variety of DJs. Unfortunately, the youth did not attend.

**JG:** So, this multi-faceted, community strengthening summer program, focused on building a relationship between youth and police was challenged by the reluctance of the young people to attend. But yet you did not give up on this important mission. What was your next step?

**DG:** A second program was then designed to give high school students in four classrooms in three St. Louis Public Schools the opportunity to express their experiences with gun violence. The students in both the writing and art classrooms had never talked about their exposure to gun violence despite the fact that some students had lost family members and friends to this growing tragedy. The English Language Arts students in particular were very reluctant to even think about repressed feelings let alone share them openly. Several who had declared their refusal to participate were among those who eventually shared their innermost pain and loss. About 40% - to 50% of the students in both the writing and art classes chose not to participate.

**JG:** When did you start to feel you were getting the kids to open up about their experiences through the art and writing program?

**DG:** In September 2021 over two 60-90 minute class periods, the participants talked about gun violence and,

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though very reluctant, they verbally expressed their experiences and feelings. The writing students then translated those experiences and feelings in writing and likewise, the art students expressed theirs in artistic expressions ranging from paintings, to sketching, to work with colored pencils. The instructions to each student was to write or artistically express gun violence, peace, or hope. Some of the students combined all three. One drew attention to the gun violence against dogs. In light of this historical use of dogs to hunt and terrorize enslaved people of color, there remains a high degree of fear of dogs in the African American community. With the widespread availability of guns, that fear has translated to gun violence against dogs

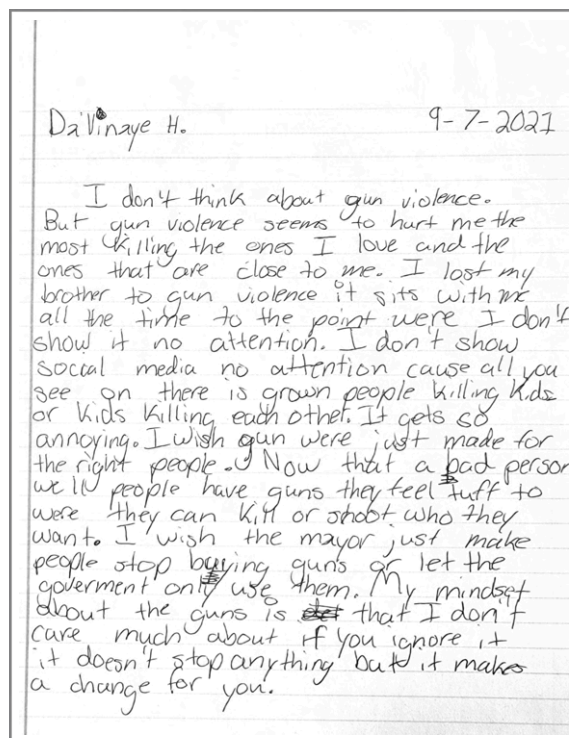
**JG:** What did you hope to accomplish with this program?

**DG:** The purpose of the art and writing program was two-fold. The primary reason was to give students the opportunity to take a critical look at a social malady that has become normalized in their lives and to examine how it impacts them emotionally and psychologically. The second reason was to give the community a lens into the lives of young adults and the mental stress and impact that gun violence has on their lives beyond daily news reports. Students had accepted their fears, anxiety, pain, and loss as a part of life and adults seldom considered more than the sensationalized news story or possibly the grief of the immediate family. It is our hope that this awareness will generate change by participating youth and exhibit visitors.

**JG:** All of the difficult organizational work accomplished by you as the fearless leader, the support of the community, and especially the expressions the youth produced in spite of their initial reluctance to participate, came together in a wonderful and heartbreaking exhibit. Can you tell our readers about that?

**DG:** A five-day exhibit of the student artwork and writing was originally scheduled to be a part of The [Missouri History Museum](#)'s commemoration of **Dr. Martin Luther King** birthday events and the Missouri Emancipation program in January 2022. However, the entire St. Louis museum system closed down due to an outbreak of Omicron. The exhibit, however, was held with great success in the Grand Hall of the **Missouri History Museum** during the final week of Black History Month. That exhibit followed several weeks of the exhibit being on display at **The Dred Scott Heritage Foundation** Office in Chesterfield, MO. Those who viewed the exhibit in both locations were moved by both the written and artistic expressions.

**JG:** We are so grateful for leaders like you who understand the importance of giving a voice to the unvoiced, in this case the youth of the St. Louis public schools. The importance of amplifying the voices of the youth community



An incredible student contribution



Part of the extraordinary display of art & writing



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through writing and art is such an important factor in creating meaningful change in modern society. What is your theory about why it is so difficult to get young people to express themselves even with all the scaffolding and help you and others are providing, and how is it different in modern society as compared with historical movements that united young voices to enact change such as the Civil Rights Movement?

