



DOMESTIC HARMONIZER PROGRAM

2023 Annual Report

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Executive Summary

In 2023, the Domestic Harmonizer Program (DHP) was implemented in Southern California schools with positive results, creating meaningful change among 3,438 students, educators, and the overall community of 10 schools. The program has played a pivotal role in equipping students with essential conflict resolution skills and fostering a more harmonious and cooperative atmosphere within schools. Through targeted workshops, interactive sessions, and the integration of Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) principles into the curriculum, students have demonstrated a heightened ability to navigate conflicts peacefully. Moreover, the program's emphasis on empathy and understanding has not only improved interpersonal relationships among students but has also cultivated a culture of problem-solving and respect. The ripple effect of these positive changes extends beyond the classroom, strengthening the bonds within the entire school community that are felt by educators and parents as well.

Throughout the year, the DHP continued to equip students with invaluable skills such as peer mediation and transformative social-emotional learning. The students in our program developed skills to navigate personal conflicts peacefully and learned how to contribute to a broader culture of respect and understanding at their respective schools. Through our parenting workshops and large-scale events, we were able to impact families and the broader school community as well. We also worked closely with counselors at our partner schools and classroom teachers to implement key aspects of the program at their respective school sites. The DHP collaborated with schools large and small across the Greater Los Angeles Area and even paved the way for programmatic expansion to the State of Washington.



Students at Lakeland Elementary School with their certificates of completion following 12-hour peer mediation training course delivered by WPDI

Over the past 12 months, WPDI expanded the DHP to 3 new elementary schools as well as 2 new high schools. This year was in fact the first year that the program has been implemented at the high school level. Our overall expansion resulted in a greater number of students in grades 4-12 being trained in peer mediation, ready to facilitate their fellow classmates in resolving conflicts peacefully and creating their own solutions. This year, we also launched our first-ever train-the-trainers course for counselors from

across Los Angeles County so that they could create and implement their own peer mediation programs at their respective schools. Finally, and perhaps the most distinguished achievement of this year was the launching of Inner Spark, a peer-to-peer mentoring program for high school students to help promote social-emotional resiliency, trauma-informed care, and personal growth tools. The achievements of this past year are establishing the DHP as a strong peace education program in the region and beyond.



Background

The Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI) is a non-governmental organization with an international scope and reach, founded by Forest Whitaker in 2012. WPDI develops an array of peace-building programs, initiatives, and campaigns to foster peace and reconciliation in disadvantaged and fragile communities in different regions of the world, including Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the United States. Our mission is to help societies impacted by destructive conflicts transform into safer and more prosperous communities.

In the United States, WPDI works with school communities to implement its peace education program, the Domestic Harmonizer Program (DHP). This peace education program supports all stakeholders – students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents – to promote restorative practices. We provide transformative tools for the whole school culture. Our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model is focused on helping all members of the school community by learning communication tools centered on restorative practices, such as conflict resolution

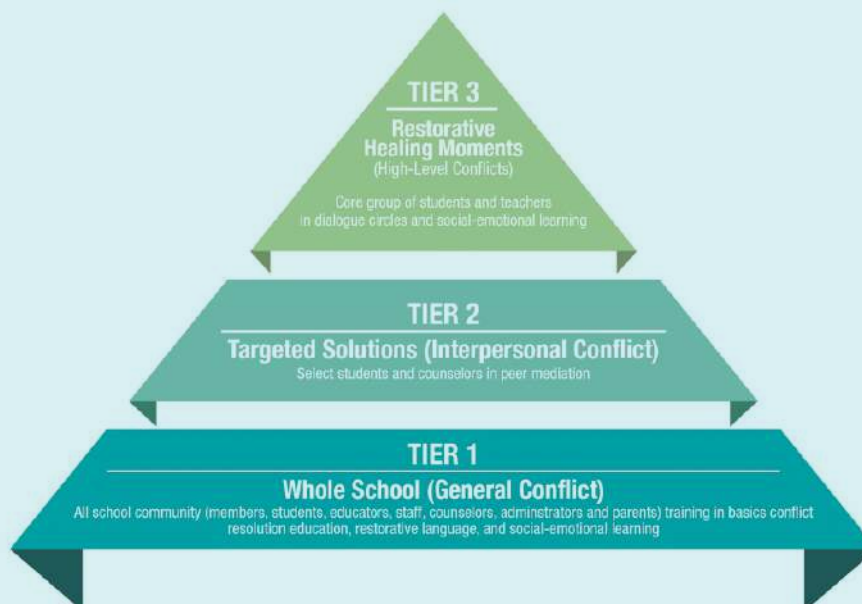
education, negotiation, peer mediation, social-emotional learning, and dialogue. Our approach helps schools focus on creating healthy learning environments by providing additional support for students, teachers, and parents to resolve conflict peacefully and constructively. For each of our educational partnerships, WPDI offers a wide array of services, including peer mediation training, in-class lessons for students, professional development training for educators, parenting workshops, conflict coaching, PBIS support for administrators, and advocacy events. The program also has a newly launched peer-to-peer mentoring program for high school students, *Inner Spark*, that supports youth with tangible tools to address personal and group challenges. We house all of our content in our Domestic Harmonizer Virtual Center (www.domesticharmonizer.org) where schools can access our content in an open-source platform. The Virtual Center is also a place where students can play our peace education game, *Hear Me Out*, which provides a fun and educational outlet for students to learn about these concepts.



Students at William Orr Elementary School trained in peer mediation by WPDI.

Since 2016, the DHP has worked with schools in the Greater Los Angeles Area to promote peaceful interactions, including through restorative practices. These practices aim to prevent conflict and repair harm caused by conflict in school by emphasizing dialogue, transformative conflict resolution, empathy, and understanding. The DHP promotes CRE in schools through curriculum integration as well as youth trainings focused on peer mediation and support services. Through these and other approaches, we provide a structured framework for students and educators to engage in open conversations, helping them to foster a sense of connection and shared responsibility. Our goal is to not only reduce instances of repeated misbehavior but also promote a sense of community, trust, and shared responsibility within the school environment. By helping to create peaceful opportunities for exchange and learning, schools can reduce incidents of destructive conflict on campus. Our approach provides schools with tools to create safe and healthy learning environments.

At the core of the DHP is a deep focus on resolving and transforming conflict in a peaceful way. To achieve this goal, the DHP has the following key components aimed at providing tools for the whole school community. The program's Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) model reaches all stakeholders in the school community working with youths at different levels. Our framework reaches parents, teachers, and students to provide various tools in CRE. Below is a breakdown of the program's framework:



Training for Educators that focus on:

- ▶ Topics such as understanding conflict, empathy, communication skills, restorative justice, and anti-bullying;
- ▶ Curriculum integration using DHP curriculum, which infuses CRE with Common Core standards for math, science, English Language Arts, social studies, and physical education for grades 4-12;
- ▶ Introduction to the DHP and opportunities to co-create content.

