



PRESS RELEASE

Local Students Join the Our Peacebuilding Community

Ronald Reagan said, *“Peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”* Twenty rising seniors from Montgomery County high schools recently learned that too during a fourteen hour peer mediation training program offered by Association for Conflict Resolution-Houston (ACRH) Peer Mediation Team and the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc. (DRC-MC). Mediation is an interactive process during which an impartial third party assists parties to resolve their disputes peacefully. The students received the Our Peacebuilding Community Peer Mediation training as part of the summer internship program offered through the Education for Tomorrow Alliance (EfTA).

Corinne Coulter, EfTA Program Director, noted, *“the Education for Tomorrow Student Internship Program (SIP) normally offers a two-week, 80-hour internship at various Montgomery County businesses. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic that was not possible this summer, so summer career programming had to be adapted virtually.”* As a result, the DRC-MC and the ACRH Peer Mediation Team (ACRH Team) decided to collaborate to present a mediation training program via Zoom for the EfTA interns. *“Although we missed having in-person EfTA interns this summer, we knew that helping the interns learn conflict resolution skills that they could utilize in local schools and in their future careers would also be a valuable community service,”* said Elaine Roberts, Executive Director of the DRC-MC.

ACRH Team members, Darcy Thompson, Gina Buckley, and Kimberly Barahona, originally created the Our Peacebuilding Community Program as an in-person peer mediation program for students in grades 4 through 12. After customizing the program goals to meet the EfTA interns’ needs, the instructional methods were also adapted to become an interactive program via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Sheryl Jackson-Matthews, Dr. Diana Pino and Karla West from ACRH joined Pablo Flower, 2019 EfTA intern, Lois Voth, Glenna Rodgers, and

other volunteers from the DRC-MC to share important career information and peacebuilding through the use of mediation techniques with the interns.

Corinne Coulter commented that the Our Peacebuilding Community training provided to the interns was “well done.” She also noted that the interactive nature of the Our Peacebuilding Community Program kept the EfTA interns fully engaged during the two-day Zoom training. Through demonstrations, discussions and active role-playing, the interns learned key mediation skills such as active listening, reframing, how to ask open ended questions and negotiation techniques that they can utilize in their daily lives now and in the future.

Robert “Nicholas” Harris, from The John Cooper School, who completed the recent peer mediation training said, *“Mediation is not just a tool used by therapists. It is a life skill that can be extremely useful in any profession. I had a great experience with my Peer Mediation training, and I would strongly recommend it.”* Itzela Darkenwald, from Caney Creek High School who completed the two day training program this summer, also noted that *“... after completing this training I will not see conflict as a setback, but something that I can learn from and better myself and others by growing and making this world a little more positive one mediation at a time.”*

The ***Education for Tomorrow Alliance*** (EfTA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting the business and education communities in Montgomery County. For more information on EfTA student programs and volunteer opportunities, go to <https://www.efta-us.org/programs> or contact Corinne Coulter, Program Director, at (936)271-6153.

The ***Association for Conflict Resolution - Houston*** (ACR Houston) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and conflict management, supporting and developing ADR professionals, and to the practice and understanding of peaceful conflict resolution at all ages. For additional information on programs offered by the ACR Houston, visit their website at <https://acrhouston.org> or contact Darcy Thompson, ACR Houston Peer Mediation Team Coordinator at peermediation@acrhouston.org

The ***Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Inc.*** (DRC-MC) was established in 1988 by Commissioners Court and the Montgomery County Bar Association. The DRC-MC offers an affordable way to prevent disputes from

escalating into serious civil or criminal matters. Mediations are currently being handled via Zoom during regular business hours, Monday through Friday.

Find out more about training programs, mediations and volunteer opportunities at the Dispute Resolution Center of Montgomery County by visiting www.resolution-center.org. Visit the DRC-MC Facebook page at www.Facebook.com/MontgomeryCountyDRC or call (936) 760.6914, Ext. 2 from 8:00am-5:00pm, Monday – Friday.

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