

## **Reflection—Howard County Photography Project: A Portrait of a Community**

Lisa Silverman



When I entered high school, I knew that I wanted to make a difference in my community. I had no idea what kind of impact I could have as a mere fifteen-year old, but I was determined to leave my mark. In November 2005, I was fortunate enough to represent Howard County Connections at Search Institute's Ninth Annual Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth Conference in Dallas, Texas. I met people from all over the world and regaled in the stories of people who made a difference in their communities. I was inspired.

After returning home, I began to envision my project, my chance to make a difference. It involved high school students having an active voice in the community. I wanted to take a small step, to push in the direction of youth leadership and voice. I have always believed that youth are not just the voice of tomorrow, but also the voice of today. Our needs, wants, visions, and ambitions should be offered by us; we should represent ourselves.

The Howard County Photography Project: A Portrait of a Community was a chance for high school students to express themselves through photographs. After partnering with the school system, this pilot project was incorporated into the photography classes' curriculum. Instructed to photograph Howard County through their eyes, students had a unique opportunity to have their voices heard. Displays of over 120 photos taken by students from all twelve county high schools left their mark.

This final vision was possible because of the hard work and dedication of many people. After countless meetings, hours on the phone, and planning, the project finally came together. With the help of my dedicated planning team and my Co-Chair Meg Mekelburg, the photographs

were displayed proudly at the Board of Education, the Columbia Arts Center in Long Reach, and the Howard County Public Libraries.

Professional and student photographers from across the county teamed up to judge the photographs. Although judging was not the most important part of the project, it allowed students to be recognized for having a particularly strong impact and whose voices were clearly heard.



When the *Baltimore Sun* featured the photography project on the cover of the Howard County section of the newspaper on Sunday, February 27, 2007 I not only had my “five minutes of fame,” but also felt that “warm feeling inside” when you know you made a difference. With the help of this publication, my vision now reached thousands of county residents. To put it simply, I was proud. I was proud of my hard work, accomplishment, and my ability to finally leave my mark, even if it was just a blip in Howard County’s history.

*Lisa has been an active leader in Connections for several years. In addition to co-chairing the Photo Project, she is a youth trainer. Lisa attends Centennial High School where she is the co-editor-in –chief of Centennial’s paper. She also writes for the View. She is a member of the school’s national honor society and foreign language national honor society. She provides community service, volunteers at Howard County Hospital and is a member of Student Services Advisory Committee.*

*Thank you, Lisa, for your many contributions to life in Howard County!*