



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Seniors and High School Students Bridge Age Gap With Innovative Santa Monica Bay Area Human Relations Council Program

**SANTA MONICA (July 28, 2010)** - Eleven seniors and eleven Olympic High School students are discovering through an innovative intergenerational program initiated by the Santa Monica Bay Area Human Relations Council that while they are separated by decades in age, they have much to share.

On Aug. 6, each pair (one senior and one student) will present to a panel of three judges creative works that express what they have learned from each other during the five-week program.

Janie Yuguchi Gates, EdD, principal of [Olympic High School](#), noted that this was the first time an intergenerational program had been done at the school.

"It has been so beneficial for these seniors to share with our students aspects of their lives – the things they've had to struggle with and how they have had to navigate to where they eventually had successful lives," she said. "We're very grateful to these seniors for sharing their time with us."

Participants include senior volunteers from WISE & Healthy Aging ranging in age from 64 to 93 and Olympic High School students ranging in age from 15 to 18. Facilitated by Julia Kwei, a project specialist for WISE & Healthy Aging, the program has involved exploring branching points in life, doing exercises as partners and completing the final work to be presented to the judges.

While the seniors are volunteers, the high school students receive credit toward an elective class for their participation in the project. The program is being held at Olympic High School, 721 Ocean Park Blvd., in Santa Monica.

"The high school students feel a great deal of urgency about the decisions they need to make about the next stage of their lives and how what they decide will shape the rest of their lives," Kwei noted. "The seniors have a longer point of view. They know that there are many branching points in life and an individual's life may follow paths that can't be dreamed of when you are 16, 17 or 18."



*From left: Intergenerational partners Kia Walker, 17, and Paula Monaghan, 66, discuss their project with facilitator Julia Kwei, project specialist at WISE & Healthy Aging.*

The Human Relations Council and the organizations that gave rise to it had previously sponsored a literature and arts program open to students in the fourth grade or higher who were assigned to express in art, literature or photography ways of valuing diversity. Judges picked a winner for each grade level.

About two years ago, the council decided to take a look at the program from a new perspective. A subcommittee co-chaired by Stephanie Negriff, director of transit services for the Santa Monica Big Blue Bus, and Grace Cheng Braun, President and CEO of WISE & Healthy Aging, explored concepts for enhancing the program before suggesting the intergenerational project.

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### **About the Santa Monica Bay Area Human Relations Council**

An outgrowth of the National Council on Community and Justice, the council is “a partnership of community organizations, businesses and individuals, which promotes and supports a respectful and socially just community through education, advocacy, and resolution of local conflicts and issues.”

### **About Olympic High School**

Founded in 1969, Olympic High School provides effective, alternative educational opportunities, increasing student potential by teaching the building blocks necessary for life-long learning. It is the continuation high school of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District and has been recently accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for the first time in its history.

### **About WISE & Healthy Aging**

WISE & Healthy Aging, a social services organization, enhances the independence, dignity and quality of life of older adults through leadership, advocacy and innovative services. This nonprofit is the result of a Nov. 2007 merger of WISE Senior Services and Center for Healthy Aging.