

## ***Profiles in Peacemaking***

# RPEC Program Links Richmond with Africa

By John Williamson

In August last year, three members of Richmond's peace community went to Burundi in Central Africa for training in a conflict resolution program, Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC), that has proven effective in helping victims of war and genocide recover from their traumas.

Their journey was an important stage in a dynamic and still-developing approach to peace-building that involves two-way journeys of people and program initiatives between Richmond and Africa. These exchanges can enrich RPEC's current programs with longer-term implications for healing trauma and resolving conflicts in both African countries and the United States.

The three Richmonders – Santa Sorenson, Ram Bhagat and Elsie Okpu – were among 24 participants in an international workshop for HROC facilitators. After two weeks of intensive workshops, Santa, Ram and Elsie returned to Richmond emotionally drained by the stories of suffering they heard during the training, but convinced that HROC techniques could bring new depth and effectiveness to RPEC's conflict resolution programs.

Santa is coordinator and lead facilitator of RPEC's conflict resolution programs, and a former RPEC



**RPEC's facilitators for HROC: Elsie Okpu, Ram Bhagat and Santa Sorenson.**

board member. Ram, also a former RPEC board member, teaches at Richmond's Open High and was co-founder of Drums No Guns, which partners with RPEC in the Rich-

mond Youth Peace Project. Elsie, a native of Cameroon, has lived in Richmond for four years and is a nursing student at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. She is a member of the African Immigrant Fellowship for Peace and Reconciliation (AIFPR).

The Richmonders found the personal stories they heard from other participants to be the most powerful and memorable aspects of the workshops.

The HROC approach typically involves bringing together both survivors and perpetrators of violence, and in the workshop group both were represented. For some, it was the first time that they had told their stories,

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## Dr. King Honored, Then Ignored

Once again, on Martin Luther King Day, the strains of "We Shall Overcome" rose to conclude church services and rallies honoring the man who has become, in death as much as in life, the conscience of America.

And once again, even before the last "We Shall Overcome" had been sung, Dr. King's insistent call of conscience was being ignored, or worse, actively flouted.

On the afternoon of January 16 – the King holiday itself – an armed

platoon, not of soldiers but of civilians with holstered handguns on their hips, massed at the State Capitol, lobbying legislators to remove restrictions on the guns that have killed so many innocent Americans, including Dr. King himself. And after pressing their demands in the Capitol, the gun-toters stood watch around a smaller rally by advocates of increased gun controls, in an intimidating show of their ability to carry loaded guns wherever they please.

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Richmond Peace Education Center  
3500 Patterson Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23221  
Phone: (804) 232-1002  
E-mail: rpec@rpec.org

RPEC Web Page:  
<http://www.rpec.org>

**RPEC Staff**

Executive Director: Adria Scharf  
Asst. to the Director:  
Paul Fleisher  
Office Manager: Johnnie J. Taylor

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**Newsletter Staff**

Editor: Charles Robideau  
[ccrobideau@comcast.net](mailto:ccrobideau@comcast.net)  
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**Reflections**

Adria Scharf

Director, Richmond Peace Education Center

RPEC received two new grants in late 2011 that will greatly strengthen our impact on the metro-region.

The first was a grant from an anonymous donor that enables RPEC to train and mentor a new group of Youth Conflict Resolution leaders at Armstrong High School during the 2011-2012 school year. The 20-plus students we are working with participate in the Armstrong Leadership Program, and are selected by teachers and counselors for their leadership potential.

Upon completion of the training process, these youth will qualify to apprentice to become RPEC Youth Conflict Resolution trainers and will have opportunities to lead workshops in nonviolent conflict resolution with younger children in the community.

Secondly, we were pleased to receive a first time grant from the Memorial Foundation for Children to support the Richmond Youth Peace Project. The grant will cover several expansions of our work with teenagers.

First, it will enable us to provide our Youth Conflict Resolution Facilitators more intensive training and support with regular training meetings to raise their conflict resolution skill levels and increase their capacity to help other young people manage their differences.

Second, the grant will enable RPEC to increase its presence in at-risk schools and communities, including public schools, public housing communities, and other low-income neighborhoods, with youth-led conflict resolution trainings.