A 3-part virtual workshop for Parents on:

- ▶ Identity leadership so that parents can understand who they are as individuals, lead themselves first and model the behaviors they wish to see in their children, and set the vision for their families;
- ▶ Tools for parents to understand the needs of their children and to better communicate with their children in constructive ways;
- ▶ Concepts to help families see each member as a valued individual with unique gifts and motivations, and ways to bring the family towards understanding and healing.

Leadership opportunities for Students to:

- ▶ Become peacemakers through the school's peer mediation program and to serve as impartial mediators trained on the process to help their peers come to solutions to their interpersonal disputes;
- ▶ Become changemakers as a part of the DHP's Inner Spark initiative, which trains high school students in personal growth, peer-to-peer mentoring, and trauma-informed practices so that they can help their peers address life stresses in healthy ways;
- ▶ Engage in school-wide events, classroom projects, and advocacy campaigns initiated by the DHP.

These components of the program help the whole school community navigate various interpersonal conflicts and broader challenges on school campuses. Schools that partner with WPDJ and adopt this framework can help build stronger systems of support for students and educators, and help students feel understood and supported, rather than merely instructed and disciplined. Our approach aims to have the broader goal of helping students, parents, and teachers understand and meet each other's needs, and through constructive communication, break the cycle of

conflict and create healthier relationships and safer school environments. By incorporating a myriad of opportunities for all members of the school community to create a positive and inclusive culture, we can equip schools with tools to address conflict constructively and foster a safe and supportive atmosphere for learning and personal growth. Our model and various workshop offerings also contribute to the development of essential life skills that students can learn and practice throughout their future endeavors.





Educators at a training delivered by WPDJ

Virtual Center

One of the key vectors through which we disseminate our educational content is our Domestic Harmonizer Virtual Center (www.domesticharmonizer.org), an innovative online platform offering content for educators, parents, and students. The educational resources, lesson plans, worksheets, animation videos, and interactive games housed in the Virtual Center are designed to captivate young people's attention and support educators in delivering the best possible learning tools in the restorative practices field. The Virtual Center contains the program's educational curriculum for teachers, counselors, and students in elementary, middle, and high schools. The platform also features a treasure-trove of animation videos on various topics from negotiation, mediation, communication skills, analyzing conflict in the history and current affairs, problem-solving in the sciences and more. The DHP team utilizes the Virtual Center in trainings and our educators also rely on the site to gain quick access to all our educational curriculum and resources.

The Virtual Center is also home to our peace education game, Hear Me Out. The game is designed for use by K-12 learners. Hear Me Out is an innovative way for youth of various ages to have fun and learn how to problem-solve in a variety of conflict scenarios. Hear Me Out offers students opportunities to play games in school-based and community-oriented situations such as dealing with cyberbullying at school, healing a broken friendship, dealing with different personality types, and negotiating a price at a bike repair shop. These are common situations that youth face anywhere, and the games are intended to teach students how to address these issues while learning new skills. The 8 games currently available on the platform can be played as a single-player, and some as multi-players as well.



Educators at DNA Prep Academy at a WPDJ-led professional development training.



Students at Hawkins High School playing Hear Me Out.

2023 Overview and Achievements

This past year enabled WPDI to experience a level of stability and predictability to our school-based activities and workshops, which we had not enjoyed since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. In collaboration with our school partners, WPDI confidently moved forward in providing workshops to school communities in the Greater Los Angeles Area and beyond, across 13 educational partnerships, including with 10 schools. The DHP team trained students in peer mediation, delivered workshops to educators and counselors, and facilitated the 3-part parenting series with an expert panel. It has been a relief to go back to a sense of normalcy and consistency with our school-based work planning, implementation, and scheduling. This helped us to advance and deepen our level of interactions and activities with schools and maximize our overall impact as well.

DHP Peacebuilding Impact

Schools hosting WPDI programs

10

Learners and teachers trained

1,318

People reached through advocacy campaigns in schools

2,120

Total participants in school-based peacebuilding

3,438^{DHP}



DHP Team with a group of student peacemakers at Jersey Elementary School.





Students at William Orr learning about the peer mediation process.

WPDI focused on sustained growth of the DHP. This meant more partnerships, more educational offerings as well as more youth, parents, and educators reached consistently throughout the year. This year, WPDI focused heavily on our flagship peer mediation program. In both the Spring and Fall semesters, we worked with a combined 373 students across 9 schools and trained them as peer mediators. This resulted in peer mediation being used as a process to de-

escalate conflict among students using the communication tools. We also expanded the program to 3 new elementary schools and 2 new high schools in the Greater Los Angeles Area in the State of California. Moreover, we signed a multi-year partnership with the Northwest Educational Services District 189 (NWESD) to expand the program to the State of Washington.

Below is the full list of educational partners WPDI worked with during the 2023 calendar year:

Los Angeles Unified School District:

- ▶ Hawkins High School
- ▶ Stephen White Middle School*

Anaheim Unified High School District:

- ▶ Cambridge Virtual Academy
- ▶ Cypress High School
- ▶ Walker Jr. High School

Little Lake City School District:

- ▶ Cresson Elementary School
- ▶ Lake Center Middle School
- ▶ Lakeland Elementary School**
- ▶ William Orr Elementary School**
- ▶ Jersey Elementary School**

Private School:

- ▶ DNA Prep Academy

Los Angeles County Office of Education

Northwest Educational Services District 189 (State of Washington)***

* Term ended in May 2023

** Term commenced in August 2023

*** Term commenced in November 2023

Each of our educational partners listed above were chosen based on a recognized mutual interest in advancing peace education within their institutions and championing WPDI's educational tools. Our goals vis-a-vis partner schools and educational partnerships is to find avenues through which we can collaborate and match our resources and educational resources with their specific needs. Each school partner has different challenges and bandwidths to adopt and implement the DHP, and therefore part of our

work with each of our partnerships is to customize our work to meet the specific needs of each institution. Experts from WPDI confer with administrators, teachers, and/or counselors at each partner organization to develop goals and a school-specific roadmap for each academic year. For example, we work closely with school counselors to run the peer mediation portion of the program, individual teachers to implement the DHP in their classrooms, and with parenting/community coordinators to schedule our 3-part series. We

also co-host special events with our school partners, such as the International Day of Peace, provide professional development sessions at the principal's request to all educators on themes and topics of interest to them, and deliver demonstration lessons at the request of individual teachers. In this fashion, we can customize our program for each school and leverage their capacities and interests to meet the goals of the DHP.

