

Children & Youth Communities of Practice

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Above, SFCG-Morocco and youth mediators.

A THIRD WAY: USING PEER MEDIATION TO HEAL COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE AND MOROCCO

Despite being thousands of kilometers apart, youth in Morocco and Ukraine have more in common than they realize. SFCG has undertaken massive mediation projects in both countries, training youth to transform conflict in their communities.

Today there are more than 100 School Conflict Resolution Centres (SCRCs) in Ukraine, all of which train students in peer mediation, and about half of those have received direct training from the local SFCG office, Ukrainian Centre for Common Ground (UCCG). This initiative comes at an important time: the majority of Ukrainian youth have committed a misdemeanor crime before entering secondary school, and statistics show an increase in the overall level of crime committed by secondary school students. Schools have tried other methods to quell school violence, but only mediation addresses the root causes of the problem. And

the SCRCs seem to be working: schools with mediation programs report significant reductions in student fighting and suspensions. But how does it work?

Peer mediation means that a neutral, third party (the mediator) helps students resolve a problem in a way that is acceptable to everyone. UCCG has trained more than 600 peer mediators, as well as educating approximately 150 school psychologists about the SCRCs. By now, UCCG has a well-

MEDIATION...CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



A NEW COMMUNITY:
Read, discuss & share in new online community for C&Y Staff worldwide (shown above). VISIT SFCGYOUTH.NING.COM FOR MORE INFO, OR EMAIL [FELIX UNOGWU, FUNOGWU@SFCG.ORG](mailto:FELIX_UNOGWU@SFCG.ORG)

THE PEOPLE OF SEARCH:

Questions for Alyce Akineza Ndeze, of Generation Grand Lacs

Every Saturday afternoon, over 5 million youth in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo tune their radio dials to Generation Grand Lacs (GGL). The show does not feature the latest pop songs or even a weather forecast, and yet its audience continues to grow. Instead, this live, hour-long show seeks to spark debate and dialogue among youth, all with the goal of promoting peace and transforming conflict. Working collaboratively

SPOTLIGHT...CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

In this issue:

**The Theory behind the Practice:
Transformative Mediation**
...page 4

**The People of Search: Questions for
Alyce of Generation Grand Lacs**
...pages 1 & 3

Mediation in Morocco & Ukraine
...pages 1-2



Above, a peer mediation training in Ukraine, led by UCCG.

MEDIATION...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
 honed strategy for implementing peer mediation programs in local schools. After obtaining a commitment from school administrators, UCCG selects students between grades 8 and 10 to be trained. Initially, about 10-12 students, along with a school coordinator, participate in a 4-day basic mediation skills training, including an overview of participatory methodology. Once the centre is established, UCCG provides continued support in the form of coaching, networking and supervisory meetings. A year or two after the SCRC is founded, further training is provided for peer mediators so that they are able to train their successors and ensure the sustainability of the project. Alyona Gorova, a DM&E Officer at UCCG, says that the student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. She reports that the SCRCs have allowed students to imagine another

destiny as they become facilitators of relationships among their peers, and some enthusiastic students have even become volunteers and co-facilitators

“BEFORE, IT SEEMED THAT POWER AND AUTHORITY WERE THE BEST MECHANISM FOR RESOLVING DISPUTES ...WITH MEDIATION, YOUTHS HAVE THE CAPACITY AND TOOLS TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS WITHOUT THE ‘OLD PEOPLE.’ IT’S NOT OWNED BY ANYONE – ANYONE CAN PRACTICE IT.”
 (YOUTH MEDIATOR, MOROCCO)

for the project. Students are not the only ones feeling the positive change. One school principal has been able to remove the police presence in his school, thanks to the SCRC, citing the example of 7 conflicts that were resolved through mediation instead of juvenile police. The only downside to this great success? School administrators might suddenly have too much extra time. Another principal was accustomed to constant parent meetings about school conflicts, but now with SCRCs, conflicts are on the decline. This principal has become an advocate for SCRCs and the mediation approach to resolving conflict. Search for Common Ground Morocco (SCGM) has seen similar success with their

Youth Community and Mediation Centers (YCMCs). The 19-month project, which ended in July, established centers in poor neighborhoods in order to train youth mediators as well as teach entrepreneurial skills. The youth trainings covered topics from negotiation and facilitation skills to human rights education and advocacy. Case studies, group exercises and role-playing were used to build the youth trainees’ knowledge, skills and self-esteem, all with the ultimate goal of creating autonomous and enthusiastic mediators able to construc-

tively tackle conflicts in their own neighborhoods.