Third, the grant will increase the scope of the Richmond Youth Peace Project (including the Educoncerts and Youth Peace Summit), enabling RYPP to reach 750 Richmond-area children and teenagers this year.

In addition, we were grateful to once again receive generous support from The Wonder Fund of The Community Foundation Serving Richmond & Central Virginia, to support RPEC's overall functioning and expansion in 2012, and we continue to be grateful to the Doherty Family Fund of The Community Foundation for its annual support of the Peace Essay Contest.

Our primary source of support continues to be you, our donors, individuals and faith communities who believe in our work for peace and justice.

**Our Mission**

The Richmond Peace Education Center is working to build a more peaceful and just community in the Richmond, Virginia area. Since its founding in 1980, the center has been a leading voice for nonviolence and social justice, offering programs on conflict resolution and violence prevention, racial justice, and global issues. RPEC needs your involvement. Contact the office to plug in: [rpec@rpec.org](mailto:rpec@rpec.org) or 232-1002. Together, we can build a more peaceful and just community and world.

## **RPEC Happenings**

### **RPEC Acknowledged by Living the Dream**

The Richmond Peace Education Center was recognized by Living the Dream, Inc. on Martin Luther King Day, January 16. The Rev. Ricardo Brown, Living the Dream director, presented RPEC with a plaque at the organization's mass meeting, attended by more than 700 people.

Living the Dream, formerly known as Community Learning Week, is the collaboration of Richmond area congregations and community organizations that educates the Richmond community about the legacy of Dr. King, on the occasion of the King holiday.

RPEC was cited for our long-time support and community efforts. We were truly honored to be acknowledged by this important body.

### **RPEC Gives Workshops for Occupy Richmond**

Together with the Wayside Center for Popular Education, RPEC gave two workshops to Occupy Richmond in mid-January.

First was a workshop on conflict resolution and de-escalation focused on how to communicate with one another across lines of difference within the movement, in ways that enhance solidarity.

The second, on nonviolent direct action, exploring definitions of non-violence and how to stay safe when engaging in protest activity, was cut short due to another scheduled Occupy meeting. A longer future version of the workshop is planned.

### **Generation Dream Educoncerts, Feb. 3-4**

Join the Richmond Youth Peace Project in commemorating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with our Youth Educoncert, Generation Dream 2012 – part of the annual Living the Dream community program.

Shows are scheduled for Friday, Feb. 3, at 7 p.m. at the Richmond Public Library's main branch (free), 100 E. Franklin St., and Saturday, Feb. 4, at 2 p.m. at the Science Museum of Virginia (free with museum admission).

The show features talented youth performers from throughout the Richmond metropolitan area. Performers will include Minds in Motion Team

XXL; Taaluma African dance, along with Thomas Jefferson African dancers on Saturday; Indian dance and music from Apsaras Arts Dance Group and Gandharva North America; and dance from Rave' Williams and the Laburnum dancers; instrumental music from Daniel Leibovic, Pranay Vissa and Seth Vickers; songs from Krista Olson and Nyenda Diamond Anderson; rock and roll from the Firehawks band; and spoken words by Angelica de Jesus and others.

Our young performers will be supported by professionals Ezibu Muntu (Saturday only), Theresa G and – as always – Drums No Guns.

### **Youth Peace Summit Set Saturday, April 28**

The 2012 Youth Peace Summit is scheduled for April 28, 2012. This year's Summit will be held at Northminster Baptist Church, 3121 Moss Side Avenue, Richmond, VA 23222, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Workshop proposals for the Summit are being accepted through the end of February. Proposals should include a summary of the content and activities that will be presented, along with full contact information for presenters and a paragraph describing their qualifications and experience. All workshops are strongly encouraged to include young people as leaders.

Visit the Peace Center web site, [www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org), to download a proposal form, or email [rypp@rpec.org](mailto:rypp@rpec.org).

Teens, adult mentors and parents are invited to help plan the Summit. We especially want teens to take part in this leadership phase of the event. Interested teens and adults should email [rypp@rpec.org](mailto:rypp@rpec.org) for more information about dates and times.

We are also now accepting registration for participants, ages 12-19. Individuals, as well as adult-mentored youth groups can register by emailing [rypp@rpec.org](mailto:rypp@rpec.org) with name(s), contact information, school and grade.

