

## **“What They Have to Say Matters”**

### **An interview with Jane Rubini, founder of MLK VOICE 4 YOUTH – A Spoken Word Contest**

**By: Pamela Finkelman 9/2022, for Peace Week**

September 21<sup>st</sup> each year is the United Nations International Day of Peace. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire. Jane Rubini was inspired by this world-wide event in her determination to find a way locally to celebrate the Day of Peace and also honor the words of Dr. Martin Luther King. “I remembered the speech contests I participated in when I was in school and how the feedback from educators and challenge of expressing myself influenced my life,” she said. “This contest is a way for our youth to share their experiences as they relate their lives to the profound wisdom of Dr. King. I want us to hear the voices of our youth.” With support from Christ Church Christiana Hundred and YWCA Delaware, Jane founded Delaware’s statewide MLK Voice 4 Youth, a spoken word contest now in its 7<sup>th</sup> year.

When she was envisioning how to format the speech contest, Jane consulted educators who advised her to think about a slam-poetry performance rather than confining the contestants to speeches behind a podium. “The options on how to express themselves are wide open for the youth. They can even compete solo or collaborate with peers if they choose,” she explained. “Each participant has a mentor who guides them, but the ideas, presentation and words are theirs. The only stipulation is their content must relate to the words of Dr. King, and we encourage the teens to explore some of his less famous writings and talks.”

All Delaware students enrolled in grades 9 to 12 are eligible to enter this contest. The prizes awarded are impressive: \$2,000 for first place; \$1,000 for second place; \$500 for third place. Registration opens on the UN Day of Peace, September 21<sup>st</sup>.

Jane believes youth are important people and need to be heard — they are the future and a barometer of our society and culture. “With all the trauma and roadblocks many of these students have confronted, the hope they express in their performances continues to inspire me,” Jane said. She is looking forward to the 2022 contest as an in-person event at the Baby Grand since 2021 was a year severely constrained by Covid. She urges people of all ages to either join the audience in the auditorium or stream the event from home. “Listen, learn and be moved by these extraordinary young people. What they have to say matters.”