

Draft

Pittsburgh Youth Program

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Initiation

The Conflict Resolution and Mediation Project was first sketched on the back of a paper napkin in a faculty dining room during the spring, 1994. It was the result of two Pittsburgh-based academics brooding over the increasing gang-related violence in their city.

Both professors taught and administered in the area of conflict resolution at their respective schools--Carnegie Mellon University and Duquesne University. They had trained as mediators with the Pittsburgh Mediation Center (PMC), which specializes in conflict resolution and mediation training as well as community mediation services. One had recently completed a training experience with young adults. She was impressed with how well they seemed to integrate the skills. The question rose quite naturally, "Could these same skills be used to impact our gang-affected neighborhoods?" (1)

Duquesne University's leadership had long wanted to make an institutional outreach to two neighboring and predominantly African-American communities, i.e., Hill District and East Liberty. At the very time of the lunch table conversation, Duquesne was making a bid for a multi-faceted Community Partnership Center grant being offered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). (2) The \$580,000 HUD grant was awarded in December, 1994. It could--and did--make all this so much easier.

More immediately relevant to the Conflict Resolution and Mediation Project of this larger program were some excellent human ties that had emerged from earlier research that had been done. These had been formed over the years between Duquesne's Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy and the Community Intensive Supervision Project (CISP). CISP is an innovative, court-related and community-based alternative to incarceration. Through the work of its four neighborhood centers, CISP attempts to keep male youth who have had a brush with the court system in their own homes and neighborhoods. By means of an intensive, after-school program of monitoring, community services and skill building, the agency equips its young participants for a new lease on life outside prison. The Graduate Center of the University had just recently done some much appreciated research work for the CISP leadership.

Given the gang presence and activity in the target neighborhoods, it is inevitable that some of CISP's clients would be former gang members or youth-at-risk of such involvement. Thus, the CISP centers offered a ready access into the heart of the communities and the social concern they wanted to address. The trust level

which had been established between the Graduate Center and CISP leaders because of the early research ties was turned rather easily to the benefit of this new service Project.

Project Objective and Goals

As modest as it might have seemed when it was written, the Project's aim "to help alleviate gang-related violence" in the two communities seems quite grand when looking back, after having completed one year of the two year Project. The program objective has three thrusts: the empowerment of some trained mediators; an institutionalization of a mediation process or service in the communities; and offering a substantial expose to conflict resolution ⁱⁿ to the designated areas.

Collaborators

From the tangle of positive relationships described earlier, a creative partnership emerged which pledged to help implement the Project. Each "partner" organization makes its own contribution: 1) a Steering Committee composed of community members and representatives of each collaborating group advised and directed the Project; 2) CISP leadership identified clients and mid-level supervisors, supported their participation and provided hospitality, transport and food service for the entire program; 3) Pittsburgh Mediation Center designed the curriculum, did the orientation, taught the various training programs and offered technical advice; 4) through its Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies staff, the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy identified University participants, administered the grant and provided coordination, organizational and monitoring services. It also provided the valuable service of providing ongoing evaluation.

Model

Orientation and Training

Following orientation sessions in three different settings, a heterogenous grouping of 30 participants began with the Project. By the end of a demanding 13 week training period (3 hours each week) of conflict resolutions skills and mediation training, 24 participants had completed the total 39 hours. Three fell short of finishing the full program, but have expressed interest in completing it. Nine of the class of 27 were clients or mid-level supervisors of CISP. Eleven were service agency personnel or members of the communities and their environs. Seven were Duquesne University students and staff.

"Know Your Kin, Know Your Turf" Seminars

To ensure the relevance of the training for a largely African-American student body, guest presenters were brought in to lead two day-long enrichment seminars. In one case, the trainer was a former gang member working in the area of alleviating gang violence. During the second seminar, community leaders shared what they and their organizations were doing to reduce violence. On both occasions, participants in the Project helped to facilitate the meetings.

Mediation Internships

After completing the mandatory hours of conflict resolution and mediation training, trainees were required to observe a minimum of two mediations. When scheduled cases available through the Mediation Center ran short, two carefully "staged" or role-played mediations were offered as a partial and alternative way of completing the observation requirements.

Peer Development Sessions

All the Project's trainees were invited to monthly peer sessions which the Pittsburgh Mediation Center holds for all its affiliated mediators. Though attendance by Project members at these sessions was sparse, for those who did participate the events helped to further skill development, build solidarity among themselves and integrate the Project's mediators into the larger group of PMC mediators. At the end of the summer, a picnic was held to fulfill these same objectives in another manner.