This past year, we also developed and piloted an array of new educational content, including new CRE-infused social studies and science curriculum for 4th and 5th grade elementary as well as a new action-based social justice manual for high school students in grades 9-12. The addition

of these curricula is in part due to expansion to elementary and high schools as well as our earnest desire to provide additional education offerings and classroom-based curriculum integration beyond peer mediation for students and CRE-training for educators. We also launched in the Fall the newest feature of the DHP, Inner Spark, a peer-to-peer program for high school students to learn tools in personal growth, mindfulness, and trauma-informed. We aim to support these highly trained youth so that they can support their peers, who may be suffering from anxiety, stress, grief and other challenges that life presents. The remainder of this report explores in detail each of these activities, and offers testimonials from some of the youth, educators, and parents on the impact of the DHP.



Survey Results

Every year since the inception of the DHP in 2016, the program has been independently evaluated to assess measured impact. Since 2019, Dr. Briana Hinga has worked with the DHP team to collect impartial data and research to assess the impact of the program at partner schools. She is also Associate Professor of Clinical Education at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California. DR. Hinga's work intersects multiple disciplines, practice, and theories of knowledge as her work moves between scholarship, teaching, learning, and community organizing. Her role is essential for guiding the continuous evolution of the DHP and in ensuring that the program's impact is routinely measured and understood.

In her assessment for the 2022-2023 academic year, she reviewed qualitative and quantitative data on 5 program partners: Stephen White Middle School and S.T.E.A.M. Magnet (SWMS), Walker Junior High School (WJHS), Cresson Elementary School (CES), Lake Center Middle School (LCMS), and DNA Prep Academy. Her evaluation provides an overview of each site's contextual background,

the purposes of DHP intervention within each site, the effects of the interventions, and recommendations for future practice and research. It concludes by summarizing key insights across sites and proposing future directions for the continued implementation of DHP. Data for the report are based on student interviews, student surveys, staff interviews, staff surveys and parent/guardian surveys.

Findings from Dr. Hinga's assessments showed that students and staff overwhelmingly appreciated the peer mediation program. Peer mediators learned the following:

- ▶ They can make a difference and be very helpful to their peers, and they are even more powerful when working through complex issues in community with others;
- ▶ How to hear multiple perspectives to any problem, which always exist;
- ▶ There is no one "right" solution. Accordingly, people involved in a conflict should be empowered to decide what works best for them to move through the conflict;
- ▶ Grounding strategies, like breathing techniques, can help keep participants within a conversation calm.



Peer mediators took up mediation skills not only through formal training sessions but also in their daily lives, which is an important component of integrating peer mediation into the culture of their community. Combining the informal and formal dimensions of peer mediations has a powerful, healing impact on relationships at schools. The following quote by a peer mediator, depicts how the lessons from the DHP are taken up internally, in relationships, and in developing new norms. *“I use it [lessons from peer mediation] with myself mostly. I have the mentality to just use it. I use it whenever I talk to someone. It teaches me to be softer when I talk to someone or approach people. I’ve used it with my mom, my dad, my sisters, my brothers, and my friends. It’s kind of subconscious. I just do it but when I do it. I just don’t realize.”*

Parents and guardians appreciated workshops aimed to support communication and conflict resolution in their families. Parents and guardians learned:

- ▶ Conflict can be generative and allow unmet needs to be seen and discussed;
- ▶ It is important to foster open and continual dialogue with children. As one parent explained, *“As a parent, we teach them life lessons, when we do tough love. But, they sometimes build a barrier making them not able to freely tell us whatever it is that they think or feel.”*

Through DHP professional developments and implementing the DHP program, educators took up conflict resolution practices not only in their classroom and school communities, but also in their personal practices. As one educator explains, they learned, *“Dialogue is a holding space to share feelings and thoughts and not a debate.”* Educators learned how to support their students to stay grounded through difficult situations and communicate productivity through conflict. At the same time, they learned to model these processes, in their own practices, within and outside of school walls.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Increase access to parent workshops;
- ▶ Draw further upon students’ lived experiences to strengthen both DHP content and students’ understanding and application of DHP content;
- ▶ The curriculum can also grow to support students to take up an individual, institutional, and structural analysis of unmet needs within their lives;
- ▶ Offer facilitated relationship building between participants in DHP programs across schools;
- ▶ Support school administrators and staff to integrate the DHP in synergy with continually evolving programming at each school site;
- ▶ Advertisement and wider education about peer mediation may make the invaluable DHP peer mediation program accessible to more students.

“It has been an honor to collaborate with the Domestic Harmonize Program (DHP) as the program evaluator. I appreciate the DHP staff’s commitment to the well-being of the communities they serve. I respect DHP’s dedication to centering the voices of students, educators, and families, as they design and evaluate the program. Year after year, through the collection of surveys and interviews, I have the opportunity to learn the many ways the DHP equips students, educators, and families with skills to work productively through conflict and their ideas for continual improvement.

Educators consistently express their gratitude for the skills they acquire through DHP training. They not only learn skills to teach their students across content areas but also skills they need to show up with more presence, as better listeners, and with more compassion for everyone they interact with. Also, I have seen students light up as they share how they feel empowered to support themselves and their loved ones, to navigate conflicts productively. They beam as they show me grounding techniques, they have learned to stay steady in times of stress. Their eyes sparkle as they dream up how they will continue to support their community through peaceful conflict long into the future.

One of the standout features of the DHP is its emphasis on data-informed growth. Through regular check-ins and discussions of formative data throughout the school year, DHP staff evolves dynamically to meet the ever-changing needs of the community. It has been an honor to see the ways the DHP has grown, to support community needs, community strengths, and emerging trauma informed practices.”

Briana Hinga, PhD
Professor and Independent Evaluator



Feedback from Educational Partners

"I am writing to express my strong support for The Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative's Domestic Harmonizer Program (DHP), an innovative program that fosters peace and understanding in educational settings. The DHP's focus on restorative practices and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) aligns closely with the School Counselor Academy's mission of facilitating professional development and technical assistance in K-12 districts. At the core of the DHP is its commitment to conflict resolution education (CRE), which is crucial for creating peaceful learning environments. By reducing conflict incidents and focusing on restorative approaches, the program helps students feel understood rather than punished. This aligns with our belief in transformative social-emotional learning and student wellness.

The DHP's utilization of the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework is particularly commendable. This framework offers general and targeted approaches to conflict resolution and social-emotional learning, benefiting students, educators, and parents alike. The tiered approach, ranging from educational workshops to peer mediation training and support for social-emotional needs, is an exemplary comprehensive education model.

Furthermore, the DHP's resources in social-emotional learning (SEL), including trauma-informed healing approaches, are vital tools for today's educational environment. As the School Counselor Academy focuses on providing quality professional development and resources across various domains, including social/emotional development, the DHP's offerings are valuable to our toolkit.