### **Peace Essayists Sought for 2012 Contest**

This year's Peace Essay contest is now open to all young Virginians from grades K through 12. Contest rules and entry forms will be posted at [www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org), in February.

The contest offers a top prize of \$100 in each of four age divisions, and other cash prizes.

Entries are limited to a maximum of 1,000 words. Entries must be either postmarked or delivered to the RPEC office by April 23.

Volunteers who would like to participate in judging the contest in May should contact Paul Fleisher at [pfleisher@rpec.org](mailto:pfleisher@rpec.org).

## ‘Crisis in the Congo: Uncovering The Truth’

“Crisis in the Congo: Uncovering the Truth,” a free film sponsored by Friends of the Congo and the Richmond Peace Education Center, will be shown at the Richmond Public Library at 101 East Franklin Street on Monday, Feb. 6 at 5:30 PM. The film is a call to conscience and action.

Millions of Congolese have lost their lives in a conflict that the United Nations describes as the deadliest in the world since World War Two. United States allies, Rwanda and Uganda, invaded in 1996 the Congo (then Zaire) and again in 1998, which triggered enormous loss of lives, systemic sexual violence and rape, and widespread looting of Congo’s spectacular natural wealth.

The ongoing conflict, instability, weak institutions, and dependency in the Congo are a product of a 125-year tragic experience of enslavement, forced labor, colonial rule, assassinations, dictatorship, wars, external intervention and corrupt rule. Analysts in the film examine whether U.S. corporate and government policies that prioritize profit over the people have contributed to and exacerbated the tragic instability in the heart of Africa.

The Richmond Peace Education Center's HROC facilitators, Santa Sorenson, Ram Bhagat and Elsie Okpu have recently been in Burundi and met with a delegation from Congo. They have invited former citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo who will speak on a panel about the causes of the war and the effects on the people. The RPEC facilitators will talk about how HROC (Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities) has helped healing of trauma in the Congo and the African Great Lakes Region.

— **Santa Sorenson**



Speaking at a plenary session of the 2012 Virginia People’s Assembly is Lillie “Ms. K” Branch-Kennedy, a co-chair of the event.

## Assembly calls for ‘Jobs, Peace, Justice’

Just about every currently hot issue of peace and social justice facing the nation and our community was food for debate at the 2012 Virginia People’s Assembly, January 14.

The fourth annual assembly, which gathered at St. Stephen’s Koinonia Church in the Chimborazo neighborhood of Church Hill, was sponsored by a wide range of activist organizations and individuals, including the Richmond

Peace Education Center and Occupy groups from Blacksburg, Virginia Beach and Richmond.

Discussion of immigration issues has helped re-energize the Virginia Immigrant People’s Coalition, which is planning a “Day of Action” on Friday, Feb. 17, at the State Capitol in Richmond. Planning for the event is being led by Jeff Winder, coordinator of the Wayside Center for Popular Education, who co-chaired the People’s Assembly.

## Youth-led Workshops

Would you like to schedule a conflict resolution workshop for your children’s or youth group? Please contact us at [rypp@rpec.org](mailto:rypp@rpec.org). RPEC Youth trainers are available to lead workshops for children and teens, supervised by RPEC’s adult workshop leaders.

## Your Votes Paid Off

We just received our portion of this summer’s Richmond Unite fundraising effort. Thanks to the support from our online community, we earned over \$2,000 to help fund RPEC’s programs over the coming year. Thanks to everyone who helped with your electronic votes!

## Richmond and Africa

*Continued from Page 1*

and telling their stories in a supportive setting was the beginning of a healing process. This took courage and trust. Santa explained that during the HROC workshops in Burundi there was a “sacred time of participants telling their own stories,” with most stories being told for the first time.

One such story was told by a young woman who had been a captive in the bush for six years, Santa recalled. “For ninety minutes she described her experiences, including being forced to kill and being raped. Although she had been through unspeakable torture, this young woman, who is my daughter's age, has become a committed peacemaker.”

“I heard many stories in Africa,” Santa said, “and there is one thing I

think about every day because of my experience there: There is nothing more profound and more resilient than the human spirit. I am so pleased that my life's path led me to HROC. It has given me so much.”