This approach seems to have worked, and the proof is not only apparent in the final statistics from the project but in the feedback from individual participants as well.

One youth mediator in Tetouan, Morocco shared how the YCMCs have changed his perspective. He said, “I was always extreme in my opinions... Now, I’ve become more understanding and see the problem from its roots. I have more courage when it comes to arguments and confidence that solutions can be found...It has changed the way I talk with my family.” The positive outcomes of the project are also apparent on a larger scale.

Over the course of the project, youth leaders resolved 469 mediation cases. In fact, the centres proved so successful in resolving day-to-day conflicts and facilitating community dialogue that trainees have launched a new independent mediation initiative. With determination and training on their side, the next hurdle for these youth leaders will be obtaining the funding to put their plans into action. ●

SPOTLIGHT...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

among 5 area radio stations, two journalists host each show to tackle one subject, bringing experts into the studio while also taking calls and questions from listeners. Alyce Akineza Ndeze is a Search for Common Ground journalist with GGL, based in Rwanda. She took a few minutes to share her experience with us.

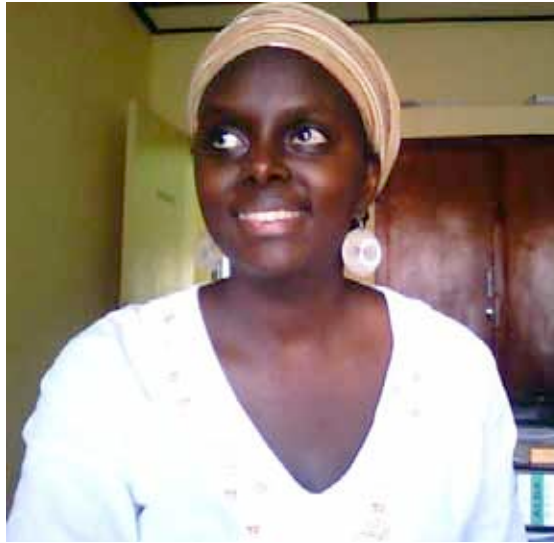
Why are you passionate about working with young people?

I am passionate about working with young people because if you want to change behaviors, especially conflict, within a population you have to start at the lowest level of the society. Older generations have been exposed to stereotypes and prejudice all their lives so it is difficult to change. In order to help the communities to grow out of these stereotypes and prejudice, we have to go through the younger generations who have not yet been contaminated and are more open to change. People are always referring to young people as the next leaders. If we want to have good governance, rebuild what has been destroyed and peace building in our region, we have to train young people to work and live as a united nations.

The second reason I love working with young people is that they are still capable of dreaming. Dreams start projects that can become live structures and help to build better, war free countries.

What are the main challenges facing youth in Rwanda? How does Generation Grand Lacs address these?

The main challenges facing youth in Rwanda are unemployment, poverty, lack of places for expression, lack of conflict management skills and the lack of information on national and



regional issues. GGL discussion and exchanges address these challenges by providing information about these issues and how to accept and cope with these problems on a daily basis. We usually have decision makers, researchers and experts on the show informing youth about the different existing strategies and allowing for an exchange between young people and those decision makers.

What is the most challenging, and gratifying, aspect of your job?

The most challenging aspect of my work is the fact that, due to our history in Rwanda, young people are still reluctant to speak about certain issues. It is a shame because young people in Rwanda have so much to say, but are viewed as having nothing to say to our leaders. My fear about this is that young people are easily manipulated because they tend to follow whatever they are told.

The second challenge is the family structure and the social pressure they live in, which is central to the culture. The family is first in everything and an essential element in every day life-the decision maker. Our work

is slowed down because of this strong importance attached to culture and respect from elders in our lives; we young people tend to keep everything inside because we don't want to be considered deviant or disrespectful. The most rewarding aspect of our work is the exchange that has been established among the team of journalists. Our friendship helps us get through all the challenges we meet

but also strengthens us as media practitioners. I am happy when a young person tells us: "I used to think that Congolese are all thieves and Burundians are lazy, but now I know that they are young people like me with the same issues and problems." Or a Congolese talking about Rwandese: "I used to think that Rwandese were all murderers, but now I no longer think so."

