



Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program

425-452-4091

Update

January 2005

Conversations on Race and Culture

by Sarah Bergdahl

I'm crazy about mandarin oranges so whenever faced with a choice on a lunch menu, it's hard to pass up "Oriental Chicken Salad." Sitting across the table from my Japanese American colleague, I almost deliberately passed it up. There is no country called the "Orient" so what's with the "Oriental" in the name of this salad? I really took the wimpy way out and ordered the "Chicken Salad" and pointed at the "Oriental Chicken Salad" at the same time. The waitress got it. I blushed a bit then and I do now. Was this my inner institutionalized racism police doing overtime?

Racial and ethnic diversity is one of the strengths of America. Oddly, if asked which conversation topics you were once warned to avoid, many of us would answer in unison "religion, sex, and politics." Race was so taboo it didn't even make the list! Particularly in racially mixed groups, this topic surfaces with flashing warning lights, accelerating heart beats, red flags, and running shoes. People fear saying the wrong thing, making people defensive, being called "racist," surfacing biases, appearing whiney, or taking the lid off the boiling pot of emotions. On the topic of race, there is a chasm between American ideals and social reality. This chasm causes stress, discomfort, anxiety, blaming, guilt and avoidance. If we do not talk honestly and openly, diversity will be America's weakness.

Modeled after the Seattle Urban Enterprise Center's luncheons, "It's Time to Talk," a group of concerned Eastside residents have been meeting and sharing ideas with Kevin Henry and Callie Shanafelt from the City of Bellevue's Cultural Diversity Department. Through facilitated, face-to-face

conversations the group hopes to provide opportunities for diverse people to come together to gain comfort, increase awareness and develop more skill in talking about race and culture.

On November 16, 2004, the City of Bellevue piloted its first Conversation on Race and Culture. Over tasty bag lunches, small groups of culturally mixed participants and facilitators discussed three questions pertaining to their experience of race and their beliefs about its relevance. After 40 minutes the energy in the room was palpable and I hated to have to break in and remind them they had to go back to work. The evaluations indicated that most people wanted more. They wanted more of the speaker, Dr. Ed Taylor, Associate Professor at the University of Washington— more time to reflect, more opportunity to listen, more challenge to sort their own thoughts enough to speak, more trust and more depth.

The demographics on the Eastside are extremely dynamic, especially here in Bellevue. Where Bellevue used to be the white flight destination from Seattle, it is now home to people of color and communities of people from all over the world. Our faces are many colors, and our values, beliefs and patterns of behavior sometimes coincide and sometimes differ. The opportunity for diverse friendships is increasing and so, too, is the potential for conflict.

Eastside Conversations on Race and Culture seeks to foster curiosity among participants with respect to one another's vantage points, or standpoints. Standpoint theory is based on the premise that our perceptions of the world are largely influenced by our social group membership (i.e. age, gender, race, religion, education, class, interests). Of course, there

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is wide variety within any social group, yet our group memberships influence the way we communicate and the way we perceive the communication of others. Societal power also frames our racial standpoints. In America, European Americans have historically maintained greater access to societal power. The associated benefits of such power, which is often assumed or taken for granted, create significantly different frames through which individuals experience life and create meaning.

Author Scott Peck (1987) describes people in typical interactions as “wearing masks of composure.” For true learning to take place we believe relationships among participants, the facilitator, and the subject require time to develop and evolve. To help make this happen, *Extended Conversations* are envisioned. This concept is in the early planning stage and would involve an opportunity to meet with a small group and a facilitator at least four times over a two-month period. It is hoped that people will have enough time to develop trust, communicate authentically, take more risks, be open to vulnerability and work to negotiate conflict. Perfect harmony without any conflict is an illusion. Solid relationships and community are built through learning to negotiate conflict compassionately.

Merely talking about race and culture will not address the existing imbalances or cure America’s race problems, but it may reduce stereotyping, promote understanding and allow for the development of broader, more complex perspectives. To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King, we can either learn to work together collaboratively or perish individually.

Conversations on Race and Culture will be held several times a year with times and places varying to accommodate peoples’ schedules. The next gathering will be April 9, at the Interfaith Multicultural Fair at BCC. Presently we are compiling a list of facilitators who are interested in facilitating groups of 8 to 10 people. Basic facilitation skills are required and additional training in guiding and facilitating conversations on race and culture will be provided.

If you are interested in participating in the project, you can contact Sarah Bergdahl at ssbergdahl@mainstreetintercultural.com. We also welcome you to participate in an online survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=81982655974>.

