



ACT Happenings

Take Home and Share with Your Family!

Fall 2002

Peer Mediation: Students Helping Students to Solve Problems

When students become the victim of relentless teasing, discover that upsetting rumors are circulating about them, or are dealing with threats of a fight, some may choose to confide in a parent, teacher, or friend. However, many may suffer by keeping the turmoil to themselves. Since these and similar situations are seen as serious risk factors that can lead to school violence, it is vital that students have a safe, healthy outlet for their concerns. The Abington School District Peer Mediation Program provides the opportunity to resolve conflicts directly with the perceived offender.

The premise of peer mediation is simple. Abington students work with other students who assist them in reaching a resolution that is acceptable to those having the dispute. The program begins with students who are interested in serving as peer mediators attending a two-day training session in which they examine their own preconceptions about conflict and learn the necessary skills to assist others in resolving disputes. The mediators generally work in pairs with two student disputants. The students involved in the dispute must first agree to the process before it can begin. This agreement is never coerced.

During peer mediation, mediators follow a script that includes ground rules to which students must agree. The script also provides a set of questions to elicit information about the conflict and how each student's actions have affected the other. They then discuss the steps they can take to solve the problem. A

faculty member is always nearby but never in the room during the mediation.

A successful mediation is one in which both parties to the dispute are comfortable with the resolution. Sometimes if students feel that the situation has not been completely resolved, a second mediation is scheduled.

Mediators meet several times throughout the school year with faculty sponsors and professional peer mediation trainers to hone their skills and discuss concerns that have arisen. Over the last several years, the Abington School District has committed to implementing peer mediation across the district so that programs are now in place in every school. The Peer Mediation Program was introduced at the secondary level but quickly grew to include elementary school students learning to help each other resolve their differences in a peaceful manner.

Abington Junior High School Guidance Counselor Claudia Carabelli points out, "The Peer Mediation Program is a positive step toward providing students with the skills necessary to solve small problems before they become serious ones. Although mediation cannot be used for serious offenses, such as when a fight has already occurred in school, it can be very helpful in addressing issues that are often precursors to serious conflicts, such as kids annoying each other or carrying on long-term feuds." Mrs.

(Continued on page 2)

Students Check Out Service Learning Opportunity

Living Word Lutheran Church, Easton Road, Roslyn, is offering various opportunities for young people to participate in community service activities. The opportunities include raking leaves for senior citizen neighbors, a fall clean-up day at the church, preparing meals for Aid For Friends that serves the frail elderly in the greater Philadelphia area, serving meals to the homeless at a site in center city, and a variety of other possibilities to explore. To participate, contact Pastor Rich Moore at 215-884-2821 or pastor.moore@hotmail.com.