

MOM teaches kids positive expression

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Tribune Correspondent

When young people get into trouble, it is often due to acting out or some lack of discipline for which they have no remedy.

So think the creators of the literacy project called Murals of the Mind or MOM, which they describe as a "creative writing project that specifically focuses on using writing as a tool for conflict resolution, youth violence and disenfranchisement."

The goal of MOM is to help young people, ages 5 to 12, express themselves in constructive ways, rather than destructive.

In the process, participants learn about themselves and others and begin to develop creative and team building skills.

And their finished project is something tangible, a book of the writing they created during the MOM workshop.

Kenyetta Overton and her husband, Jamil Overton, are

co-creators of MOM, which they have been presenting to schools and community organizations for the past four years.

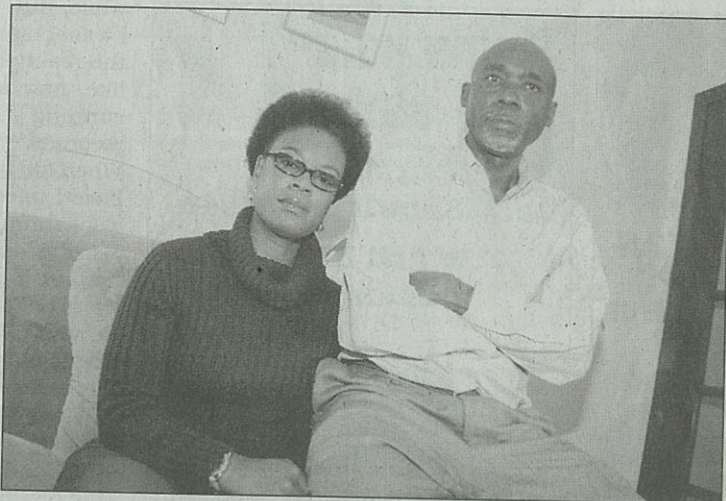
The MOM workshop has evolved, the creators said, from the length to the type of audiences for which they present. Now, instead of a two- or three-day presentation, for two or three hours per day, the workshop may last a month or an entire school semester.

The Overtons are particularly interested in helping young people incorporate their own language and ways of expression into the writing that they do for the workshops, as a means of self-validation.

Some violence comes from language, or the lack thereof, Kenyetta said. Because some individuals do not know how to express themselves verbally, they strike out in violence.

"We show them how to use their voices instead of their fists," she says.

"We have been pretty fortunate in our lives. We just want to be here to try to make a



Jamil Overton, right, and Kenyetta Overton, left, are co-creators of the organization, Murals of the Mind (MOM), which uses writing as a form of conflict resolution. — HIROKO TANAKA/Tribune Staff Photographer

change," Kenyetta said.

Their family, which includes their young son, recently moved to an area of the city where there has been some trouble. They found that they could not let the activities that were occurring near their home go unchallenged.

to use writing as a catalyst for getting them thinking about beyond high school."

To this end, education professionals and a legal professional have been enlisted to assist with the actual presentation of the workshops as well as to act as guides when needed.

Many young people, Jamil said, don't know their potential and have no one to help them, not even their parents. He said he knows a young man who writes beats, but his mother has taken no interest in his art.

"We're fed up with hearing adults say how things used to be. It is our responsibility to give these kids guidance that they are not getting," said Kenyetta, with more than a bit of agitation.

The acronym MOM is appropriate in this setting, as often the program becomes just that for its participants.

Kenyetta is herself an artist, a poet and visual artist. She is also skilled in event planning,

marketing and sales.

Jamil is a specialist in business development, but has also engaged in artistic ventures, including writing and developing the syndicated young program, "In the Mix," which aired on PBS a few years ago.

While the Overtons prepare for additional and expanded MOM workshops, they are looking to engage other like minds who are interested in facilitating workshops as well as seriously engaging with young people.

However, the project, they said, is not one that is presented once and then forgotten. They want a continued relationship with their young people, as they want them to continue using their acquired skills.

"We have a responsibility to hold our partners hands through this entire process," Jamil said. "This project is a process for everyone involved."

The Overtons invite e-mail inquiries regarding MOM at momproject2007@yahoo.com.