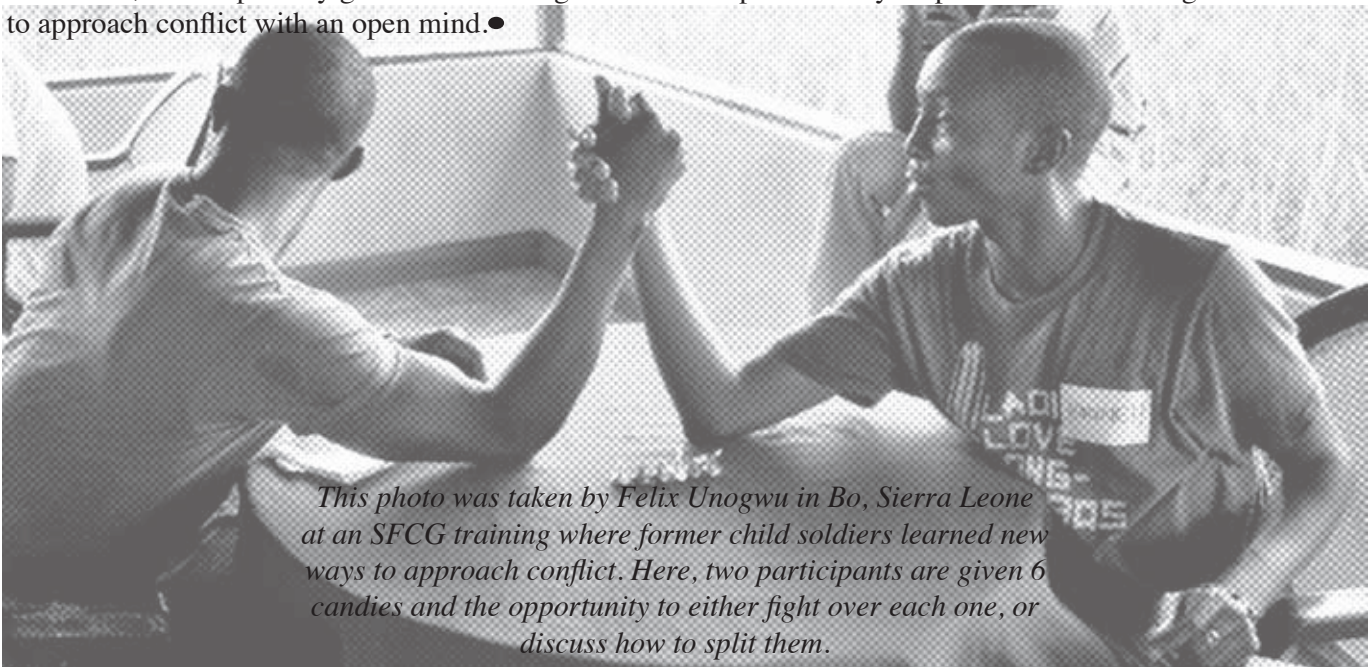
What are your hopes for the future of Generation Grand Lacs?

When it comes to Generation Grand Lacs, I refuse to have hopes because sometimes hopes cannot be carried out. But I do have big dreams. I dream that GGL is the number one radio show in the sub region and that the show will grow up and include other countries. My biggest dream is that in five to ten years, youth, government actors and other civil society actors will attend a Generation Grand Lacs conference in which we will plan for a better and bright future for Africa. A country cannot grow and develop without a healthy and productive population as well as peaceful and constructive relations with our neighbors. ●

In this section, we hope to connect the theoretical with the practical in Children and Youth programming. Here, we discuss the Transformative style of mediation.

Traditional mediation is a process in which a neutral third party, the mediator, facilitates a compromise between two conflicting parties. Settling the immediate problem by satisfying each party's needs is the goal. The transformative approach to mediation takes a different approach. First defined by Robert Baruch and Joseph Folger, **the ultimate goal of transformative mediation is not to simply arrive at a compromise, but rather to transform the conflict itself through empowerment and recognition.** Transformative mediation is particularly useful for parties who already have a relationship or plan to build one.

Using transformative mediation techniques, conflicting parties identify and share problems and goals that are significant to them, and in doing so, take ownership of the conflict and its resolution. This transformative method is built upon the idea that conflicting parties will not begin to solve problems until they learn to recognize and understand the other party's point of view. It is important to note that recognizing the other perspective does not mean the parties need to agree with each other's points of view. Transformative mediation sometimes leads to a settlement, but the primary goal is to encourage a relationship marked by empowerment and recognition in order to approach conflict with an open mind.●



This photo was taken by Felix Unogwu in Bo, Sierra Leone at an SFCG training where former child soldiers learned new ways to approach conflict. Here, two participants are given 6 candies and the opportunity to either fight over each one, or discuss how to split them.

TRANSFORMING

TRIANGLES:
a comic about
transformative
mediation