The synergy between the DHP and the School Counselor Academy's goals is evident. We share a common vision of empowering school counselors and educators to be change agents, promoting student and educator wellness, and instilling transformative social-emotional learning. We believe that by collaborating and utilizing resources such as those offered by the DHP, we can make significant strides in improving the well-being and development of students in Los Angeles County and beyond. In conclusion, we look forward to potential future collaborations that will enhance our collective impact on the educational community. Thank you for considering this letter of support."

Anna Heinbuch
Coordinator II, Mental Health and School Counseling Unit
Los Angeles County Office of Education



"The Domestic Harmonizer Program (DHP) has been a game-changer for our school and a life saver in the areas of discipline as the new Head of School. The program continues to revolutionize our approach to restorative practices, allowing students to develop essential lifelong skills through peer mediation. Our teachers have also embraced the program's lessons on conflict resolution, leading to a more inclusive and harmonious classroom environment. A standout experience was our participation in World Peace Day, where DHP donated materials for an art gallery and facilitated activities to support us feeding over 300 homeless. Overall, the DHP continues to transform our school community, empowering students, and teachers alike with invaluable skills and fostering a culture of compassion and social responsibility."

Brandon Rainey
Head of School, DNA Prep Academy



"Partnering with the Domestic Harmonizer Program has been an enriching experience. Currently, we have 30 individuals serving as Peer Mediators. Our Peer Mediators have eagerly and enthusiastically learned essential techniques for critical thinking and effective problem-solving. The hands-on approach of the program empowers students and encourages them to work together to find resolutions to conflicts. Furthermore, our partnership with the Whitaker Peace and Development Program has contributed to fostering a more positive environment, especially with the celebration of International Day of Peace. Our entire school community came together to decorate "Peace Rocks" with symbols and images of Peace. I want to express my gratitude for being given such a partnership opportunity."

Gabriela Delgado
K-8 School Counselor, Jersey Elementary School



"Inner Spark is a one-of-a-kind program that allows students to be with themselves in a way that builds the capacity of resiliency and transformation. Students will leave this program with a skill set that can easily be shared. There has been a significant increase in our youth feeling overwhelmed, challenged, and traumatized for a variety of reasons. Inner Spark mentors are emerging at the perfect time because they will have the mind tools, and skills to lead, and will have grown the capacity for compassion. This combination makes them a powerful asset in the pursuit of peace and mental wellness." Ms. Nielsen, educator at AUHSD

Ms. Nielsen

Health Sciences Teacher at Cypress High School and Cambridge Virtual Academy



Implementing Peacebuilding as Grassroots Empowerment

Bringing Skills and Values for Peace into Schools

At the heart of the DHP is a commitment to providing concise and actionable training for students and educators in peer mediation. The training process of peer mediation entails training student leaders of all backgrounds in the peer mediation process, which includes learning about the confidentiality clause and other ground rules, learning how to impartially listen to disputants, and uncover their unmet needs. Through workshops and routine practice, our peer mediators learn how to collaborate with one another and support the disputants to come to a solution that is agreeable to them both. They conclude each mediation by signing a formal contract, which is a part that signifies the mature and important roles that the students have in supporting

their peers and their school communities. It also shows the disputants that their communication and participation in the peer mediation process is noted, valued, and appreciated. We are so proud of the 373 peer mediators in grades 4-12 with whom we had the pleasure of working this past year and are very encouraged by the dedication and commitment that they showed in learning the process, practicing it, and showing up to support their peers as needed. They are formidable agents of change and champions of peace inside and outside of their classrooms. We hope that they will encourage students at each of their schools to routinely use peer mediation to peacefully resolve interpersonal conflicts.

Developing a Culture of Conflict Resolution Education in 4 Elementary Schools

In 2023, WPDI worked with a total of 123 elementary school students (74 female, 49 male) in the 4th and 5th grades within the Little Lake City School District (LLCSD). As listed above, the 4 schools include Cresson Elementary School, William Orr Elementary School, Jersey Elementary School, and Lakeland Elementary School. Except for Cresson, which

WPDI began working with in 2023, the other 3 schools were new additions to collaborate with the DHP and are a part of a district-wide expansion that WPDI has agreed to with LLCSD. We are so encouraged by the continued results generated by Cresson and are delighted by the motivation shown by the new elementary school partners.



Student peacemakers at Lakeland Elementary School in WPDI's program



The nature of conflict at the elementary school level is complex as they are often rooted in children’s ever-evolving developmental stages, and often rooted in their challenges in navigating various social interactions with their peers. Elementary school students are still learning about emotional regulation and refining their personal

social skills, and this time of rapid changes and confusion can also create interpersonal disputes from a variety of sources, such as differing personality styles, competition for attention, acceptance, and confusion over homework and other expectations. It can also be fueled by different family backgrounds, communication styles, and expectations.

Creating Impact at Cresson Elementary School

Cresson Elementary School is a public school located in a suburban setting in Norwalk, California within Los Angeles County. Cresson has a student population of 237 students in grades K-5, of which 86.9% are Hispanic or Latinx. According to statistics collected by the California Department of Education, 69.6% of learners at the school are

socio-economically disadvantaged and 24.3% are English language learners. Chronic absenteeism is 50.2, which is considered very high but the suspension rate is classified as “very low.” It is worth noting that 53.8% of students at Cresson are female, while 46.2% are male.



Students at Cresson receiving peer mediation training from WPDI



We became introduced to Cresson Elementary School through our partnership with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). Back in the Spring of 2022, the DHP team delivered a virtual workshop as a part of our CRE series in partnership with LACOE, which was opened to counselors from across Los Angeles County. LLCSD had participated in that session, and reached out to WPDI for support in implementing peer mediation programs at their sites. The goal of the peer mediation program at Cresson has been to address interpersonal conflicts. After a year of distance learning during the pandemic, educators at Cresson noticed that students experienced more conflict than before. Cresson’s counselor sought out a hands-on program to address these challenges, and this is how the partnership was formed with WPDI.



Ms. Martha Robles with student peacemakers





Peace art created by Cresson students, "Cresson Declares Peace the Greatest Work of Art."

Immediately after commencing our partnership with Cresson, DHP leaders saw the high level of commitment that the school's counselor had in implementing this program. Ms. Martha Robles provided a serene and immaculate classroom where our peer mediation training sessions have been held. Her room offers students an inspirational and safe space full of color, lovely textures, and sounds, including small fountains whose trickling water sounds. The

walls are adorned with soothing, colorful SEL posters so that students can learn about their emotions, comfortable chairs of varying sizes, colors, and textures so that students can feel comfortable. She even offers students who enter her room kid-friendly snacks. If there is a text-book example of what an optimal space for peer mediation training – or any kind of personal growth training to happen in a school setting – this classroom would be top of the list.



