

*(Storycoach Marni Gillard addressed the audience for the January 2006 Winter Lights program, to explain the Children at the Well project and introduce the participants in attendance.)*

The Children at Well Project was developed by a committee of the Interfaith Story Circle of the Tri-City area. We're very pleased to announce that the proposal for the project won The Brimstone Award last November from the National Storytelling Network, which enabled us to start making our dreams a reality.

(Paraphrasing from the NSN's description of their aims©)

The award takes its name from *brimstone*, the elusive element medieval alchemists believed would transform base metals into gold. It focuses on the transformational properties of storytelling, and aims to increase understanding of the ways storytelling can promote change in individuals and communities.

The award is given to a model storytelling project that is service-oriented, based in a community or organization, and replicable in other places and situations. Projects receiving this award will be likely to have an impact beyond their own communities, organizations, or clients, inspiring excellence in applied storytelling work and communicating to new audiences the humanitarian possibilities of storytelling.

In developing The Children at the Well project, we sought to pass on our love for interfaith storytelling to the upcoming generation. From a variety of religious education programs (Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Hindu) we have gathered a wonderful group of young people who have demonstrated a high degree of interest in storytelling. The participants will be encouraged to delve into the wisdom of their faith tradition to find stories that speak to them and which they wish to share. We used the image of a well in the title because we envision this process to be like people gathering at a well to get the water of life.

Mary Murphy and I will work with them, instructing in storytelling technique and developing each young person's story from their own tradition to tell at an April community performance and pot-luck supper. This event, which will be open to the public, will provide an enjoyable goal for the young people involved. It will connect people of diverse faiths and cultures, and introduce them to the humanitarian possibilities of storytelling through the youth. It is also likely to promote a lively interest in the art of storytelling, and to encourage even more young people to become involved.

An additional component of the project is a series of teacher workshops for interested religious school faculty. At this very moment, Gert Johnson is conducting the second of those workshops. She hopes to join us afterwards.

Our intent of 'Children at the Well' is to deepen the experience of our story circle and to be of service to our broader community to promote interfaith peace and understanding in an intergenerational context. We envision it as an ongoing program, and with your help it will become that. It will serve as a positive and lasting model for other storytelling and interfaith groups, as well.