



VOICES

The Newsletter of the Touchstones® Discussion Project

MAPPING THE FUTURE – A KEYSTONE MOMENT

by: The Touchstones Roving Reporter

In 2003, when Howard Zeiderman decided to write the Touchstones program, *Mapping the Future*, he had one goal in mind. He wanted a keystone program that took the power of the Touchstones discussion leadership method and outcomes and put them into the hands of every participant. *Mapping the Future* takes each person (and group) through four units that delve into how we understand authority and expertise, who we recognize (and don't) as legitimate speakers, and explores the vital roles of listening and understanding. It culminates with our responsibilities in leadership, participation, and social commitment. In the process, every person—and the group as a whole—progresses through four stages of development by building skills central to participation, cooperation, active listening, and collaborative leadership.

The program is designed so discussion leadership, modeled at first by the "teacher," is then practiced and refined by the students themselves. The first time this program was used in full was at the National

Security Agency in 2003 to enhance cross-division collaboration. Today, *Mapping the Future* is used in advanced academic classes and courses in the US and Canada to build leadership skills.

A student in an AP Philosophy class using *Mapping the Future* recently shared this about his experience, "I learned that others are exactly that—completely different people with different sets of prejudices, beliefs, lived experiences, and unique points of view. And I learned that giving others space to express themselves is crucial to a well-functioning group and the act of standing for others can be beneficial to the self. ... there must be someone to give the quiet person their time—unless the person themselves has the courage to demand it. I must demand it and not rely on others."

The evening of November 15, the Touchstones Board of Directors will honor Howard Zeiderman on his retirement from the Touchstones

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Through inclusive discussion-based programming, Touchstones develops highly effective speakers, listeners, critical thinkers, and collaborative leaders.

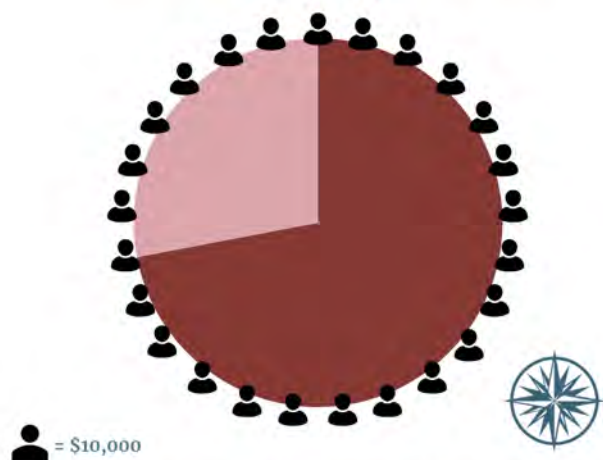
MAPPING

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Discussion Project staff. This special fundraising event is aptly titled, Mapping the Future. It features guest speakers who will share how Howard's visionary work in education has shaped their own paths. There will also be a delicious dinner, an art raffle of the painting shown here, and an exciting live auction—not to mention lots of laughter and maybe even some tears.

As invited guests of the Touchstones board of directors to this special celebration, charitable gifts made in Howard's honor (and the charitable deduction portion of all event ticket sales) will count toward the Still Water Foundation's challenge. That challenge, named "The 2025 Transforming People Campaign" by the Touchstone's board is raising \$250,000 that the Foundation will match in full. We are almost 75% of the way to our goal, and we need your participation!

2025 Transforming People Campaign



The Touchstones Board of Directors is raising \$250,000 to achieve a 1:1 match from the Still Water Foundation of Austin TX.

To join us on November 15, please email Jenny Walton:
jenny@touchstones.org.

After 41+ years of extraordinary contributions to Touchstones as the primary architect of its unique discussion method, Howard will dedicate his time to publishing books he has already written and to completing several more that are in draft. He'll remain on the Touchstones board, along with co-founder Nicholas Maistrellis—both as vital contributors to the organization's next chapter. Though he'll skip our weekly staff meetings, Howard has assured us he'll be there for every birthday lunch!

