



This year's peer mediators, from left: front row: Teresa Harris and Maria Caragiulo; center row: Katherine Hardman, Tommaso Mastroianni, Era Bushati, Avery Fuerst, John Michel and Fletcher Taylor; back row: Gavin Moorefield. Not pictured: YaMeshia Bowie, Carol Deason, Kim Grady, Nicolas Hill, Amanda Probst, Kris Snider and Tatyana Taake.

Don't hate — mediate

Story and photo by Cynthia Gracianette

Students at Naples High School are getting an education in diplomacy, through a program that teaches selected students the skills needed to resolve interpersonal problems.

Using the curriculum from Conflict Resolution Unlimited (CRU), middle school counselor Lisa Edgett teaches students how to apply conflict resolution skills to resolving the types of interpersonal problems encountered in the high school setting. The stated goal of CRU is "to teach young people effective, peaceful ways to resolve conflict and to develop understanding, respect, and the ability to cooperate with others in a multicultural world."

To become a peer mediator, interested students applied and were selected on the basis of teacher recommendation, Edgett said. Academic responsibility was also a consideration for inclusion in the program, because peer mediators may be called out of class to facilitate peer mediation.

Once a student has parent and teacher approval, they are scheduled to complete a two-day certification training. Naples has 16 certified peer mediators on the roster: 11 high school students and five students from the middle school.

During the training, participants learn how to listen to each other and ask questions rather than giving answers, said sophomore Avery Fuerst of her peer mediator training experience. Videos provided scenarios portraying problems and modeling peer-mediated solutions, she said.

Students are taught how to solve peer problems through helping the peers understand each other's point of view, Edgett said.

Freshman peer mediator Tommaso Mastroianni said that students often benefit from peer intervention, even if they don't really understand the process.

John Michel, an eighth-grade peer mediator at the middle school, said that by asking some questions and probing emotions of the peers-in-conflict, the peers come up with a solution.

Katherine Hardman, also an eighth-grader, as well as a three-year program veteran (with one year at the elementary school), said she instructs peers-in-conflict how to use "I-messages" to avoid a "blaming stance."

Amanda Probst, another eighth-grader, reported that the rules of polite conversation were also enforced — such as not interrupting — as well as specific techniques for peer mediation, like calming the participants down and non-emotionally paraphrasing what the peers are saying. Students must also not "take sides" in their role of peer mediator, she said.

Seventh-grader Maria Caragiulo noted that the setting is also very important in the process of peer mediation.

In a peer mediation situation, she said, a peer mediator is paired with each disputant. The seating arrangement is also a consideration, with the

disputants sitting diagonally across from one another and the peer mediator at the side. The setting is balanced and no one has a physical advantage, such as a higher seat.

The most common types of disputes involve rumors, which result in misunderstandings among peers, Edgett said.

Peers learn how hurtful rumors can be to another, and also gain a better understanding of how rumors develop, for example, when students spread misinformation about a situation before finding out the facts.

Peer mediators have been used to resolve bad feelings stemming from horseplay or taking others' possessions.

Most peer mediations result in a situation where the disputants can be friends again, but sometimes individuals do decide to end their friendship, Edgett said. In any event, overt conflict is typically reduced and civil social interactions among the disputants result. If the same issues keep reappearing, however, professional help may be required, she said.

The Peer Mediation Program is fully implemented by DoDDS-Europe, and is supported by the NHS Parent Teacher Student Association.

For more information about the CRU curriculum, go to <http://www.cruinstitute.org>.