

## BUILDING BRIDGES CASE STUDY: SOUTHWARK MEDIATION CENTRE

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In March 2008, Dave Walker and the Southwark Mediation Centre (SMC) were awarded £12,000 from Team London Bridge's Building Bridges Fund, to provide support and supervision to a group of eighteen Youth Mediators aged 17-19, in Bacon College. The mediators provide a conflict resolution service to 1,200 young people in a local college. The college students are from very diverse and sometimes disadvantaged backgrounds.

Once the young mediators have undergone a five day training course in mediation and conflict resolution they begin volunteering their time after school and in the holidays on conflicts in the college and wider community that involve young people. The programme is highly thought of by the Police and others who request their presence to resolve conflict on the streets and in estates around antisocial behaviour, hate crime and violence. They also get called in to resolve serious conflict in other schools where the dispute has resulted in exclusion. Their role is to mediate with those involved so they can either return to school sooner or make sure the conflict is fully resolved before the pupils return to school after exclusion. Excluded pupils are more likely to end up in crime or joining a gang.

This work has seen television coverage on the BBC as well as articles in the Guardian Society online. The SMC has an excellent reputation internationally as well as nationally - last year the centre saw mediators from Japan and Palestine take up work placements with the SMC. They were very impressed by what they saw and want to start something similar in their respective countries.

After winning nine awards over 24 months, the youth mediators hope they can show both education, and local and national government that this can be a blue print for successful partnership work that delivers real empowerment for young people.

Dave Walker, the Co-ordinator for the Southwark Youth Mediation programme said, "As a spin-off to this work the Youth Mediators who applied to Universities are telling us they have the edge when it comes to students with the same grades. Knowing the young people they have offered places to have had the opportunity to do voluntary work and resolve conflict, not create it, is very attractive to them".

Mathew Dejong, one of the youth mediators said, "I became a Youth Mediator because I wanted to give something back. Since then I've discovered that my own relationships with friends and family have benefitted too. I'm now part of the group that also encourages other people to join the youth mediation programme because I want people to know there is another way to sort out arguments rather than by fighting".

Teachers at the college report that day-to-day issues such as bullying are more quickly and easily resolved and that the incidence of large-scale fights has decreased. One also believes that there is a better connection now between pupils and another said that the arrival of the mediation team was the best thing to happen to Bacon College in a long time.

### Further reading:

Southwark Mediation Centre website [www.southwarkmediation.uk.com](http://www.southwarkmediation.uk.com)

The teen go-betweens (Society Guardian, May 2008) [www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/may/15/youth.mediators](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/may/15/youth.mediators)

Awards given to community heroes (BBC, May 2008) ([news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7384292.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7384292.stm))

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