

The Next Generation—Encouraging Youth in Dance and Music

by *Chris Levey, Chair, CDSS Youth Task Group*

One wonderful aspect of our traditions of dance, music and song is how naturally these activities incorporate all generations. It is important that we recognize and foster our love of these traditions in all age groups: children and families, youth and young adults, those in career and family raising years, and the more senior members of our community. It is valuable to look at how we support each generation both individually and as part of an intergenerational community. This article kicks off a new column in the newsletter, focusing on youth (loosely, mid-teen through young adult years). Of course, CDSS also supports strong children, family, adult and intergenerational programs.

CDSS is moving forward in a number of ways, including recent *CDSS News* articles about and by young members of our community, a dramatic increase in the number and type of youth camp scholarships, more family weeks, more young staff and musicians in our programs, and a recent letter to our affiliates looking for ways we can collaborate on youth initiatives. Our brainstorming with community members has led to a long list of exciting possibilities, for example:

- **Mentoring:** We are forming a national youth leadership mentoring referral program—e-mentoring and electronic sharing of video clips (for example) can broaden mentoring over long distances.
- **Electronic Discussion Groups:** Younger dancers and musicians are increasingly connecting to each other nationally via web discussion groups, Facebook, LiveJournal, etc. Youth Task Group member Brian Gallagher runs a Facebook contra dance discussion with over fourteen hundred members (mostly youth). Julia Nickles is co-administrator. See cdssyouth.wiki-site.com/index.php/Discussion_Groups for links to this and other groups.
- **Workshop Discussions:** Brian and Julia ran a workshop at the 2007 NEFFA Festival called “Contra dancing, the next generation,” and will offer this again next spring. They offered shortened versions at English & American and American weeks at Pinewoods this summer.
- **Events:** We are helping to coordinate programs oriented toward younger dancers; possibilities include a youth-oriented dance and leadership weekend for youth dance leaders and a traveling performance group to help jump start youth teams.
- **Starter Kits:** We are developing starter kits for high school or college contra dance and ritual team leaders, including recruiting videos, instructional videos, music, bells, swords, etc.
- **Web Wiki:** We have started a wiki (a web page that allows anyone to contribute material) for CDSS Youth issues. The URL is cdssyouth.wiki-site.com. It includes listings of and discussion on youth dance/music events; youth performance groups and teams; discussion groups, blogs and social networking; articles on youth programs and issues; ideas for community action; ideas for national level action; working groups of the Task Group (camp scholarships, discussion forums, networking and mentoring database, outreach); and supporting organizations and reports.
- **CDSS News articles:** In the near future we hope to present articles including intergenerational dancing; country dancing as a college PE or mini-course; Contra Dancing, the Next Generation: NEFFA Workshops; the Wayward Youth Morris; dance, music and song on the Internet.

But **who** will implement all this? How about you? The CDSS board and its Youth Task Group set primary goals for CDSS such as strong intergenerational communities; opportunities for youth, and a constituency informed of such opportunities; and low barriers for new youth and quality youth leaders. It is the responsibility of the CDSS Executive and Artistic Director (Brad Foster) and staff to determine how the primary goals are to be accomplished; however, the staff is small. That’s where you come in, and also where the Youth Task Group puts on its second hat, as volunteers helping to

formulate, flesh out and implement the ideas presented here. Please contact us with your ideas, dreams and volunteer energy, and together we will make this happen!

The CDSS Youth Task Group is (* indicates CDSS board members): Jan Elliott, Brooke Friendly, Brad Foster (ex officio), Brian Gallagher, Steve Howe (ex officio), Lily Leahy,* Tom Kruskal, Chris Levey (chair),* Chloe Maher,* Sarah Pilzer,* Joanna Reiner, Sandy Rotenberg* and Susan Todt.* We look forward to working with you!

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