INTERESTING FACTS

Howard Zeiderman shared that the genesis of Mapping the Future was in 1970 while he was a graduate student in philosophy at Princeton University. He wanted to build a practice that empowers people to better recognize social and intellectual constructs that thwart human progress. Using this new method—a new way of engaging—people would leverage their experience and imaginations, their touchstones, to collaborate in building an inclusive society.

BONUS FACT

Howard's first use of the word "touchstones" was in his senior essay at St. John's College in the fall of 1966. In his essay, "Spring Came and the Leaves Turned Brown," he explored how inherited cultural and philosophical frameworks no longer enlivened human creativity and community.



This oil painting with charcoal line by Elliott Zuckerberg will be raffled off at the Nov 15 event. Tickets go on sale on October 5. \$25/ticket and 5 tickets for \$100. The winner will be responsible for shipping, but we will deliver it in person to addresses within 100 miles of the office.

Untitled, undated, 24"x36"



To learn more about the structure of the Touchstones method and the chapter themes in *Mapping the Future*, use this QR code.

K-12 EXEMPLARS IN ACTION

by: Sharon Thomas, Director of K-12 and Family Engagement Programs

Each year, the Touchstones Discussion Project highlights exemplary Touchstones instruction and advocacy with our Geoffrey J. Comber Touchstones Teacher of the Year Award. This year's winners introduced Touchstones into new school communities, bringing additional opportunities for insight and understanding about the types of support schools need. Our 2025 Touchstones Teachers of the Year are Dr. Christopher Palladino, Director of College Engagement and Interdisciplinary Learning, and Ms. Allyssa Hampson, Coordinator of Teacher Education Program and Conversational Learning Projects, at Esperanza Academy Charter School (EACS) in North Philadelphia, PA.

The EACS campus, with primarily a Latino student population, includes an elementary, middle, and high school. Allyssa and Christopher, who are administrators in the middle and high schools, managed the school's Touchstones implementations in grades 3-12 over the last year. Both have also led Touchstones classes themselves.

When nominating her colleagues, Jeana Davis, EACS's elementary school Director of Instruction, wrote,

"Both nominees have played a pivotal role in transforming the quality of students' discussions and collaborative activities by fostering a classroom environment rooted in respect, active listening, and critical thinking..."

Their commitment to inclusive dialogue and thoughtful facilitation has not only deepened students' understanding of diverse perspectives but also strengthened the overall sense of community and collaboration within the school environment."

The school's adoption of Touchstones has its roots in Christopher's initial Touchstones circle—almost exactly a decade ago in the living room of Bonnie and Jonathan Adams' home in Princeton, New Jersey. They were hosting a dinner party during which Touchstones staff ran an introductory discussion. For Christopher, this first experience

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EXEMPLARS

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was transformational. Reflecting on its significance, he shared, "Being exposed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the role and structure of dialogue in the classroom especially—and elsewhere—opened my eyes to the various possibilities."

Those possibilities started to become realities in 2022 when he assumed responsibility for social studies instruction and a pathway program at EACS for students who intend to become teachers. Christopher designed the school's Touchstones implementation, with Allyssa's intrepid organizational and logistical assistance supporting that vision.

Beyond their school-wide roles providing overall Touchstones leadership and classroom support,

Christopher and Allyssa also teach using Touchstones in the school's teacher education pathway in the high school. Both have relished their Touchstones experiences with their students each week, while also supporting the social studies teachers who were using Touchstones for the first time in their classes, too.

In her nomination, Jeana captured Allyssa and Christopher's remarkable dedication as teachers: "During Touchstones discussions, they guide students to speak with intention, listen actively to one another, and build on each other's insights—developing essential higher-level thinking skills and collaborative problem-solving abilities. By linking these discussion practices to other academic subjects and real-world situations, the teachers help students

see the relevance and power of their voices beyond the Touchstones classroom."

In our work with the school over the past year, we have seen firsthand the care and dedication in everything Christopher and Allyssa do. They focus as much energy on teacher engagement as they do on student development—caring for the entire school community. They want students to grow as collaborative thinkers and leaders, and they want adults at Esperanza, including themselves, to grow in those ways, too.