Making The News !

The Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program was featured in the December issue of *It’s Your City*, highlighting the tremendous commitment and dedication that our volunteers provide to the citizens of Bellevue, both in neighbor-to-neighbor and in parent-teen mediation.

You may have also caught our ‘ad’ on the phone while on hold for someone who works at City Hall.



Regina, Andrew & Ron wish you all a peaceful and wonderful New Year! We are looking forward to an exciting 2005!

SAVE THIS DATE!



Annual volunteer recognition night:

**Wednesday, Feb. 16th
5:00 PM to 8:30 PM.**

Be sure to mark your calendar!

Parent-Teen Update

by Cathy Goldman

We have created a one-page summary of the highlights from our outside grant evaluation. I am excited to share this information with our referral sources. It has been a great outreach tool to help educate potential clients and referring agencies. Please stop by the office and take a look at our findings, or phone and we'll mail you a copy. It is pretty impressive!

We have been asked to present "Conflict Resolution Workshops" at two schools in Bellevue. I'm pleased to introduce new approaches to conflict resolution to middle and high school students. Please let me know if you would like to help facilitate these workshops.

Our next in-service training will take place on January 12th at 6pm at Bellevue City Hall. We will discuss power imbalances and learn ways to help ensure equal voices in the mediation. It will be wonderful to see you all after the holidays. I hope you enjoy your time off with family and friends.

May the New Year bring you peace and joy.

Watch your e-mails for more observation opportunities!

Program Staff:

Program Co-Managers:

Regina Lyons / Andrew Kidde	-	452-5222
Mediation Program Asst.: Ron Matthew	-	452-5288
Parent-Teen Coordinator: Cathy Goldman	-	452-4091
Peer Mediation Coordinator: Laurie Slater	-	455-1625

City of Bellevue website: <http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us>
(Look for the Mediation Program under "Neighborhood Information")

Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators

BNMP In-Services / Training

Two For One ~ In-service and Pizza!

January 20, 2005 from 5:30 pm to 6:00 pm for pizza, and 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm for your choice of in-service, City Hall, Rooms 2CD and 4AB

Join us at 5:30pm for pizza in Room 2CD and/or choose from two inservice options, both beginning at 6:00pm.

1. "Code Compliance: The Musical"

This will be a fun and informative session presented by the Code Compliance troupe. In this lively presentation, you will learn what Code Compliance is, what they do and how they interact with the Mediation Program.

2. Mock Mediation

This session will also be fun and will provide an opportunity for anyone in the practicum to practice the mediation techniques you have learned in a mock setting, and for more advanced mediators to hone their skills.

RSVP required at 452-4091

Parent-Teen In-service:

"Balancing The Power"

January 12, 2005 from 6:00 - 8:00 PM.

Conference Room 2CD, Bellevue City Hall

Cathy Goldman will lead a discussion about power imbalances in parent-teen mediations and explore ways to help ensure equal voices in the mediation room.

King County DRC Training:

Tenant/ Landlord Disputes: Discussion

January 10, 2005 from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

King County Dispute Resolution Center, Training Room

Presented by Kira Zylstra, Fremont Public Association

Call 206-443-9603 ext 100 for more information

BNMP volunteers are requested to call Ron at 452-4091 to let him know you will be attending a KCDRC In-service.

Other Opporunities:

"Professional Mediation Skills Training"

UW School of Law, Seattle

January 14-16, 29-30, 2005

For more information, call the CLE Department, UW School of Law, 206-543-0059 or 1-800 253-8648.

E-mail address uwcle@u.washington.edu.

Webpage www.uwcle.org.

Volunteer Profile

Olga Chermeshnyuk

Olga Chermeshnyuk recently started volunteering as a conciliator after completing her conciliation training.

Olga was born in Vinnitsa, Ukraine and came to the United States in 1989 when she was 8 years old. She attended the University of Washington where she graduated with a BS degree in Psychology.

She loves to work with diverse people and has volunteered at Crossroads Mini City Hall where she aided the general population in accessing community services and document preparation. Her ability to speak Russian allows her to reach out to a larger part of the community.

Through her services at Mini City Hall, Olga found out about our program (BNMP). Her interest in helping the community along with her desire to resolve conflict motivated her to join BNMP team. She wants to continue her education and use what she has learned from BNMP to pursue a career in law.

We are very happy to welcome Olga to the BNMP team!



*Bellevue
Neighborhood Mediation Program*

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