**DG:** As a child growing up in the 1950s and 60s, we could not wait to go outside on a Saturday morning to play with friends, swim at the community center, attend scout meetings or participate in sports or organized activities. With that in mind, when asked to create a summer program for teens centered around gun violence, it was disconcerting to have only two teenagers participate in Saturday programs that involved art, food, DJs, neighborhood clean-ups, and working with the police and psychologists. Indeed, the president of one of the most successful community centers in St. Louis was more than willing to lend us their space but was surprised at the notion that any youth would attend. They did not. Other programs designed by others met a similar fate. Times have changed and many factors have impacted how children and teenagers interact in a new millennium. Gone are the days when you ran out the back door at 7:00 in the morning, and stayed out playing until you were forced to come in for lunch, a nap, and eventually for dinner and bed when the street lights came on. We weren't up until three in the morning with our faces glued to cell phones, we didn't communicate via SnapChat, text, or Tik Tok. And most importantly, we weren't afraid of being outside for fear of a randomly shot bullet killing us or one of our friends. Between air conditioning that was essentially non-existent in the 1950s and 60s, the emergence of advanced electronics, and the crime and violence proliferated through a system of mass incarceration, there is little incentive for today's youth to engage in activities outside of their homes.

**JG:** What are your hopes for the impact of this exhibit and more like it?

**DG:** It is our hope to see the youth art and writing gun violence exhibit continue to be on display at locations throughout the St. Louis community and for it to be expanded throughout the US either/and through the display of the current exhibit or through work with additional schools in various cities. One of our deep concerns is the lack of writing skills exhibited by students in their first and second years of high school. Mass incarceration has grown into a \$182 billion dollar business in the US not counting the additional tax burden of caring for children of incarcerated parents. It also does not factor in the human toll. The exhibit discloses the critical impact that mass incarceration has on the emotional and intellectual achievement of students who are more likely than not, in inner-city schools, to have at least one parent in prison, to live in poverty as a result of a parent being in prison, to experience anxiety, depression, abuse, and trauma due to the gross frequency of incarceration in Black communities despite the same types and frequency of crimes being committed in White communities.



The amazing Lynne Jackson & exhibit guests

**EDITORIAL COMMENT:** *This is a brutally honest look at how, in my opinion, systemic problems like mass incarceration impact families and contribute largely to a vicious cycle of poverty, distrust of the police, and more gun violence. Those factors coupled with the inequality in education in American public schools gives me, and I hope other youth reading this article who have the privilege of access to excellent education, a responsibility to speak out against systemic injustice and brainstorm solutions to create a better society. It is because of visionaries and social justice warriors such as Dr. Christi Griffin that we can hope for a better future.*



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**\*CORRECTION** In the February 2022 edition of the Imagine Society Newsletter on the theme of [EQUALITY](#), I published an article entitled "Black History is American History" in which I reported on the Dred Scott Heritage Foundation. In the second paragraph I incorrectly referred to Chief Justice Roger Taney as "Judge Taney." Thanks to the expert eye of Dr. Christi Griffin, who read and enjoyed the article. She was kind enough to point out a hard to catch error, and at the same time teach me something new. Her quote, "US Supreme Court associate justices are referred to as Associate Justices and the chief justice is referred to as the Chief Justice. US Supreme Court justices are never referred to as judges. Within state appellate courts, (A Supreme Court, Superior Court, and lower appellate courts - the name changes depending on each state.) only the chief justice is referred to as a (Chief) Justice with the other jurists being referred to as judges. When being addressed in writing or being introduced, they are all referred to as "The Honorable Justice or Judge ..." and "Most of us do not learn this fact until law school." Thank you Dr. Griffin for this very educational correction!

**To read more about the outstanding achievements of Dr. Christi Griffin please visit: [ChristiGriffin.com](http://ChristiGriffin.com). You can learn more about The Ethics Project at [TheEthicsProject.org](http://TheEthicsProject.org)**  
**To inquire about Dr. Griffin speaking at your school or organization, please visit, <https://www.greatblackspeakers.com/author/christigriffin/>**



Dear Jack, thank you for an incredibly illuminating and vital interview helping to show us how all young voices everywhere matter and deserve to be heard, respected, and uplifted!