Mediation Intake

PMC will receive and process calls for mediation from the target communities. As the neophyte mediators from the project finish their observed mediations, they will be called on to serve as mediators in these disputes. The diversity within the cohort of mediators from the Project--community members, young men and supervisors from CISP, University students and staff--assures a rich and diverse experiential base needed for good mediation. In turn, Project mediators will also serve with other more experienced volunteer mediators affiliated with the Pittsburgh Mediation. Neutral mediation sites within easy access for community members will be identified. It is estimated that 30 referrals to mediation will be handled during the final six months of the Project.

Training for Trainers

As the Project's trainees entered the second year, it was anticipated that a select group of the new mediators (5-8 persons) would demonstrate both the interest and ability to teach conflict

resolution skills to others. This has, in fact, occurred. A nine hour Training for Trainers program is being designed for this advanced training by the Pittsburgh Mediation Center. The experience of the earlier classes with the full group of participants will be drawn upon in preparing the curriculum.

Conflict Resolution Mini-Courses

The diffusion of conflict resolution into the broader communities will be a major preoccupation of the Project during its second year. One way of doing this is through a series of short three week Mini-Courses in basic conflict resolution skills. In all, three such courses will be taught.

Classes will be held in the communities for three hours each week during a given Mini-Course. Participants in the Project who have successfully completed the Training for Trainers program will serve as co-trainers in these sessions. CISP clients and supervisors, other youth from the area and key community people will be offered this training.

Community Mediation Needs Outreach

A fairly common experience of the community mediation movement is to have a shortage of referrals to mediation. Expecting that this difficulty would be compounded in our target areas where community mediation is not widely known, a form of audit or outreach was planned. Using the network of already established community contacts, we are approaching neighborhood groups, social agencies, churches and individuals. In these outreaches, an effort is being made to disseminate information about the Project, tell about our new community-focused mediators and to get help with the identification and referral of community conflicts.

Peer Development Sessions (Year II)

Project participants will be invited to continue their attendance at monthly development sessions sponsored by the PMC. These regular gathering will have the same purpose as similar ones in the first year, i.e., furthering skill development, building solidarity among the new mediators and integrate the Project's mediators into the larger group of PMC mediators.

This Far and No More

Like so many notches on the western gunfighter's rifle, the early steps of the Project have been completed pretty much on schedule. Orientations, conflict resolution and mediation training are nine-month old history. A few of the most persistent and fortunate trainees have come through the internship with its two prescribed mediation observations. Others--boosted by carefully prepared role-played meditations--are on the way.

Nine student mediators have signed up for the Training for Trainers program, offering the real hope that some will receive more advanced training. Through the services of these new trainers, Mini-courses will be made available to other members of the designated communities in the future. The Outreach to the target communities designed to tell them about the Project and to solicit conflict referrals is being dutifully executed, but it has met with little success thus far. Peer development sessions have been attractively offered to all the participants on a monthly basis but they have met with minimum response.

The Project has been held together and advanced by a doggedly committed Steering Committee which meets several times a month. An ever-present evaluation team chronicles the successes, failures as well as the inadvertent and unreflective twists and turns of the effort.

In the fourth quarter report on the Project to HUD, the administrators acknowledged the problems and weaknesses of the Project as we now see it : 1) We have all but lost the six CISP clients from the Project. 2) It has been extremely difficult acquiring and completing sufficient mediation cases for the trainees. 3) Low participation by some Steering Committee members from the communities has weakened our link with the neighborhoods. 4) Chronic overrun of time demands on the support staff to manage and execute this innovative program has been troubling. 5) Relatively minor but real work tensions have arisen between the collaborating groups.

To focus on this "litany of problems" can misrepresent a genuine and wholehearted effort to make something important work. Drawing together a court-administered youth service, a community mediation agency and a university graduate program to address a major community concern is a feat in itself. Numerous and positive interactions between the collaborators suggest a potential for future cooperative peacemaking efforts. (3) Innovative and culturally-sensitive training techniques have been developed. The nature and meaning of community involvement and impact continues to be critically examined. And, some important lessons have been learned which will help our Project during its remaining year. The rest of this article will draw out some of these "major lessons" which we have learned, relating them to the body of empirical

studies and theoretical reflection found in the emerging discipline of conflict resolution and transformation.

Lessons Learned

Empowerment:

- Disputants, mediators, society-at-large and collaborating organizations

Diversity/Culture:

- Ethnicity, class, real life

Success:

- Notches on the gun, touching peoples lives

(1) Though her initial brainstorming and collegial encouragement were most important, the Carnegie Mellon professor, Dr. Martha Harty, went on sabbatical the next academic year. She could not participate in the actual Project .

(2) More precisely, the "partners" in this HUD grant are leaders from two urban Pittsburgh neighborhoods--Hill District and East Liberty-- and Duquesne University. In addition to the Policy Center's work in conflict resolution and mediation, nine other projects make up the Partnership Center Program. Included are such efforts as legal advisement by the Law School, job counseling worked through the School of Education and preventative health care for the elderly jointly executed by the Schools of Nursing and Pharmacy.