Student peer mediators at Cresson trained by WPDJ being recognized for their leadership at a school-wide assembly.



From the moment we worked with the two different cohorts of students at Cresson (Spring and Fall semesters) this past school year, we noticed that all the students selected to participate in the peer mediation program were really kind, respectful, and eager to learn. In both cohorts, the students absorbed the content, listened carefully, and immersed themselves in the learning process about peer mediation. We could sense that they were indeed passionate about helping their peers and the Cresson community and took their role as peer mediators very seriously. Throughout the year, we are so impressed with the students' maturity and Ms. Robles' commitment to helping this program and her school succeed. Ms. Robles has served as a champion for WPDI throughout her school and her school district, advocating for this program and its expansion throughout

the district. During 2023's spring and fall semesters, Cresson peer mediators of two different cohorts mediated a total of 26 official peer mediations (17 in Spring semester and 9 in Fall semester). These are interpersonal conflicts between students that could have escalated and become more challenging had the peer mediators at Cresson not been trained to help the disputants address the core root of their unmet needs and help them to find agreeable solutions. Thanks to Mrs. Robles' leadership, we have been matched with 3 other wonderful elementary schools in the LLCSD; schools that also have incredible counselor leaders and students. We have also worked with her to implement our International Day of Peace event, and we hope to expand our collaboration to include our more educator professional development and our parenting workshops as well.



Students conducting peer mediations at Cresson

Our positive experience working with Cresson has also been independently evaluated by Dr. Hinga whose assessments and interviews formally corroborated our positive experiences and enthusiasm working at Cresson. In her report, Dr. Hinga noted that prior to the DHP intervention, specifically the peer mediation program, the same students would repeat the same pattern of conflict throughout the school year, even with a counselor's continued intervention. However, because of the DHP's peer mediation program, these students were able to resolve the conflict and move on. This is the power of the peer mediation process – it provides disputants a chance to have ownership of their conflict, express their needs, and have a voice in the solution. They get a chance to hear the other side and to be heard themselves. As complex as this process is for any adult to master, we must be even more impressed that our elementary school students have been able to learn the process and achieve positive results.

Students promoting peer mediation at Cresson using posters they made





"The Domestic Harmonizer Peer (DHP) Mediation Program has been a huge success at Cresson Elementary School. It is an honor to be the first elementary school to partner with DHP! Our students have learned lifelong skills that will help them navigate conflict in a peaceful way. The training was interactive and engaging. The students had so much fun they did not mind coming to school two days earlier in the summer for training. Because of this informative training, students are eager to help their peers resolve their conflicts. They look forward to the monthly refresher trainings that Mrs. DeVoogd and Mrs. Kian facilitate. This school year, DHP sponsored our first "International Day of Peace" celebration on September 21st. Students learned the meaning of this day in their classrooms and how we can all make a difference. They were invited to create an art piece that represented peace to them. Students drew, painted, and colored various symbols of peace. In the words of DHP "This is how we can build peace in the world – one school at a time, one community at a time."

Testimonial by Martha Robles
Counselor, Cresson Elementary School



"I learned that being a peer mediator is all about helping people solve problems with their feelings and their friendship. Peer mediation looks easy but it's not. One time two people had different ideas and it took three days to finish the peer mediation. What I liked was the training, it was good and I loved it. We had a partner and did practices. We also took turns being a coach. The coach's job is to help the mediators if they get stuck. I love being a peer mediator."

Morgan, 5th Grade
Cresson Elementary School



"What I have learned about being a peer mediator is that when we are working on a conflict we need to be calm and keep the conversation private. What I liked about peer mediation is that you get to know the other mediators and disputants and help them."

Emily, 4th Grade
Cresson Elementary School



Conflict Resolution Education in 4 Middle Schools

In 2023, WPDI worked with the following middle schools: Lake Center Middle School in LLCSD, Stephen White Middle School in LAUSD, as well as Cambridge Virtual Academy and Walker Jr. High School; both of which are in the AUSDH. We also worked with a private school in Chatsworth, DNA Prep Academy, which is a school designed to prepare youth to become professional athletes. All these partner schools, except for Cambridge Virtual Academy have peer mediation programs supported by WPDI for at least a year now. In the Spring and Fall of 2023, WPDI worked with a total of 191 middle school students (124 female, 67 male).

Working with students in the middle school arena is quite different than in the elementary school context. In middle school, they tend to be more mature in some ways by having more life experience, ability to relate to different kinds of interpersonal conflict such as more relationship-

based disputes and have a fuller vocabulary to grasp the concepts expressed through training. However, with this cognitive development also comes a heightened complexity compared to elementary school as pre-teens and teens are also undergoing significant social, cognitive, and emotional changes. Middle schoolers are beginning to form their personal identities, and have a strong desire for peer acceptance, both of which, at times, contribute to interpersonal conflict that may center around friendship dynamics, changes in social hierarchies, and other relational misunderstandings. Middle schoolers are transitioning from childhood to adolescence, which brings changes in their moods and their self-esteem, and the heightened desire for peer acceptance may also fuel various degrees of self-consciousness. All these factors may influence their relationships and the nature of their disputes.



"Being a peer mediator helps you be more empathetic and realize how others feel. Being a peer mediator has been a very important part of my life because it has helped me find out how to figure out problems. The skills I have acquired are the different types of ways people feel, and what words to avoid due to big feelings and high tensions. Especially knowing that I can now be impartial, and I know that being empathetic and understanding how someone is feeling is such a great skill to have. Along with the fact that using questions to clarify what different emotions are happening is so helpful. The peer mediation setting is calm and has helped me to become a better listener, a more empathetic person, and a good student. The staff and students at our peer mediation meetings are always happy, patient, and never fail to make us smile."

Roshely
Lake Center Middle School



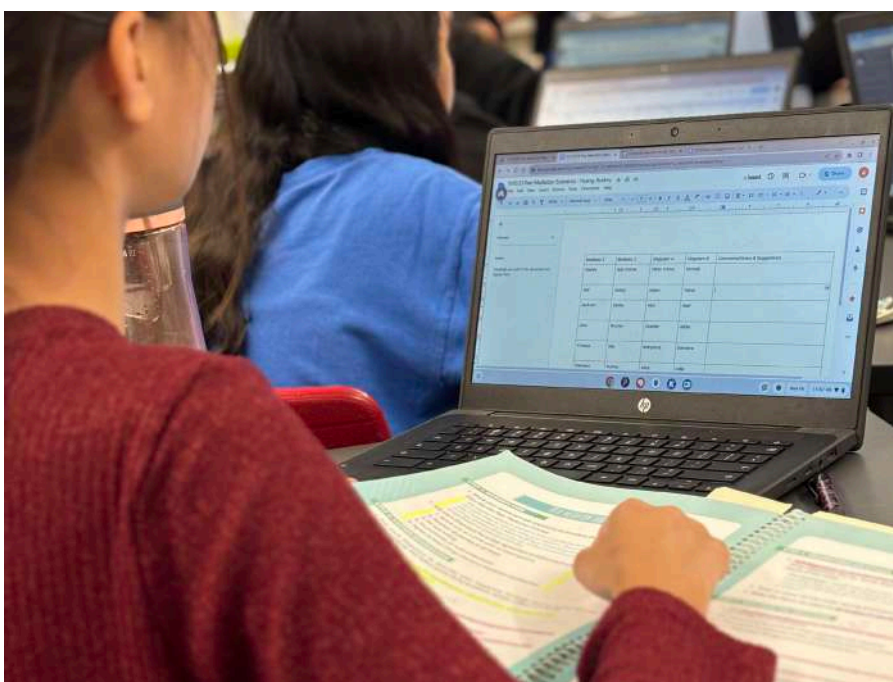
Creating Impact at Walker Jr. High School