**Jack Gaffigan (16) is a Sophomore at York Prep**



**Who Came Up with April's Newsletter Theme "Growth"...**  
**it was Youth Editorial Member Olympia Hall!**



"When I think of **growth**, I think of when you do something better. I think of expanding and growing. Things get bigger when they grow and **people get smarter and understand more**. Think of a flower - it is just a little sprout and it turns into a beautiful flower. That's what **growth** means to me." - Olympia Hall (9)

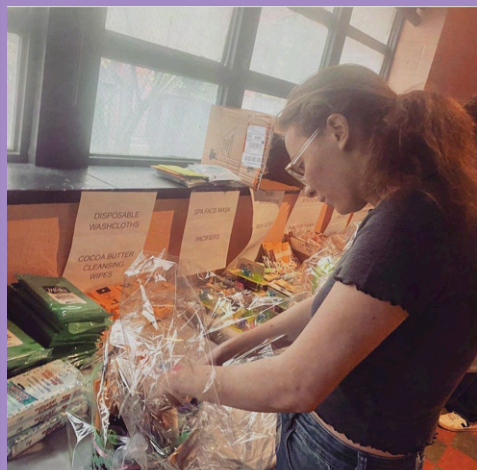
**Follow us on Instagram! @theimagesociety**



# 4th Annual Spring Wellness Basket Service Project!



Every spring **The Imagine Society** and youth group the **St. Patrick's Warriors** from **Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral** dedicate themselves to a very special service project benefitting our favorite family shelter. Thanks to these amazing Youth Volunteers we were able to put together 27 beautifully curated baskets overflowing with health and wellness necessities for Mamas and babies. This year we are happy to announce was also an international affair! Thanks to a special connection in France we have an amazing donation from our new friends **Happy Family Organics** of incredible organic and healthful baby food, and thanks to **Valentina Fenton** and her daughters **Shelby (15)** and **Hannah (13)** in Canada we have beautifully handcrafted accessories. Tucked into each basket was a handwritten and handcrafted card by our junior members! As a companion to this project, we also wanted to thank the incredible staff who work with such care, both tirelessly and selflessly to help the residents of the shelter. Led by Imagine Youth Leaders **Alessia (17)** and **Sabrina (18)** Turner, they lovingly put together beautiful gift baskets of *L'uova di Pasqua*, a traditional Italian Easter delicacy that represent sweetness, love, and rebirth. They were then joyfully delivered by hand by Junior Imagine Leaders **Olympia (9)** and **Zuzu (7) Hall**! Thank you to Imagine Moms **Gina Larucci** and **Chloe Hall** for nurturing this service dedicated to those helping our city's most vulnerable. A special and most heartfelt thank you to **D. Coluccio and Sons** and **The Fazzolari Kitchen** for the extraordinarily generous donation. Thank you truly to all of the donors who generously gave so we could purchase vitamins, digital thermometers, medicinal teas, body wash, bibs, pacifiers, and so much more! We hope this spring is full of love, good health, and hope!





# A Boy Grows in Brooklyn

## by Louis A. Craco III

People in the whole world have Growth and their accomplished years have brought them to Strengths, Beliefs, Smart Thinking, and all of that begins in the past. My Name is Louis A. Craco the Third and this is the story of my Life and how I've Grown.

I was born on September 25, 2008 and I was given the same name as my Father and his Father, my Great Grandfather, and his Father, too. In 2020, My Grandfather (Pa) died from a stroke. When he was alive he was the president of the New York Bar Association and he was a very wise Lawyer. My Father is a Lawyer as well, but he works for a different firm. Just because I have the same name, I don't need to be a lawyer, because I have different other kinds of curiosities.

In my childhood, I accomplished many things. When I was little I met my Speech Therapist named Meagan. She taught me how to speak, because I have Down syndrome and my mouth muscles needed to be developed.

When I was about 3 years old my Grandfather Poppy (Richard), helped me accomplish my walking and climbing skills. Speaking about my Grandfather, he is a Designer. He also built me a Special Hand-Railing for when I walked up the stairs. When Poppy got Cancer, I supported him by taking him walking around the hospital floor. That is something we have in common. When I was 6 years old, I went on an adventure with Poppy. I drove my big-wheels bike 2 miles all the way to the fire station and back to my country house.

On September 25, 2021, I turned 13 years old. Now I'm a Growing Teenager. My height is 5 Feet, 3 Inches, I weigh 102 Pounds. At my Mom's old School called West Rocks, I played Basketball for almost 2 Hours + 2 Hours back at Home. My Grandfather was watching me play. For a matter of fact, my Muscles are becoming stronger and now I can ride a 24 inch - 10 speed bike.





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At Cooke School & Institute (My School) Teachers I know help my Mind get Stronger in other kinds of classes. My Math Teacher is teaching us how to Estimate. In my Humanities class we've been learning about ancient Egypt and making the parts of a newspaper. They also gave us news about the war in Ukraine, and we will donate money to help.

Another place I grow is at home. Home is where I live, and in fact I am becoming more Responsible. Last weekend, I earned money just by helping Mom do the Gardening. I've done that 2 times. This Spring Break, I helped my Grandmother by carrying boxes up from the basement. The more I become responsible and mature, the more I become Independent.

