

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday July 27th, 2010

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The REAL Truth about TRUE Skool, Inc.

Statement by TRUE Skool, Inc. to address erroneous claims by Alderman Bob Donovan.

Tuesday July 27th, 2010-Milwaukee, WI- TRUE Skool is deeply concerned by the recent public attacks initiated by Alderman Bob Donovan following our successful 5th Annual Block Party and Adopt a Community Kick-Off event held Saturday July 17th. Alderman Donovan has made a series of misleading and outright false assertions that have threatened the public credibility of our efforts. The citizens of Milwaukee elect public officials to serve the best interests of all residents regardless of race, age, or artistic taste. We entrust them to work diligently to pursue constructive solutions to problems that impact our city. We expect our public officials to carry out their duties in a professional manner with decorum and integrity. Alderman Donovan embarrassed himself and the Common Council by screaming insults at the Executive Director of True Skool Inc. in the presence of media and young members of True Skool Inc. No public official should be allowed to defame a legitimate nonprofit organization in this community with a track record for positively impacting the lives of young people and improving Milwaukee neighborhoods. As we have stated repeatedly, True Skool Inc. shares Ald. Donovan's concern over vandalism in our community. However, his tirade in Alderman Witkowiak's district regarding the temporary mural created during our Block Party was both misinformed and misdirected. True Skool is a nonprofit 501c3 organization that provides a variety of art education to youth and teens. Graffiti style art is only one form of art that True Skool teaches in partnership with faculty, and senior level students from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. True Skool offers participants a variety of programs in music, dance, and visual arts. The board and staff of True Skool Inc. do not endorse vandalism in any form, by anyone, for any reason. Representatives of True Skool Inc. have actively participated in Anti-Graffiti Policy Committee meetings throughout the years and have demonstrated its commitment to community beautification and positive youth development. We have repeatedly invited public officials to our events and have offered to meet with Alderman Donovan personally. We find it reprehensible that Alderman Donovan would make public claims that are completely false and potentially damaging to an organization's reputation without ever taking the time to meet and discuss his concerns with us directly. His conduct is unacceptable and we would like an official censure from the Common Council for his actions. Members of the press and the community joke about the frequency and tone of Alderman Donovan's press conferences, but defamation is no laughing matter. We expect decisive action to ensure that this type of conduct is not tolerated from any public elected official in the future.

Since this incident unfolded TRUE Skool has received an overwhelming amount of support from partner agencies, parents, educators, business owners, and youth from throughout the country. True Skool has received an unprecedented amount of requests for murals, and program-related partnerships. This support encourages us to continue to

provide new solutions to old problems by working with youth, not against them, and by working collaboratively with public officials, community organizations, neighborhood associations, law enforcement and anyone else interested in working for positive change in Milwaukee.

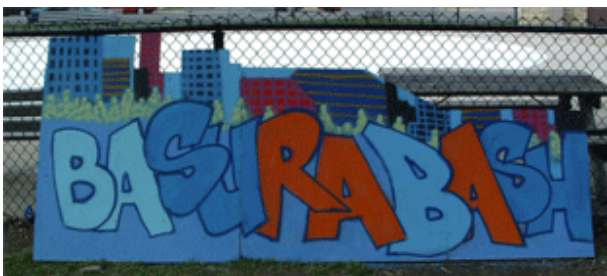
We would like to concisely refute the most serious accusations made by Alderman Donovan in his most recent press release. Please allow the facts to speak for themselves:

ACCUSATION: “Members of a gang of graffiti vandals known as the WR Crew-busted by police in late 2007...have direct ties to TRUE Skool.” - Ald. Donovan

TRUTH: TRUE Skool, Inc. receives referrals from judges, probation officers, First Time Juvenile Offender Programs and other sources for young people who receive tickets for illegal graffiti related offenses to work with us on community service projects. Juvenile members of the WR Crew were referred to TRUE Skool to do community service, based on our ability and track record for redirecting young people away from engaging in illegal vandalism. We work with young offenders to give back through activities based in restorative justice practices such as removing illegal graffiti. In 2008 TRUE Skool participated in Safe & Sound’s 1st Annual Basura Bash where they highlighted True Skool’s efforts in removing illegal graffiti. Juvenile members of the WR crew were present with TRUE Skool to do community service and remove illegal graffiti at this event and to help paint the Basura Bash sign (see picture below), a sign which Safe & Sound has used since 2008 for this annual event. Other members of the WR Crew were also present with the MPD to do community service through Operation Payback at this same event.