WPDI began working with Walker Jr. High School in 2021, during the peak of the pandemic. We initially delivered professional development training for educators introducing them to the DHP and the key CRE concepts. We also began working closely with Ms. Dolly Chang, the school's English and leadership teacher to spearhead the peer mediation program as well as other initiatives at Walker Jr. High School. The school is fully in support of CRE and other initiatives to help promote a peace and safe environment for students. Over the past 2 years, we have delivered training to educators, collaborated with Walker and other nearby schools in the district to provide our 3-part parenting series, which has reached hundreds of parents, held multiple International Day of Peace events, and collaborated with the technology team for students to play and test out our peace game, *Hear Me Out*.

Walker Jr. High School is in La Palma, California, which is located in north of Orange County, just 22 miles south of downtown Los Angeles. Walker Jr. High School currently has a student population of 846 students enrolled, and the school teaches grades 7-8 only. According to data collected by the California Department of Education, 61.8% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 9.6% are English language learners. Chronic absenteeism is 18.7, which is considered relatively low, while the rate of suspension is 2.5% suspended at least one day. Walker takes a proactive stance towards the mental well-being of students. A major focus is on developing a community of learning that promotes civic awareness and peace. To that end, the training the leadership students receive peer mediation procedures and conflict resolution to complement and support these endeavors. Additional

activities such as quarterly campaigns to promote diversity and kindness help to promote awareness of social justice issues. At Walker, unlike other DHP partnerships where counselors recruit students to become a part of the peer mediation program outside of regular class time, the

students in the peer mediation program are randomly selected. The peer mediation program is woven inside the leadership class, and Ms. Dolly Chang masterfully uses DHP's peer mediation content to integrate peer mediation into this class throughout the school year.



Walker students participating in WPDI peer mediation training and DHP advocacy events



Testimonial by Kendra

"I think mediation is important because it is a better way to resolve conflicts than violence, arguing, or ignorance. During my training, I learned how to appease issues between my peers in civil ways. I also learned how to detect tension, and how to avoid and peacefully ease it. I think it would be good for everyone to have this training, because it would benefit the world in a way where there is less violence and more peace. Though, I don't think everyone would be willing to do so, as plenty of people have many different perspectives and opinions. After this training, I think I have become a better person in the way that I less often resort to negative resolutions. I also find it easier to find solutions to my issues with friends and other peers."

Testimonial by Azman

"I think learning the mediation skill is important because it can help become efficient problem solvers. I learned about underlying needs. Knowing this helped understand what a person can be needing to fix the conflict. I believe everyone should have this training because of how beneficial it could be. With this skill, people can solve conflicts of any variety."

Testimonial by Emma

"I think that learning about peer mediation is important because in life you are going to have many conflicts that you have to resolve, but with peer mediation training, later in life when conflicts come and go, it will be easier to make them better or to resolve them. It is also important to know how to solve conflicts, because you can also help other people with their conflicts to make their lives easier, which also gives you the satisfaction of knowing that you helped others as well."

Bringing the Conflict Resolution Education Program into 2 High Schools

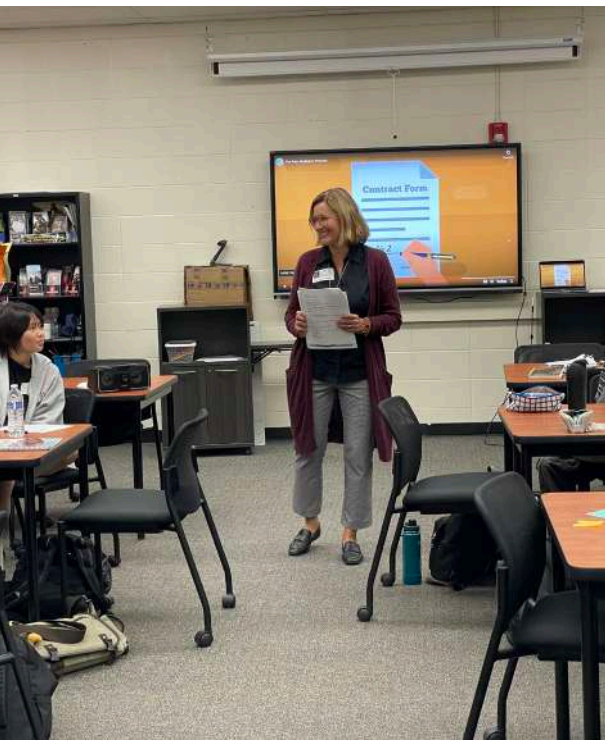
This year marked the first year that the DHP expanded to the high school level. We are proud to partner with two wonderful high schools: Cypress High School within AUHSD, and Augustus Hawkins High School within LAUSD. We started both collaborations mid-year. At Cypress High School, we began working with the school's Law and Justice teacher in September to promote the International Day of Peace, and to recruit a cohort of students to serve as peer mediators at their schools. In 2023, we worked with a total of 24 (22 female and 2 male). At Hawkins High School, due to administrative changes at the school, we were not able to launch the peer mediation program this past year; however, we aim to launch it in early 2024.

At the high school level, conflicts become even more complex than in the middle school years. Teenagers in high school grapple with a myriad of personal challenges that are difficult to navigate, not to mention physical changes and brain development changes that may complicate how they regulate their emotions. High Schoolers are striving for

independence, self-actualizing to form their own personal identities, and navigating various relationships inside and outside of school. They begin forming various relationships, romantic relationships, and some develop challenging relationships with food as well as illegal substances. Many are on a quest for social status, face peer competition and/or pressure, and may encounter conflicts that arise as a result of misunderstandings, jealousy, or desire for attention. At this age, students begin feeling a desire for autonomy, whether it is to pursue their own hopes and dreams or to escape from abuse, financial stresses and/or traumas at home. This is all on top of the intense academic stress many students feel and college admission pressures – all on top of the innate need we all feel to be connected, loved, respected. High schoolers are also at a stage where many are using social media, which may or may not fuel these personal insecurities and conflicts. Typically, high school students deal with interpersonal conflicts that are rooted in personality clashes, competition for social status, and misunderstandings based on differing perspectives.

