

## **“What do you want to be when you grow up?”**

By Natalie Jones, Gray Panthers Intern

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Most people are asked this question multiple times throughout their childhood, and even throughout college or early adulthood. As a 22-year-old recent graduate with pretty hands-on parents, I know I definitely have had to answer my fair share of this question, oftentimes with no concrete answer. However, sometimes in life it is the question that is most important, not the answer. Simply by asking me this important question throughout my childhood, my parents illustrated that they cared about what my future holds, so that in turn I began to care too. On Wednesday May 31, 2017, Gray Panthers was given the delightful chance of presenting at this year’s annual career day at the P.S. 273 Wortman School in Brooklyn for this same purpose: to expose students to this question and allow them the opportunity to envision their future. The Gray Panthers’ representation in this career day introduced students to the essential work of confronting ageism and fighting for human rights, justice, and peace of all ages, notably broadening the students’ perspectives beyond their classroom material and positively influencing the lives of students in the community.

At this year’s half-day career event, over 20 speakers prepared 15-minute presentations on their different careers to address students across grades one to five, providing students the opportunity to explore concrete examples of what their future could hold. Mr. Jack Kupferman represented the Gray Panthers, teaching students about the Gray Panthers’ important work to protect the human rights of older persons through working with powerful international organizations such as the United Nations. He presented to students in five different classes, and was led to each classroom by a wonderful, exuberant third grader named Eternity. In each classroom, Jack did not shy away from a single question from the more on-task “what is the best part of your job” and “what does your daily schedule look like,” to the amusingly intrusive “how old are you” and even “how much money do you make.” His responses were passionate, engaging, and thoughtful, and his determination in helping the students understand the Gray

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Panther’s mission paid off in their clear interest in what human rights for older persons meant and what the United Nations is. Eternity even expressed at the end of the presentations how much she appreciated learning about the Gray Panthers’ rewarding work in the field of advocacy and social justice because it provided a specific, real-world connection to her social studies curriculum.

As Principal Melessa Avery stated in the career day invitation, this year’s career day truly was an opportunity to “give back to the children who are in need of dreams and desires.” Asking the students this question and illustrating links between their students’ learning and the real-world, the faculty and educators of P.S. 273 proved how much they care about their students, and their commitment to their mission statement of “providing an opportunity for all students to become critical thinkers.” The Gray Panthers is thrilled to have contributed to this tremendous school program in the community, and looks forward with pleasure to next year’s career day.