RPEC's path to HROC was opened by AIFPR, which is dedicated to helping Africans now living in Richmond to reconcile and heal from the traumas experienced in violent conflicts in their home countries. AIFPR, which was founded by the Rev. Davis Yeuell, a long-time RPEC board member, now has more than 100 members from 27 African countries.

In 2010, AIFPR approached RPEC to help its members learn how to reconcile and heal from their past traumas. Santa knew about HROC, and in March 2010, she and Ram led a work-

shop with AIFPR members, who responded enthusiastically. Elsie was one of the participants.

Following the March 2010 workshop, Santa and Ram felt that they needed firsthand experience of life in Africa to be able to work more effectively with Africans in Richmond. They also saw that HROC could add a significant dimension to RPEC's conflict resolution work. Members of the AIFPR also felt the need to develop skills in HROC that they could use within their organization and in their home countries. Word of the HROC training in Richmond began to circulate to other communities, and RPEC received requests for information and support from Philadelphia, Atlanta, Washington and other cities with significant African immigrant populations. Spurred by this interest, Santa approached HROC organizers and learned of the Burundi workshop. For Santa and Ram, it was their first trip to Africa.

Most of the 24 participants in this training were from Africa's Great Lakes region. Besides the Richmond group, there were participants from Seattle and Philadelphia, as well as Brazil. Three of the participants had been trained in Kenya by Linda Heacock, an RPEC founder.

To open the training, participants were divided into three groups and sent to different parts of Burundi, where they were immersed in local life, eating local food, walking through communities, and using local transportation. Santa went to a camp for internally displaced Burundians, while Ram went to a village and Elsie to a Catholic seminary. Reminders of Burundi's violent past were evident in the dilapidated buildings and abandoned homes. Santa described a sense of sadness but also amazing hope among the people she met. After three days, the groups returned to a Catholic seminary in

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## HROC's roots grew in African genocide

HROC (Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities) was developed in 2003 by two young African peace builders, Adrian Niyongabo and Theoniste Bizimana. They are with the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Center, which works in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. They saw a critical need to facilitate the peaceful reintegration into communities of men and women who were about to be released from Rwandan prisons, where they had been held for their roles in the 1994 genocide.

In developing HROC, Adrian and Theoniste adapted exercises from the Alternatives to Violence Program (developed in the U.S. for work with prisoners), to help heal suppressed trauma among both survivors and perpetrators of the genocide. They

felt that healing the trauma was essential to breaking the cycle of violence. It was used first in Rwanda and Burundi. Five principles underlie HROC:

1. HROC believes that in every person, there is something good.
2. It assumes that each person and society has the inner capacity to heal, and an inherent sense of how to recover from trauma.
3. Both victims and perpetrators of violence experience trauma and its after-effects.
4. The violence in Rwanda and Burundi was experienced at both a personal and community levels, so healing and rebuilding must happen at both levels.
5. Healing from trauma and building peace between groups are deeply connected and must happen simultaneously.

## Richmond and Africa

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Burasira, where they stayed for two weeks of training.

The Richmond three found the training well-organized and very interactive, including structured exercises and training in how to facilitate them. “The exercises and activities were experiential as we have in our RPEC Conflict Resolution programs, so I felt very much at home,” Santa said.

“I left for Burundi without preconceived notions but was very receptive to what I was going to experience,” said Ram. “One thing that was striking to me was how linguistically diverse the African participants were, often speaking and functioning well in four or more African and international languages.” He found the African participants to be real citizens of the world.

Elsie found Burundi to be quite different from her Cameroon homeland, and she faced some adjustment challenges, both during the workshop and after returning to Richmond.

“When the time came,” Santa noted, “it was difficult for all of us to part with the others, especially people that we had bonded with. With elections coming up in Congo, we were concerned for the safety of those who would be returning there.”

They felt that the workshop in Burundi affirmed the HROC training they had already done in Richmond had been done right, Santa said. “We had heard the same expressions of gratitude during the workshops in Burundi and Richmond. People said their hearts were lighter, just being able to tell their stories. It is a mission to do this work.” Santa and Ram would like to return to Africa to help some of their workshop colleagues set up a peace center in eastern Congo.