Creating Impact at Cypress High School

Cypress High School is in the city of Cypress, California in Orange County. The school has a student enrollment of 2,820 students in grades 9-12, of which 42.8% are socio-economically disadvantaged. Cypress High School is an academically high-achieving school, with a 95.1% graduation rate and a very low suspension rate (1.4% suspended on a day). With high academic testing scores and achievement comes intense pressure, which brings a huge level of stress to many Cypress students. While violence is low, Cypress students also grapple with the interpersonal challenges and conflicts that all high schoolers face, and the need for WPDI's involvement at the school was actually bred by students taking action. In fact, WPDI entered a partnership with WPDI after some students at Cypress requested peer mediation at their school to address interpersonal issues. The students discussed this need with the principal at Cypress, who immediately thought of WPDI given that she had previously worked with WPDI at Walker Jr. High School. We entered into a 3-year agreement shortly thereafter, starting this year.



Students in the peer mediation program at Cypress receiving training from WPDI Conflict Resolution Education Trainer, Mrs. Karen DeVoogd.



Students at Cypress High School receiving their peer mediation training certificates of completion from WPDI

Since late October 2023, WPDI worked with 24 student peer mediators in grades 11 and 12, and we delivered over 18 hours of peer mediation training using our peer mediation content. The students recruited for the program are poised, mature, eager to learn, and motivated to apply the peer mediation concepts. The students also displayed a deep understanding of how they could apply these concepts to

their various personal relationships, including with their parents and guardians, siblings, friends, peers at school, and romantic relationships. Given that the students recently completed the training, they have yet to formally roll out the program and have any formal mediations to resolve. We hope that given their dedication and interest, they can formally mediate some cases in 2024.





"I've learned a lot of things from being a peer mediator, for example I've learned how exactly to show empathy instead of showing sympathy. This class has really helped me with my police (training) work due to us having competitions and me being one of the people that are on tactical negotiations, it helped me get 7th place on my last competition. I really like how nice the teachers are, they're really supportive and make the classroom feel safe and inviting. They also clear up anything that we may have questions about and may add onto what we are thinking or doing. They actively listen to the room and listen in on our scenarios that we do and help us if we get stuck. I really like how they've taught us to build off the basics. It's essential to really establish a foundation with the basics and they did an excellent job of hammering that into us. Peer mediation is something that I initially joined because it would be fun to leave class for a few days, however now that I have experienced this and learned I would happily pursue further education in this subject. I think that we are truly lucky to have the opportunity to learn this subject."

Joel, 12th grade
Cypress High School



"During peace peer mediation training I can't emphasize enough how great of a time I had while being there. The community was friendly and for the most part it seemed everyone who attended wanted to be there, which made a significant impact on the dynamic of the learning environment in the best possible way."

Rickey, 12th Grade
Cypress High School



"Since becoming a peer mediator, I have learned how to make people more comfortable when talking with me about a personal circumstance. Additionally, I have learned more about understanding human needs; some of these can include community, love, and resources. Resulting in that, I now have a better comprehension of various perspectives and ideals that people may differ or share, but nonetheless are able to communicate. Altogether, being a peer mediator has opened my ability to bring people together, and overall, help others."

Valentina, 12th Grade
Cypress High School



"Being a peer mediator has taught me how to be more understanding towards others. I have learned to listen to both sides of a situation instead of blaming someone. I have enjoyed working with other students who want the same change and implementation of new programs in our school. I truly feel as if I can express myself and help others around me by being a peer mediator. I love helping others which stirs up my enjoyment in being a peer mediator. I like to help stir people on the right path to success. I am truly grateful for this opportunity in being a peer mediator and hope I can bring change and help spread positivity."

Natsumy
Cypress High School



High School Students at Cypress learning the peer mediation process.



Conflict Resolution Education for Teachers

In 2023, WPDI delivered informational sessions about the program to all of our partner schools. All in all, WPDI reached a total of 378 educators to deliver either hands-on workshops tailored to a CRE-content area of their interest or need, or a general information session about the DHP. These sessions are important in supporting the implementation of the program so that teachers learn about the program, and eventually begin to implement aspects of the DHP in their teaching practice. Below are the highlights from the most content-rich workshops that WPDI delivered in 2023.

Hawkins High School

WPDI delivered a training to a group of 11 educators from Hawkins about the benefits of the DHP, and how to incorporate it in their teaching. The educators were special education leaders, and one math teacher. The training provided an overview of the DHP's various components and benefits, as well as an introduction to the Virtual Center and Hear Me Out. Most of the training focused on providing the teachers hands-on CRE content, including an introduction to

conflict basics, an analysis of a conflict example in DHP's English curriculum, learning about applications of CRE and conflict styles using DHP Math content, and also working on creating a restorative justice mindset using new social studies content recently developed by DHP. The session concluded with a call to action to integrate CRE into the curriculum and to collaborate to create new content.

DNA Prep Academy

In August 2023, WPDI met with 11 educators from DNA Prep Academy and delivered an all-day training in CRE focused on introducing them to the DHP, fundamental concepts in CRE, including the nature of conflict, underlying needs, communication tips, and more. We also introduced the educators on ways to integrate these concepts using our curriculum in science, math, English, social studies, and in the fabric of their school culture. This group of teachers

at DNA Prep was highly engaged and were very open to implementing these restorative practices. The educators provided positive input and reflection and used the time of the training to look closely at the DHP units of instruction and discuss norms for orientation of students and families. The educators spoke of how they could tailor the content to their unique school, given that it is a sports school with a predominantly male student population.





Educators from DNA Prep Academy in a team-building activity during a professional development training conducted by WPDJ

Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE)

Through our partnership with the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), WPDJ delivered a number of workshops for educators, including 3 virtual sessions for counselors on topics such as social-emotional learning, peer mediation and a model roadmap of how to implement CRE in the classroom. A total of 39 educators from various schools from across Los Angeles County attended the virtual sessions, and asked questions about the DHP and signed up for the Virtual Center.

In collaboration with LACOE, the DHP team also led a 2-day train-the-trainers in-person workshop for 18 educators from

various schools from across Los Angeles County. The purpose of the training was to train the counselors on the fundamentals of the peer mediation process, practice the process through mock conflict scenarios, and practice delivering the training themselves as they would with their students. We also covered essential protocols that need to be established at each school site following best practice models, including how to do intake of conflict cases, when and where to hold peer mediation sessions, and how to promote the process across their respective school campuses.