We are delighted and honored to recognize Dr. Palladino and Ms. Hampson as our 2025 Touchstones Teachers of the Year and look forward to celebrating them at our Mapping the Future special event on November 15. We hope you'll join us!



Sharon Thomas announces two 2025 Teachers of the Year from Esperanza Academy Charter School during a recent school visit.

From left: Yohana Giraldo (Director of High School Instruction), Evelyn Nunez (Chief Executive Officer), Christopher Palladino (awardee), Sharon Thomas, Allyssa Hampson (awardee), and Jeana Davis (Director of Elementary Instruction)

A SUPER CAN-DO VOLUNTEER

by: Sharon Thomas, Director of K-12 and Family Engagement Programs

Like many other non-profit organizations, Touchstones relies on volunteer support to advance numerous initiatives—including outreach and public relations, strategic planning, fundraising and special events—and programs in K-12 and higher ed, veterans' groups, senior centers, and prisons. Our volunteers are incredibly committed to the Touchstones mission—many giving time and energy toward multiple endeavors. Dr. Kimberley Riley, our 2025 Touchstones Volunteer of the Year, is one such extraordinary individual.

Retired now after a long career as an educator and head of the history department at The Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore, MD, Kim has worn many volunteer hats in the last year, plus. She has been a member of the Touchstones Fellows program, has served on our Still Water Foundation-funded business planning committee, was a guest speaker at our 40th anniversary event in DC, and supported professional development at a local school site. She currently sits on our K-12 Advisory Committee and is a dynamic discussion leader in the weekly Touchstones program in the school at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W). Kim recently joined the Touchstones Board of Directors and will host a TouchScones & Tea Party at her home this fall to introduce friends and fellow educators to Touchstones.

Kim is indispensable, with her can-do energy, enthusiasm for Touchstones programs, and openness to everyone around her. She offers new ideas for how and where Touchstones can make a difference and has a teacher's ability to walk into a room in a way that puts everyone at ease. She is also a dedicated member of her community in Baltimore, a global citizen in her outlook, and a true Touchstones ambassador.

For these reasons and more, we are thrilled to announce Dr. Kimberley Riley as the 2025 Touchstones Volunteer of the Year! On November 15, we will recognize and thank Kim—and all our amazing volunteers—for their invaluable contributions that advance Touchstones in countless ways.



Kimberley Riley, the 2025 Goeffrey J. Comber Touchstones Volunteer of the Year

THANK YOU

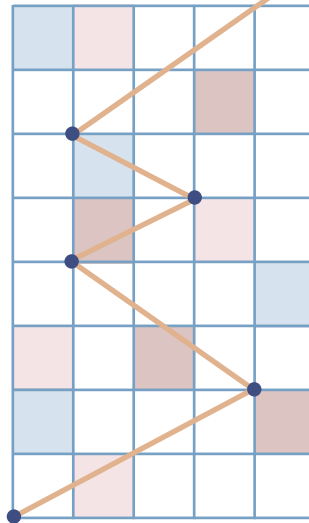
The Touchstones Board of Directors also wishes to acknowledge B. Brett Heavner, Partner at Finnegan, for his and his team's pro bono legal counsel on behalf of Touchstones.

EXCITING CHANGES ABOARD

by: The Touchstones Roving Reporter

Some of our volunteers fulfill an extra special role: these are our directors who serve as members of the board, providing essential oversight and guidance for the organization. We are delighted to welcome two new members this year: Charlie Green of Annapolis and Kimberly Riley of Baltimore. Both Marylanders bring diverse talents and passions to the board, and each has demonstrated a deep commitment to Touchstones through a range of activities—from co-leading Touchstones programs to rolling up their sleeves for strategic planning and special events.

Charlie is a published writer and an experienced editor and proofreader



who has worked in varied genres, including nonfiction, fiction, and dissertation manuscripts. He also reviews books for several online and print publications and covers theater through reviews, interviews, and feature stories. You can learn more about Kim Riley in our article, "A Super Can-Do Volunteer!" which further recognizes her as our Touchstones Volunteer of the Year.