After the emotional intensity and bonding of the workshop and the experience of local life in Burundi, the transition back to Richmond was a challenge for all three Richmond participants. Having adjusted to living without phones, television, and other technology, as well as living at a much more measured pace, the return was a shock. An additional influence was secondary trauma from the stories they had heard.

Santa and Ram are now certified to lead HROC workshops and are mentoring Elsie, who also will soon be certified. They led a basic HROC training in Richmond January 20-22, and they may lead trainings in other cities as well. HROC training is now part of RPEC’s conflict resolution program.

In addition to Elsie, sixteen members of AIFPR are being trained in HROC, enabling them to use this approach in the United States and their home countries. Elsie is reaching out to identify

Rwandans and Burundians in Richmond to invite their participation in the AIFPR.

Ram and Santa feel that HROC could be used effectively in Richmond for addressing gun violence and its effects and that it will deepen RPEC’s other conflict resolution training. They also anticipate that HROC could be used effectively to address local tensions between Black and Latino youth, and they believe that it could be used in work with rape survivors.

Theoniste Bizimana, one of the HROC founders, recently visited Richmond, where he spoke at AIFPR, Open High, Richmond Community High School, and Richmond Friends meeting. In partnership, AIFPR and RPEC want to enable Richmond to become a model in the United States for supporting and integrating African immigrants. HROC, with roots in both Africa and the U.S., is also a way to strengthen both local and global aspects of RPEC’s mission.



**Burundi villagers enjoy a peaceful day.**

## Dr. King Honored, Ignored

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That evening, at a memorial service at Fifth Street Baptist Church in Highland Park, celebrating both Dr. King and the 10th anniversary of the Boaz and Ruth community organization, the Rev. Tyrone Nelson invoked Jesus's teaching to his disciples that if one failed to feed, clothe, shelter or otherwise help a person in need, "just as you did not do it to the least of these, you did not do it to me." (Matthew, 25:31-45)

In subsequent days many groups came to the Capitol, to speak out against pending budget cuts for "safety net" services that hundreds of thousands of "the least of these" in Richmond and Virginia depend on for their very lives.

Medicaid is the guarantor of health care for nearly 200,000 Virginians who don't have health insurance and can't afford to buy a private insurance plan. In Gov. Bob McDonnell's budget plan for the next two years, 4,500 older Virginians could be denied long-term care under Medicaid due to McDonnell's proposal to lower the income limit for such care from 300 percent of the federal poverty level to 250 percent. This would save the state \$18.2 million, to the detriment of 4,500 Virginians.

On Wednesday, January 18, the Capitol was crowded by health care groups protesting cuts aimed at many "safety net" organizations. The cuts include \$5 million to three major Richmond area-based organizations that serve the network of community medical centers and free clinics around the state. In McDonnell's two-year budget plan, current appropriations would continue for the first of the two years, but would be halved in the second year, Fiscal 2014, starting October 1, 2013. In that second year, the Virginia Health Care Foundation would lose \$2,040,286; the Virginia Community Healthcare Association would lose \$1,204,375, and the Virginia Association of Free Clinics would lose \$1,598,200.

McDonnell's budget assumes that under the federal "Affordable Health Care Act" many users of the free clinics would be enrolled in an expanded Medicaid, and others would obtain insurance with government subsidies. But this chancy prospect offers cold comfort to the local agencies that would bear the pain of the budget cuts.

"They're panicked, just panicked," said Judith Cash, the Health Care Foundation's deputy director. The Foundation regularly matches the state appropriations with its own funds, so cuts in the state funding could be a double whammy for many recipients.

In addition, McDonnell's budget targets many groups directly for cuts. For example, the Fan Free Clinic in Richmond, as a member of the Health Care Foundation's

network, faces a funding cut from that source. McDonnell's budget also targets the Fan Free Clinic directly for a 50-percent cut of \$6,690 in the second year.

Other organizations facing 50-percent second-year cuts include the Virginia Comprehensive Health Investment Project (CHIP), the Arthur Ashe Health Center, the Virginia Sickle Cell Chapter, the Jeanie Smith Free Clinic, Mission of Mercy, St. Mary's Health Wagon, and many others.

