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An Introduction to Earth Train by Young People

We are a group of young people from all over the world who are involved in doing positive things for our neighborhoods, other kids and the environment. We have been successful in creating and implementing a variety of projects geared toward bettering the world we share. We have launched nationwide speaking tours; produced educational theatrical and dance events on the streets of Harlem; published and nationally distributed "what you can do booklets" to youth during Earth Day; planted community gardens; and trained hundreds of teenagers — in effective communication skills, problem-solving and personal goal-setting. We've been making great friends and most importantly, impacting our peers and our world. **Now, with high ideals and a desire for change, we're getting ready to do much more.**

During the past two years, many of us have been involved in creating an unprecedented 10-year campaign called Earth Train. Earth Train is a network of organizations and groups with the common goal for positive environmental and social change worldwide. It is a rolling stage—a physical train—which will attract the attention of adults, families and youth alike. It is also a catalytic program that will encourage young people to develop their unique personal skills, learn more about the environment and find ways to get involved in community service for a better world. Earth Train, for all its many dimensions, rides on a simple belief: *the young people who join us in finding solutions to our world's most pressing problems will impact the future, learn how to reach their personal goals, and through working with others, discover the unique talents hidden in themselves.*

Why is our generation so concerned about the environment? Because the signs of a world in trouble are everywhere, even in the air we breathe. Worst of all, we see that our age group itself is becoming a walking environmental disaster. There's a new epidemic threatening us: hopelessness.

In the United States, one out of five of us suffer a severe psychological disorder before we make it to our 18th birthday. Suicide rates have tripled among 15 to 19 year olds in the past 30 years—a sure indicator of youth in distress. The chance that a teen will die a violent death—by accident, murder or suicide—increased 12 percent from 1984 to 1988. In addition, high divorce rates, parental neglect, prenatal exposure to drugs, endless hours in front of the television, the growing percentage of American children living in poverty (today, 10% are afflicted) and increased violence among our youth (nearly 135,000 students carry a gun to school) are among the many forces that are eroding the capacities and spirit of our generation.

Our generation is adrift. Children of rich and poor alike are growing up without any sense of direction. One study recently revealed that because of the high level of involvement in delinquent behavior, substance abuse and/or problems in school, as many as one-half of 10 - 17 years olds can be classified as moderate to very high risk individuals.

The most crucial ages are from age 10 to 14. These are the prime years during which our value system, our behavior code and our self-esteem are largely formed. By the time of our first year in high school, our personality and personal values are largely set for life.

Wouldn't it be exciting if we could reach the millions of youth in our age group with a message of hope: *"saving the planet, beginning with your neighborhood, is the greatest, most comprehensive and rewarding goal young people, even those from distinctly different backgrounds, can all share with enthusiasm and hope. We must keep dreaming and planning. Imagine combining that message with all of the training and the other on-going activities and resources that we are launching with Earth Train. Person by person-group by group we will help shape a new world."*
Signed by:

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