As Charlie and Kim join the organization, Touchstones acknowledges and thanks Jessica Burgard and Melissa Curtin for their board service. We wish them both well and look forward to their continued participation in our community programs and outreach.

LEADING CHANGE IN PRISON

by: Stefanie Takacs, Executive Director

"Being a part of the Touchstone's circle was a lively and freeing experience. I was able to connect with my students in an unfamiliar way that was culturally relevant to their past and present lives. As a school leader, my goal is to not only lead, but to also serve as a role model every opportunity that I get for the women at MCI-W. My hope is that they take a little piece of what they've experienced as a student back home with them, that will ultimately have an everlasting, positive impact on their lives."

These words are from Shakeria Lambert, school Principal at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women (MCI-W), which is located in the prison complex in Jessup, Maryland. Ms. Lambert participated in her first Touchstones discussion last month, along with special visitors Maryland State Senator Mary L. Washington (43rd District: Baltimore City and Baltimore County) and the Senator's Aide Cara Matteson. MCI-W is one of seven prisons, three of which have been home to Touchstones discussion programs since the mid-1990s. (One, the former maximum security facility known

as The House, was razed in 2014 after closing in 2007 due to overcrowding and violence.) The discussion in which Ms. Lambert participated marked Touchstones' 10th anniversary running Touchstones programs at MCI-W. Over the last decade, many hundreds of women—perhaps more than a 1,000 at this point—have learned to express their ideas and their feelings and to raise their questions publicly and respectfully in Touchstones discussions.

Howard Zeiderman, Touchstones co-founder and then president of the organization, was initially invited into MCI-W in 2015 by Principal James Younger, who had known about Touchstones programs in the men's facilities. Dr. Younger had experienced first-hand how the men in Touchstones learned to regulate themselves more successfully, engaged in reflective and consequential thinking, and become more open to diverse viewpoints and ways of thinking. He recognized those benefits as crucial elements in an education that effectively prepares people for productive social interaction. Wanting the same benefits for the women students at MCI-W, he reached out to Howard and asked if we would bring Touchstones to his school.

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LEADING CHANGE

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Howard had first entered a Maryland prison—The House—after a group of men serving life sentences had written to him in the mid-1990s and asked if he would come teach them to lead Touchstones discussions. They had been given a copy of *Touchstones Volume 1 Teacher's Guide* by someone in the ACLU Prison Project, and they had already been trying to teach themselves, they said, to humanize their environment. They figured it was worth a chance to ask Howard if he would help them. And he did. For two years, Howard indomitably ran weekly programs in which he trained the group of men to lead their own Touchstones discussions.

You can catch Howard and the men in action in a short video on the Touchstones website on our Community Programs page, Incarcerated Individuals.
www.touchstones.org/community-programs/incarcerated-individuals/

The Touchstones staff rarely turns down the opportunity to bring Touchstones to new populations, particularly highly marginalized people who are often dismissed as unworthy of compassion or respect. When Dr. Younger invited us into MCI-W, of course we said yes. Since then, the program has served hundreds of members of the prison's general population and students within the prison school, in various formats and iterations. One thing has been constant: our commitment to providing every participant with invaluable opportunities to improve their interpersonal and workforce readiness skills—tools they absolutely need to return to society successfully.

Today, leadership of a six-week, recurring Touchstones program at MCI-W is shared by 12 trained volunteers. One incarcerated participant recently shared that the most important thing she had learned in Touchstones was "about telling the truth." She credits the class with teaching her "different ways of thinking" that "helped broaden her thoughts." Every six weeks, a new group of 15 students enters a Touchstones class for the first time. Like Ms. Lambert, each person experiences a different approach to teaching and learning and a compelling approach to leadership that emphasizes collaboration and a shared responsibility for ourselves and to each other. That is the Touchstones way.

For more information about Touchstones work with adult populations or how to volunteer, please contact Jenny Walton: jenny@touchstones.org

Use this QR code
to watch a clip from
Howard's discussion group
in the Maryland
House of Corrections.



Touchstones Discussion Project



[touchstonesdiscussions](https://www.instagram.com/touchstonesdiscussions)



Touchstones Discussion Project

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