The Community Healthcare Association's network encompasses 29 local organizations operating 116 sites around the state. Neal Graham, the Foundation's CEO, explained that its primary aid to its members is defraying services to uninsured patients, who make up about one third of the total. No patient would be denied care, Graham said, but there might be longer waits between visits at clinics that are already over-stressed. "There is already more demand than any of us can meet," he said.

Health care advocates were only one of the many groups that have been flocking to the State Capitol to lobby for continuing support. One day it was groups working to end homelessness; another day it was teachers, members of the 50,000-member Virginia Education Association (VEA), along with Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members.

The VEA's analysis of the Governor's budget noted that schools were being short-changed by a variety of cutbacks, plus the diversion of \$300 million to plug the under-funded Virginia Retirement System. The VEA concluded:

"The state decreases, on top of the actions that localities are going to impose due to restraints on local dollars, mean that Virginia schools will see larger class sizes, deteriorating buildings, aging bus fleets, outdated technology, fewer curriculum offerings, lay-offs of teachers and support staff, and lowered student achievement as teachers struggle to provide quality instruction with fewer resources."

Gov. McDonnell, in his address to the General Assembly's money committees on December 19, stated: "This is a budget marked by tough decisions demanded by this difficult economy."

Politicians, of course, love to boast of "tough decisions." But the truly tough decision is that defined by Dr. King in his 1967 address, "A Time to Break Silence," at Riverside Church in New York City. Speaking passionately against the war in Vietnam, Dr. King stated: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

— Charles Robideau

# Mediation Helps Kids Handle Conflict

By Wendy Northup and Paul Fleisher

*Editor's note: The following article was published recently by the Richmond Teachers for Social Justice. The authors, Wendy Northup and Paul Fleisher, are long-time teachers and leaders of the Richmond Peace Education Center.*

Too often, young people faced with a conflict turn to physical violence. How can we teach children to settle their differences civilly, with words instead? There's a tested technique that can help kids settle conflicts peacefully. It's called *peer mediation*. This program features problem-solving sessions moderated by other kids. It's been used both here and abroad for decades with young people from elementary school age through college. Here's how it works:

In a mediation, kids with a dispute voluntarily sit around a table with a pair of trained mediators about their own age. The job of the mediators—also sometimes known as “conflict managers”—is to help the disputants resolve their problem, not to solve it for them. Arguments about shared space, possessions, insults, threats, jealousy, rumors, and disputes over girlfriends and boyfriends are all appropriate for resolution through the process. A responsible adult is always within easy calling distance in case problems arise that the mediators can't handle.

Both disputants must first agree to a few basic rules: Listen to one another and speak one at a time. Use no put-downs or foul language. And most importantly, agree to work towards settling the problem. Mediators inform the disputants that the discussions in the mediation will remain confidential; but that information about anything dangerous or illegal must and will be reported to a responsible adult.

Each child takes a turn describing his or her side of the complaint, without interruption from the other party. Both mediators listen carefully. Without making judgments, they restate the problem to show they understand. As they summarize, the mediators are trained to reflect the disputants' feelings and values, as well as the facts of the disagreement. If they need more information, or don't think they've heard the whole story, the mediators can ask for clarification.

The mediators then ask the disputants how they want the situation resolved. Each child gets to propose a solu-

tion. Often, once both parties have been heard, the conflict is easily settled. Student resolutions can seem simplistic to adults. For example, kids who have been teasing each other may simply decide to avoid one another. A student worried about a rumor that she cheated on a test may just want an apology. What's important is the disputants' satisfaction. If *they* consider the problem to be resolved, it *is* solved.

Sometimes a resolution takes more time. The mediators may ask the disputants to brainstorm a variety of possible solutions. The mediators listen, and make sure that the discussion remains civil and constructive. After the parties agree on a solution, the mediators write it out and everyone signs the agreement. If the settlement later fails for some reason, the parties can return and try to repair it.

Not every conflict can be mediated successfully, of course. Some problems are too serious, or too intractable. At that point, the student mediators pass the dispute on to adults for a more traditional treatment. Interracial conflicts, bullying, and conflicts rooted in sex or class issues often call for a broader, systemic solution. Mediation is *not* appropriate to use with children who have come to blows or committed other serious infractions such as theft or possession of illegal substances. Such infractions require more serious administrative sanctions—although an administrator may later use mediation to help resolve an underlying dispute between the parties. Nor is mediation used to settle disputes between a child and an adult.

