

## HISTORY

The idea for the Stolen Dreams Youth Leadership Conference developed first in early 1999. The education committee of the Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre discussed appropriate programming to run in conjunction with two upcoming exhibits - *Stolen Dreams: Portraits of the World's Working Children* and *Children of the Wind: Art Work by Children About Their Lives*. The combination of the two exhibits provided the ideal opportunity to work with youth in the community to educate young people about child labour and encourage them to become active in their community, their country and their world.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA

Planning began in earnest in the summer of 1999 first with students from Ancaster High Secondary School's antiracist student group, ARMAC. Throughout the summer planning attempts were made to contact additional students from high schools in the area in order to gather suggestions and support.

The students made the decision to hold a roundtable after the school year began in order to develop leadership and interpersonal skills and encourage more students to become involved in the project. These students would then also be able to inform students from their own schools and coordinate involvement in the conference. With the assistance of teachers and OWAHC staff, representatives were invited from all area high schools for a workshop October 7, 1999. Twenty-four students from nine different high schools attended.

The roundtable included information about child labour, the upcoming exhibits and the proposal for a small conference that would be designed to provide participants with the information and skills necessary to combat the problems associated with child labour. Historian and OWAHC education committee chair Ken Cruikshank provided information on the history of child labour in Canada and what can be learned from experiences in the past in order to confront contemporary problems. The roundtable also involved activities, videos and presentations designed to build understanding.

A major focus was on facilitating discussion between students from the various schools. By the end of the evening numerous suggestions and plans had been made. Concrete ideas for project coordination were discussed. Several suggestions emerged for how to raise awareness about the project and about child labour more generally. Students went away from this workshop enthused about participation in the project.

The process of continually attempting to bring in additional people was not without difficulties but ultimately provided the means to involve as many students as possible in the process. It also meant that when the opportunity arose to combine the project with one being planned by the local *Free the Children* Chapter at St. Thomas More Catholic Secondary School, we were able to take advantage of it.