

# For Immediate Release

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## WCST Community Educator taking prevention program to Africa

Ray Dinkins, Community Educator for the Women's Crisis Support Team, will be taking the non-violence and community building education strategies he currently employs in area schools to a whole new set of students this summer. Combining a passion for youth empowerment and a distinct love for Ethiopia, Africa Ray will take the work of youth empowerment and healthy relationships to rescued street children in the care of Mercy Ministry Happy Children's Home in Addis Ababa. "It's amazing how everything has come together so quickly", Ray says. "I developed a relationship with Mercy Home during my previous employment, but found ways to really contribute to their program through my employment at the WCST." Ray will spend a month teaching children new avenues of behavior and healthy lifestyles as part of their ongoing education.

The children in the care of Mercy Home were rescued from the streets of Addis Ababa and are undergoing a form of "rehabilitation" that will help them reconnect with their families if possible and properly socialize in an academic setting. Many of the children are socially and psychologically scarred from living on the street and many are equipped with often anti-social survival skills. This is where Ray hopes to be of assistance. "Not only do I hope to show the kids that someone truly cares for them, but my goal is to give them tools and resources that will help them relate better to each other and to their community", Ray says. Ray has had some practice this year, facilitating young men's groups in area high schools that explore healthy relationships, violent behaviors, and social, media, and cultural pressures faced by young people. "We have really great results creating an environment for young people to explore new ways of building community and relating to one another." Despite the cultural differences, Ray suspects the kids will be attracted to the work. "Ultimately, every kid everywhere deals with social pressures, violence, and relational struggles. The work of healing and the methods of achieving peace are somewhat universal."

The group of kids in the care of Mercy Home will be the youngest group Ray has ever worked with in this capacity. "I am excited by the challenge of ratcheting down the curriculum in a way that even the youngest members of a community can benefit from it," Ray says. The challenge isn't without its reward, as the WCST will be expanding their violence prevention work into area middle schools this fall. "We've had such a demand for our services at the middle school level, this will help us give it a good dry run over the summer before we launch at the middle school level."

Krisanna Albrecht, Executive Director of the WCST is thrilled at Ray's desire to take the work of the WCST abroad. "The end result of the prevention work of the WCST involves social change, and we're not so limited in our understanding of this work that we can't realize social change involves all of us, from Grants Pass to Ethiopia", Krisanna says. "I'm excited by what Ray will bring back for the youth in our community, he's going to gain some great perspective and surely hone his teaching skills while in Ethiopia and that will only work to benefit us here when he returns." Ray will be combining accrued vacation time and a mini-sabbatical in order to take the month off from the WCST. "The timing was perfect with our break from prevention work in the schools, and I'm really privileged to have the support and encouragement of my team to pursue this passion during that time" Ray says. "I believe this trip has the potential to change lives", he adds, "both mine and theirs."