Top students don't necessarily make the best mediators. In fact, if only “good kids” are selected, the program is unlikely to succeed. Mediators need leadership ability. Successful programs include kids who may lead others in the wrong direction now and then. This provides an extra benefit. “Troublemakers” who become mediators begin channeling their leadership potential in more positive directions.

Training is an essential step in the process. Prospective mediators need extended time to learn the specific steps of the process, and the interpersonal skills they need to make it work. Most importantly, they practice role-

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## Peer Mediation

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playing mock mediations. Once mediators have been trained, they advertise their services to the rest of the population. Mediators should continue to meet with their adult mentors regularly for additional training and to address and questions or problems that may arise.

Peer mediation isn't just for schools. Recreation centers, church youth groups, youth athletic programs and summer camps can also use the process to resolve conflicts while teaching important life skills at the same time.

Active support from a committed adult sponsor is essential for a successful program. Mediators need continued training to build and maintain their skills. And other adults must guide young people towards mediation, instead of trying to impose their own solutions. Resolutions that kids decide for themselves tend to be more effective and longer lasting anyway.

When a mediation program is first instituted, skeptical students and staff may be reluctant to participate. But as students begin experiencing success in settling their conflicts, confidence in the program will grow. Teachers find they can refer students to mediation, rather than wasting precious instructional time trying to solve every dispute themselves. Kids learn mediation is not a new form of punishment, but a real opportunity to settle their own problems peacefully.

Peer mediation is empowering. It's wonderful training for democracy.. It teaches kids to be independent, self-reliant and responsible for their own actions. An active

peer mediation program supported by teachers, administrators and students can even change the underlying culture of a school. Of course, peer mediation won't resolve the social ills and inequities that are the root of much of the violence in young people's lives. But it can make children's environment safer and more peaceful. If your school or youth group has a commitment to educate the whole child, and not simply cram his or her head full of data to be regurgitated on a standardized test, a peer mediation program is worth supporting.. Urge your school administrators or youth leaders to institute one, or get trained to become a sponsor yourself.

*The Richmond Peace Education Center has a team of peer mediation trainers who would be happy to talk with you about steps your school or youth program can take as you consider instituting a mediation program. Contact us a rpec@rpec.org or 804-232-1002.*

## Teachers for Social Justice

Richmond Teachers for Social Justice was founded in March 2010 by a group of educators and allies dedicated to creating a just, democratic, sustainable and caring society through education, solidarity and social action. The organization's membership includes public and private school teachers, university faculty, adult educators, parents, students, community workers and anyone interested in working for social justice in education.

Among the RTSJ's goals is "to strengthen the bonds of neighborhoods and school communities through outreach to individuals, groups and organizations." For information visit [www.rvatsj.org](http://www.rvatsj.org).

### *Napa Valley Time Share, Anyone?*

A community member has generously offered to donate a time share to RPEC to sell, with the proceeds to be a contribution to RPEC.

The time share is for one week in Napa Valley, California, in a beautiful area of the wine country, just one hour from San Francisco. The resort is described here: <http://www.riverpointena.com/>. The annual fee for the time share is \$400 per year.

Owning the lease to this time share gives you one week in an efficiency cottage apartment every year, or one week in a larger one bedroom cottage apartment every other year. You can go any time of year, reserving your week in advance. Alternatively you can exchange your week in Napa for time shares around the country or world by participating in a time share exchange program.

### Hoops Fans for Peace?

RPEC will be at the University of Richmond Robins Athletic Center on Saturday, Feb. 18, at 6 p.m. for the basketball game vs. Charlotte. We will have a literature table on the concourse level.

RPEC members can purchase discount tickets here:

[https://www.ticketreturn.com/prod2/team.asp?&DB\\_OEM\\_ID=26800&SponsorID=3865](https://www.ticketreturn.com/prod2/team.asp?&DB_OEM_ID=26800&SponsorID=3865)

Type RPEC in the Special Offer Box.