

Youth Program Update

Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County

NOVEMBER 2011

ISSUE # 1

MATT'S MONTHLY

It has been over a month since I formally began my internship with CRCMC. My start date was delayed because of the transition from the Wheaton office to our new office in Bethesda. The transition remains in progress; the brand-new desk at which I am currently sitting is a testament to this fact.

Likewise, I remain in a state of personal transition. It has been over two years since I worked in an office. The first thing I noticed when I got here was how bare the walls were and requested that we get some posters. I have since settled into the arrangement, but nonetheless I relish opportunities to change the scenery and directly engage the communities that CRCMC services. For example, last week I was able to interview six students at Roberto Clemente Middle School, which is 25 minutes from the office, in preparation for a successful community conference.

I have taken on numerous other projects including developing this newsletter you are reading in order to keep you informed on what folks involved with the Youth Restorative Justice Initiative are doing and also invite you to submit any content or feedback of your own. I must say that I have been given many opportunities in a short period of time. At our staff

circle meeting last month, I was chosen by consensus to facilitate the next two meetings – much to my surprise. I did not nominate myself initially, but once my own nominee indicated that he was not able to accept the position, I came to see it as an opportunity to contribute my skills as a facilitator and to learn more about the Dynamic Governance process, which helped me secure this internship in the first place. Please see the next page for more on Dynamic Governance.

I am also helping to develop outreach materials and strategies for the youth program. The rest of what I do can be summed up as administrative and clerical tasks that are not necessarily newsletter-worthy but vital to the operation of the youth program and to CRCMC as a whole, so I take them seriously.

I am generally very comfortable with everything I am doing because the CRCMC staff is always available to assist while giving me the space and confidence I need to get the job done. As a matter of personal interest, I am working on bringing community conferencing and other restorative practices to my own community in Washington, D.C., particularly to the campers at Occupy D.C., which have faced numerous internal and external challenges and as of this writing lack formalized rules and procedures for addressing conflict. I hope to change that.

--Matt Johnson



SLIGO PARTNERSHIP IN PROGRESS

CRCMC's Community Conferencing Specialist Timiza Woods's proposal for the School-Based Conflict Resolution Program at Sligo Middle School has been approved. The program will "empower students to utilize [an] on-site Conflict Resolution Office to address and resolve disputes in constructive ways that support the vision of Sligo Middle School to create a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment," according to the proposal.

Timiza will serve as the ombudsman in the Conflict Resolution Office, located within the school's counseling center, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to address school conflicts utilizing individual conferencing, community conferencing, meditation, and peer mediation. She will accept complaints on behalf of students, teachers, and administrators.

Potential benefits:

- Students are provided immediate response to incidents of harm
- Students are encouraged to be proactive and address conflict in the early stages
- Suspension, expulsion, and arrests are reduced
- Relationships among students, families, and school staff improve

'DYNAMIC GOVERNANCE' INTRODUCED

This fall CRCMC is experimenting with a new decision-making process known as Dynamic Governance. According to <http://www.governancealive.com>, the "The primary objective of Dynamic Governance is creating a harmonious workplace, not just because harmony is nice, but because harmony is necessary in order for people to work together effectively." The four principles of dynamic governance are abbreviated from the website below:

- **Consent:** Consent means "no paramount and argued objections." Objections must be based on a person's ability to do their job and clearly explained so they may be addressed and resolved.
- **Circles:** Decision-making is delegated to a hierarchy of circles that reflects the operational structure. This allows decision-making to flow through the organization. Responsibility for leadership is distributed.
- **Double-Linking:** In the hierarchy of decision-making circles, the membership of each lower circle overlaps that of the higher circle. This overlap is accomplished by including at least two people from the lower circle as full members in the higher circle.
- **Elections:** People are elected by consent to functions and tasks. The election process ensures that the person elected to a task is accepted by the circle as the best available person to do it, and that the person elected also understands what the task requires and what other circle members need from the person performing the task.



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: Matthew Johnson

Each month we will profile a different volunteer.
E-mail matt@crcmc.org for more information.

How did you end up volunteering with CRCMC?

Over a year ago I was obsessed with the idea of starting an organization similar to CRCMC and the Community Conferencing Center of Baltimore where I live (D.C.), but I lacked the resources and expertise to make it happen, so I trained in community conferencing last Feb. and started my apprenticeship soon thereafter.

What made you interested in conflict resolution?

Conflict is something everyone deals with; there is nothing esoteric about it. A healthy life is predicated upon developing the skills and fortitude to address conflict directly and nonviolently. Conflict does not have to be negative; in fact, it can often be transformative. I remind myself of this whenever I find myself avoiding an issue I should address.

What aspect of this work is the most challenging?

I am a very opinionated and sometimes confrontational person. It takes a lot for me to step back as a facilitator when something is said that I have strong feelings about.

What are your interests outside this work?

Most of what I do relates to conflict. I am an activist striving to transform the Occupy Together movement and the country by extension through restorative justice principles. I am also a volunteer for the D.C. Rape Crisis Center and a writer.

What resources do you recommend on conflict?

[Difficult Conversations](#) and [Nonviolent Communication](#)



Matthew Johnson sits in contemplation.

Volunteer Check-In

Fellow Volunteer Anne Gordon will be calling those of you we haven't heard from in a while to check on your availability and get feedback on how to make volunteering for the Youth program a meaningful experience. Thank you, Anne!

Current Needs:

- *Help with intake calls for our new cases*
- *Wall- & Bookshelves for the new office*