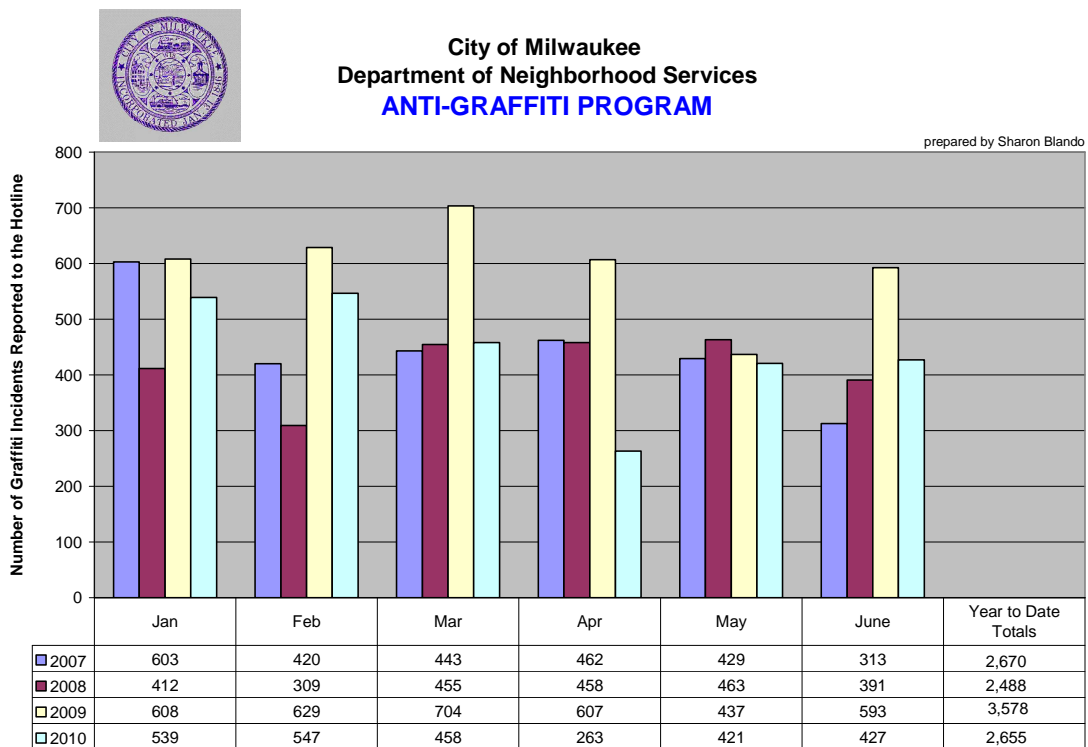
Press Release by Safe & Sound, Inc. can be found at

<http://trueskool.org/PRESS%20RELEASE%20-%20Basura%20Bash.pdf>



ACCUSATION: "I think they've been successful in misleading people...Graffiti is at its worse level now since we started taking records, and that worsening seems to coincide with the arrival of TRUE Skool on the scene," – Alderman Donovan

TRUTH: The chart below provided by Sharon Blando from the City of Milwaukee Anti-Graffiti Program clearly shows that illegal graffiti has decreased so far in 2010. There are many factors to the rise in illegal graffiti; TRUE Skool has never encouraged illegal vandalism of any kind since our inception in 2004. The levels of illegal graffiti have fluctuated over the years and there is no direct connection or factual data to assert that TRUE Skool is responsible for any increase. We are working diligently to help decrease illegal graffiti throughout the city of Milwaukee.



ACCUSATION: “Members of the TRUE Skool crowd who were present at Monday’s mural incident kept telling me and anyone else who would listen that they “clean up graffiti” in Milwaukee. Really? This is news to the Milwaukee Police Department and city anti-graffiti officials.” -Ald. Donovan

TRUTH: TRUE Skool’s 2009 Adopt a Community Kick-Off Event was held on Friday July 17th, 2009 and was attended by over 100 volunteers from 13 different agencies such as UMOS, Latino Community Center, South Division Summer CLC, Milwaukee Violence Free Zones, Summer of Peace Initiative Volunteers, and others to remove illegal graffiti, clean up the Cesar Chavez Neighborhood and to paint the

mural on S. Cesar Chavez Drive and W. Washington Street. It was also attended by Cesar Chavez Business Improvement District Members, Alderman Bob Donovan himself (*pictured below*), Safe & Sound/Community Partners, Captain Gaglione and other MPD officers. Also, see attached letter to Sharon Blando (http://trueskool.org/Blando_Ltr_pg1.pdf http://trueskool.org/Blando_pg2.pdf) (and cc'd by mail to Captain Gaglione, Alderman Witkowiak, Alderman Donovan, Alderman Zielinski, Alderman Witkowski and the Cesar Chavez BID District Members) sent July 29th, 2009 regarding our illegal graffiti removal efforts in the Cesar Chavez BID area. The claim that the Milwaukee Police Department and the Anti-Graffiti Program was not aware we did graffiti abatement is blatantly false.