Miniature golf is one my favorite sports and me and my grandparents go all over Connecticut looking for them. This could possibly involve the Miniature Golf Championship, and I hope I will someday get the Harris Cup (a Miniature Golf Championship Trophy). To get better at it I need to practice, and keep trying, and Never Give Up!

Whenever I listen to rock music, I feel rock and rolled. After I reach college, my motto, Never Give Up, will keep my band going and I will never stop playing rock and roll. I feel like the music knows who I am, it's part of my legacy.

In the future, I also want to build a restaurant. The Business will be owned by me. The things we want to put in the restaurant are cooking that people love. I admire Ria (my Caregiver) and the food she makes. People from the community of Brooklyn would also enjoy it. The Specialties would be Lasagna, Pastas, Sea Food and Meat dishes. The Desserts can be Ice Cream, Eclairs, Pies, Cakes. The Restaurant will have 2 separate kitchens, one for those who don't have Gluten Free diets and another for the people who have Gluten Free diets. I want music to be in the restaurant, too. Everyone from the community will be welcomed.

I'm a Self Advocate and I can inspire people with my writing for the Imagine Society Newsletter. My words can go all over the world by just looking it up on the internet. The way to do that is to let people in the world grow, and they can make peace happen.

Louis A. Craco, III  
8th Grade: Cooke School

**Louis A. Craco III is in the 8th grade at Cooke School. Louis is also on the Youth Editorial Staff at The Imagine Society Newsletter!**



"My favorite restaurant in CT:  
Orem's Diner"





# *Amazing Youth Volunteers* at The Ascension Pantry for #FOODFORFAMILIES



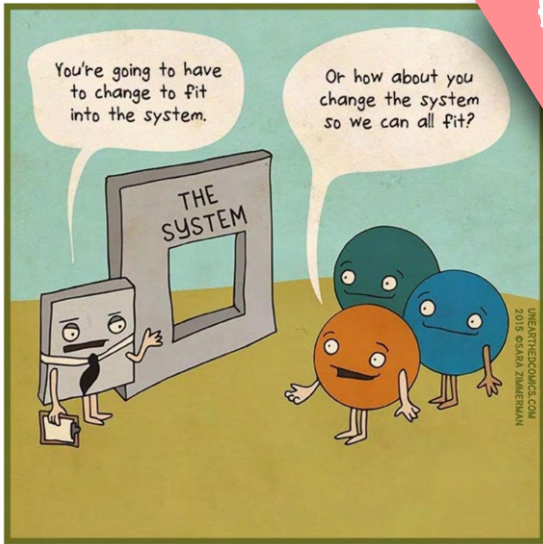
On April 9th there was an inspirational day of service at **The Ascension Food Pantry**, and at the heart of the special spring day? Dedicated young people. Superstar Kids from **The Imagine Society, The Gateway School, Convent of the Sacred Heart, St. Ignatius, The Spirit Squad, The Old St. Patrick's Warriors, Xavier**, and many more! An incredible group of youth leaders from all over the city, came together to serve over 350 of their food insecure neighbors with respect and dignity. Very special thank you to our friends at **Woolco Foods** for providing another incredibly generous donation, and to our friends **The Nasrani Family** from **Adirondack Creamery** who came to volunteer and also talk about a special ice cream donation coming later this summer! **The Imagine Society** believes that with youth led service we can change the world! At inspirational services like these we are helping to fulfill that mission. Your generosity counts now more than ever, and we thank all of the incredibly generous **donations** from our amazing community of love and support!



If you and your family would like to volunteer with or donate to #FOODFORFAMILIES please email us at [outreach@theimagesociety.org](mailto:outreach@theimagesociety.org) for ways to get involved!



# FUN PAGES



Edited by  
Junior Member  
Katie Gaffigan  
(12)



Katie's  
Fave  
Memes  
:)

Lol!



LEARNING IS A PROCESS !

UGH IDK IF I'M  
EVEN CUT OUT FOR  
THIS... :C

KEEP GOING!  
UR HONESTLY  
DOING A GR8  
JOB RLY







# WORD PLAY

Edited  
by Junior  
Member Katie  
Gaffigan  
(12)

## Growth Word Scramble

SSEROGPR

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VDEEOLP

---

VOELEV

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FRGWLNIEO

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NSNOIXAPE

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INGTESUANDNDR

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LEFRWO

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OSBSLOM

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MIPENRGTSI

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VRSIEEC

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ENGARLIN

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# ANSWER KEY

## Growth Word Scramble

PROGRESS	SSEROGPR
DEVELOP	VDEEOLP
EVOLVE	VOEEV
FLOWERING	FRGWLNIEO
EXPANSION	NSNOIXAPE
UNDERSTANDING	INGTESUANDNDR
FLOWER	LEFRWO
BLOSSOM	OSBSLOW
SPRINGTIME	MIPENRGTSI
SERVICE	VRSIEEC
LEARNING	ENGARLIN