Fifty—Six.

Since the beginning of school this year, we trained and/or retrained 303 students to be Peer Mediators this year. These 303 Peer Mediators mediated fifty-six cases. Fifty-six times, students across Chatham County have been invited to sit across from the person (or persons) they are not getting along with and put their best foot forward to take responsibility for their actions and be a part of a better future for themselves. Fifty-six times, Peer Mediators volunteered time away from their class to help those around them talk to each other respectfully and helped them brainstorm ways to think of how behaviors can and should change.

As I reflect on this past semester, I can't help but wonder—was fifty-six times enough? If every mediation session involved co-mediators (two Peer Mediators), should the number of cases mediated be around 150? Think about all the conflicts that are happening right now in your hallways, in your classrooms, and in your cafeteria. Think about all the times your students acted out because conflicts escalated without someone checking in. Think about all the times your students tried to get help but were turned away or disciplined in a punitive manner.

The commitment of the Mediation Center’s Peer Mediation Program is to support students and staff in implementing and utilizing an effective and impactful mediation program. As a peaceful and solution-oriented intervention, Peer Mediation offers students the chance to deal with their problems proactively and responsibly. We have a large number of students who have successfully completed training, and are ready and waiting for their call to “be the change they wish to see in the world”. But sometimes, more often than not, we—the adults, the supporters, the cheerleaders, the implementers—get busy. Or we are short a staff member (or two). So we don’t refer students to Peer Mediation. Or we decide that an out-of-school suspension would be the easier path to take.

Peer Mediation is the easier, better path to take. Every time you refer a student to Peer Mediation, you are empowering your students—both the Peer Mediators and the students in conflict—to think about their world a little differently, and you’re giving them a chance to make positive and long-lasting changes for their future.

We still have another semester to go. We still have time to I.M.P.R.O.V.E!
How We Can I.M.P.R.O.V.E.!

The second semester can be a hectic one—testing begins, breaks are taken, and end-of-the-year plans start taking place. Through our time working with schools, we have often seen Peer Mediation case referrals increase during this second semester, as staff are ready and able to finally put forth the effort and work it requires to manage the Peer Mediation Program. Whether you have another busy semester ahead of you or not, here are some simple (but effective) ways to IMPROVE the Peer Mediation Program at your school for the remainder of the year:

I “Implement the Program”

This is where “the rubber meets the road.” Does your school have a group of Peer Mediators trained? If so—you’re already halfway there! Now it’s time to do something about it. Do your teachers know that Peer Mediation is offered as a resource to them when dealing with student misbehavior? Have you chosen a TIME and PLACE for mediation to happen so that the Program can be CONSISTENTLY used? Let the Mediation Center know if you would like us to do a short 10-minute presentation at your next staff meeting! The more they know, the more they are likely to refer students and use the Program.

M “Market the Program”

How do you students KNOW about Peer Mediation? Are there flyers/posters letting students know about Peer Mediation and what it is used for? Does your Parent Center have parent-friendly flyers for them to encourage the use of Peer Mediation when their child expresses frustration at home? The Mediation Center can help your school create school-specific flyers and posters to distribute and/or put up around the school, and we are also available to give a short presentation at your next PTA meeting!

P [Be] “Proactive”

Our School Spotlight (across on the next page) highlights a creative way to use your Peer Mediators and the Peer Mediation Program to ELICIT and ENCOURAGE positive behavior in your students. Garrison has very few mediation referrals, but that hasn’t stopped their Peer Mediators from getting involved and being proactive leaders at school! Be CREATIVE! Hold a contest for best artistic expression of your school’s motto/creed. Give a student a “Got Caught Doing Good” Award for an act of kindness that you want celebrated and used as positive peer influence. Use your Peer Mediators as Student Ambassadors when new students arrive at your school.

R “Rhythm!”

One of the key components to any successful program is the CONSISTENCY in which it is accessed and/or used. Does your Peer Mediation Program have a ‘rhythm’ to it? Have you chosen to offer Peer Mediation every day or just once a week? New Hampstead HS offers Peer Mediation every block of the day, while STEM Academy offers Peer Mediation on Friday afternoons only. Take some time to look at the rhythm of your school and choose a time to implement the Program that fits in with the natural happenings of your school day.
**“Offer Suggestions to Make the Program Stronger”**

Your COMMUNICATION with us is key. Let us know what WORKS for your school and what DOESN’T WORK. You may have found the “secret to success” in your implementation of the Peer Mediation program. You may have found that the Mediation Contract is not sufficient in dealing with student conflict. Your school may require a letter notifying parents of the Program and requiring parent permission for their child to participate in Peer Mediation. We cannot build a stronger program if you do not let us know where we can improve too!

**V  [Celebrate] “Victories!”**

Has a Peer Mediator demonstrated above-and-beyond leadership skills? Have students become stronger friends because of their referral to Peer Mediation? Has your school climate changed for the better because the Peer Mediation Program demonstrates that you care and offer help to your students when they need it the most? Let us KNOW about your victories—big or small—so we can CELEBRATE them together!

**E  “Encourage the Use of Mediation Skills—In and Out of the Mediation Session”**

Peer Mediators are taught to be active listeners, effective communicators and empathetic helpers. Encourage your students to practice RESPECT and UNDERSTANDING in all that they do, so when conflicts arise, they would be more likely to act appropriately and seek help!

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**School Spotlight: Garrison Performing Arts!**

Under the direction and support of counselors Ms. Pierce and Ms. James, the Peer Mediators at Garrison Performing Arts have been using their skills to better their school and greater community! Before winter break, the Peer Mediators organized a school-wide Coat and Blanket Drive for the homeless, and also helped decorate the school for the festive Christmas season. What a great way for the Mediators to lead by example and give back this holiday season! Cheers to you, Garrison Peer Mediators, and thank you for helping those around you!
In 2007 the Mediation Center began training students in an alternative learning center, for designated felons and students with long-term suspensions, for peer mediation. The staff saw changes in the students and was able to recommend some to be returned to regular schools because of the emotional growth in the students.

Since then, the Mediation Center has grown the Peer Mediation Program to having active and working Programs in many schools in the Savannah-area. We are continuously committed to teaching students about peaceful conflict-resolution and are always amazed at the great work our young people are doing!

Jocelyn Lee joined the Mediation Center staff in August 2012. She holds an LMSW license in the State of Georgia. Jocelyn graduated from Emory University with a baccalaureate degree in psychology, with a minor in religion. Prior to graduate school, she has spent her adult life working with at-risk youth and youth with special needs. She finds joy in meeting and teaching youth of all different backgrounds and believes that every student has the capacity to elicit change for their generation.

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Youth Program Coordinator—Jocelyn Lee