ACCUSATION: “TRUE Skool reps have repeatedly spewed nonsense about how graffiti murals and graffiti-style “art” do not lead to an increase in graffiti vandalism. This is absolute baloney!” –Ald. Dononvan

TRUTH: Several US and Canadian cities have funded mural projects as a means to deter illegal graffiti and these programs have been proven to be widely successful! TRUE Skool has talked to officials in other cities to see the impact of community murals (not to be confused with permission walls where graffiti artists put up names, but well thought out community murals that are created out of the feedback from the surrounding community). In 2009 TRUE Skool was hired by the Cesar Chavez BID to paint a mural on S. Chavez Drive and W. Washington St (*see picture below*). We held a kick off event on July 17th, 2009 where our youth participants removed over 40 incidents of illegal graffiti in the Chavez Neighborhood. From July 17th to September 2009 only 3 new incidents of illegal graffiti appeared in that area and they did not appear until September 2009, showing that there was no increase in illegal graffiti due to our mural. Also, due to TRUE Skool adopting that area for the summer of 2009, the Cesar Chavez BID spent \$0 in illegal graffiti removal compared to the Mitchell Street BID who used triple their budget by mid summer to remove illegal graffiti. Please view the 2009 Adopt a Community ReCap (http://trueskool.org/AaCReCap2009_pg1.pdf http://trueskool.org/AaC_ReCap2009_pg2.pdf) for more info and data. We have included links below to mural projects in the US and Canada.



Successful Mural Projects that help deter illegal graffiti

http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/environment/community/graffiti/mural/guide/index_en.html Ottawa Canada

http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/environment/community/graffiti/mural/paint_town_en.html

http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/environment/community/graffiti/program_enhancements/faq_en.html (Graffiti Management Strategy about legal murals)

Redland's Program-[Redland Graffiti.pdf](#)

<http://www.muralarts.org/getinvolved/muralmile.php> City of Philadelphia

<http://arts4action.wordpress.com/2010/01/12/paint-not-prison-2010-to-start-in-mid-february/> City of Oxnard

<http://www.dosomething.org/project/paint-not-prison>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/14/AR2010011401650.html> -Washington DC Mural Project

ACCUSATION: Alderman Donovan claims that “we should teach youth how to do art and paint on canvasses and that we are not teaching leadership skills.” – Alderman Donovan

TRUTH: TRUE Skool offers a number of arts programs such as our Just Rockin’ Music Program and Music Recording Studio, Urban Arts Program and Breakdancing classes. Our entire curriculum is based on state standards of education, Milwaukee Public Schools Learning Targets for the Arts and the National Standards of Arts Education and many programs also incorporate service learning components. For example, our annual Canvass Project requires students to apply and get accepted into the 12 week program. Participants are required to not miss more than 2 classes, complete 10 hours of community service and complete a custom canvass using various mediums. Once the requirements are completed, participants organize and host a Gallery Night event where they receive a certificate of completion, a stipend for completing their requirements and are able to sell their canvasses teaching them skills in design, display, communication, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship. Our events are organized, marketed and hosted by youth participants. If that isn’t a sufficient enough demonstration of leadership for Alderman Donovan we would welcome to understand what his definition of leadership is.



We agree with Alderman Donovan that illegal graffiti is a real problem in Milwaukee. We would like for Alderman Donovan and others to see us as a partner and not an

opponent in the effort to eradicate illegal graffiti. Removal of vandalism alone will not solve the problem. It will take a multi-level, multi-faceted approach to deter, prevent, and redirect behavior that results in illegal vandalism. At the end of the day our mission is the same...to make Milwaukee a better city and to provide young people with positive opportunities to get them off the streets and on to a productive path in life, and our programs are successful in doing so. We do not condone or teach any form of illegal graffiti or vandalism of any kind. TRUE Skool Inc. believes that young people who are at risk of engaging in vandalism must be engaged as a part of the solution on the front end to prevent them from engaging in vandalism on the back end. True Skool Inc. seeks to continue to work cooperatively with individuals, organizations, public officials and programs like Operation Payback, a program which TRUE Skool has participated with in the past to remove illegal graffiti in the 6th District. When TRUE Skool uses the word graffiti art, it is referencing a style of art, not an illegal act to destroy property.

We also believe that young people deserve a chance to be heard and seen and given a voice to help create solutions, as they will be our next leaders. Alderman Donovan would be a real leader if he admits fault in his conduct, agrees to a sit down with our participants and their parents to discuss the merits our programs and their impact on the community.

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