

Princeton Prize

Simone Gibson – Friends' Central School

Simone Gibson, a junior at Friends' Central School (FCS) in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, conceptualized, planned, and organized the *Different Voices, Same Vision Conference*. The Conference's goal was to promote understanding of race and other forms of diversity by broadening the perspective of how students from different environments experience the world and to help them develop their own voices while honoring the perspective of others.

Simone was the leader in every aspect of the conference. She sent letters to school administrators introducing herself and building relationships, created a conference vision statement, sent out flyers, and recruited faculty to train student discussion leaders. The conference, which took place at Friends' Central, was attended by over fifty students and two dozen faculty and staff representing city and suburban Archdiocesan and private schools and Philadelphia public schools. It featured awareness workshops, activities, discussions, and the formation of affinity groups. Participants reached out to their school communities through social media describing what they had learned and also took an activity or practice discussed at the conference to their school. Students came together in a safe setting where they learned from and had conversations with one another about social justice and fostered racial harmony, understanding, and respect. Students thus became more engaged and willing to have difficult conversations about race. The conference also resulted in improved communication between students and faculty on racial and other diversity issues. An on-line community of students from the participating schools grew out of the conference.

The conference will become a yearly event and Simone is creating a blueprint for the next group of students to take over its management and will train the next leader. She created the original budget for the conference, and will work this summer to increase resources for the conference, so that registration is free.

Keino Terrell, the Coordinator of Diversity at Friends' Central, says Simone "really cares about making the world a better place by bringing attention to injustices. Simone wants others to understand and to honor the idea of difference, believing that only then will we reach our true potential as a society."