Educators from across Los Angeles County schools attending WPDJ Train-the-Trainers workshop hosted by LACOE



The first day of the training was dedicated to learning about WPDJ and the DHP, and learning about the steps involved in the peer mediation process as well as best practices in establishing a peer mediation program at their respective schools. Educators also learned about basic CRE concepts such as the types of conflict and the benefits to conflict, and that the source of all conflict are unmet needs. They also learned what types of conflict are suitable for peer mediation, and what are not, such as bullying. After being

introduced to the peer mediation process, the counselors had a chance to practice the process themselves. On day 2 of the training, participants continued with practicing the session and had more time to practice delivering various themes and topics covered during the training themselves. The educators were highly engaged, and eager to launch the program at their own sites. Following the training, LACOE reached out to WPDJ to request another Train-the-Trainer session in early 2024.

Switzer Learning Center (Prospective Partnership)

We had the opportunity to do a staff development in-service with a group of 12 teachers, administrators, and staff at Switzer Learning Center, in Torrance, California as part of an offering during a professional development day for the school. The Switzer Learning Center staff and faculty are a group of 25 special education teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and administrators.

Switzer Learning Center is a unique school that provides highly individualized and responsive educational programs for neurodivergent and special needs students. Switzer Learning Center operates a nonpublic school licensed by the California Department of Education and provides clinical

support services. They serve youth, teens, and young adults in grades 5-12 (ages 10-22) with learning impairments, including Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), dyslexia, executive functioning difficulties (ADHD), and nonverbal learning disorders (NVLD). Switzer serves approximately 70 students, with over 76% coming from LAUSD schools.

The training provided educators with an overview of CRE concepts, such as analyzing conflict as unmet needs and considering conflict resolution styles, sources, and stages. This was so well received by the teachers and administrators that they are pursuing a partnership MOU with WPDJ to implement the DHP beginning in 2024.

Fostering Peer-to-Peer Support in High Schools through Inner Spark

Given our mission and experience working with youth of a variety of backgrounds, many of whom have experienced trauma, we developed and launched in September 2023 a new initiative called *Inner Spark*. This new initiative is a peer-to-peer support services program for high school students. WPDJ developed a new curriculum specifically for student leaders who are passionate about personal growth and about helping their peers overcome the challenges and struggles many teenagers encounter, such as stress, anxiety, building healthy relationships, and trauma. The program is not a substitute for students seeking the professional support needed from counselors, therapists, and social workers. Instead, this program is designed to provide students in the program and those in the larger school community with peer-to-peer support and tools to help manage emotions, life events, stress, and bring awareness to issues such as conflict, trauma, and healing.



Student leaders from Cypress High School and other high schools in AUHSD receiving Inner Spark training inside the classroom



WPDI invested more than a year of time, effort, and resources in developing this unique curriculum. The pilot content is divided in 3 parts: 1) Understanding Me, which covers topics to understand one's identity and the roots of one's stress as well as tools for emotional regulation, mindfulness, and shadow work; 2) Building Healthy Relationships, focused on exploring about one's connection to self, others, and items consumed, as well as tools to help with communication and conflict with self and others; and 3) Helping My Community, focused on understanding trauma and tools for therapy.

The goal of this program is to train a strong group of youth leaders who have the tools to build their own resiliency in addressing a myriad of personal challenges that we all encounter, such as stress, negative thinking, trauma, and grief, and offer tools to help build healthy relationships with things, substances, and people. The broader goal is to also support youth in helping their school community so that these youth can also share these Social-Emotional Learning Tools with their peers.



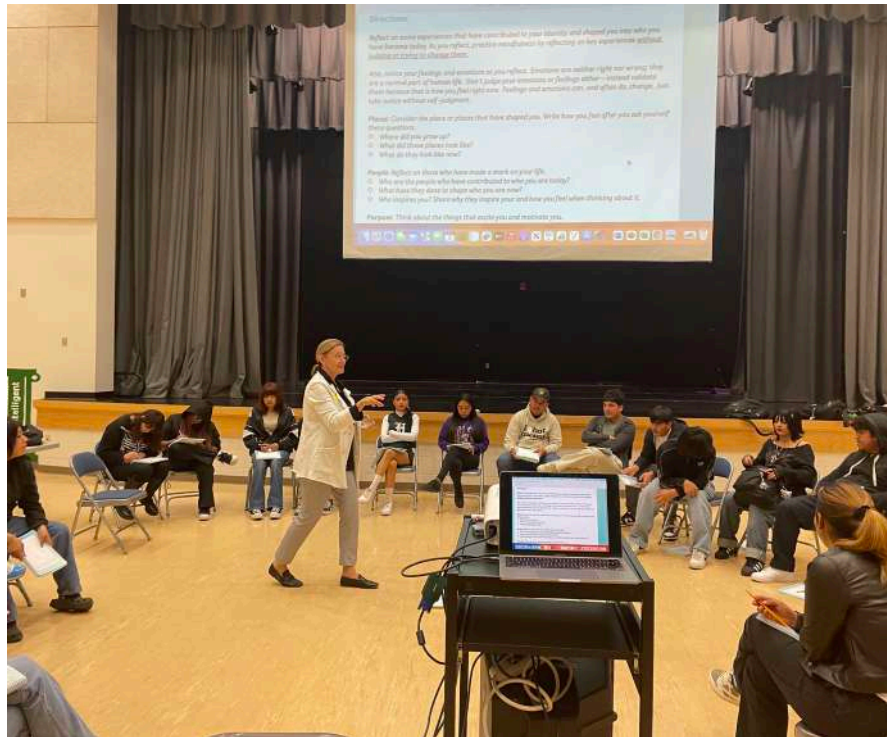
Inner Spark students on a nature walk to practice mindfulness techniques taught in session

The program was launched in September at Cypress High School with 24 students (15 female, 9 male) and in November at Hawkins High School with 37 students (21 female, 16 male). We noticed that at both schools, students were at first skeptical about the newness of the training, given that we were teaching them about non-traditional topics typically not covered in a typical academic setting, but they maintained an open mind. At both schools, as we delved deeper and deeper into the content, the students not only took a greater interest in learning and absorbing the content, but they also formed strong relationships with one another. This is the pilot year for Inner Spark, and WPDI's goal is to learn from our first year of implementation, adapt it accordingly, continue it at Cypress and Hawkins and also scale it to another high school in 2024.

Creating Impact at Augustus Hawkins High School

Augustus Hawkins High School is part of the largest school construction building program in the history of LAUSD. The school is located in the heart of South Los Angeles, and it consists of 3 Small Learning Communities, which are essentially schools within a school, including a Critical Design and Gaming School, Community Health Advocates School, and Responsible Indigenous Social Entrepreneurship School. This school opened in the year of 2012 with the first graduating class in 2014. The school

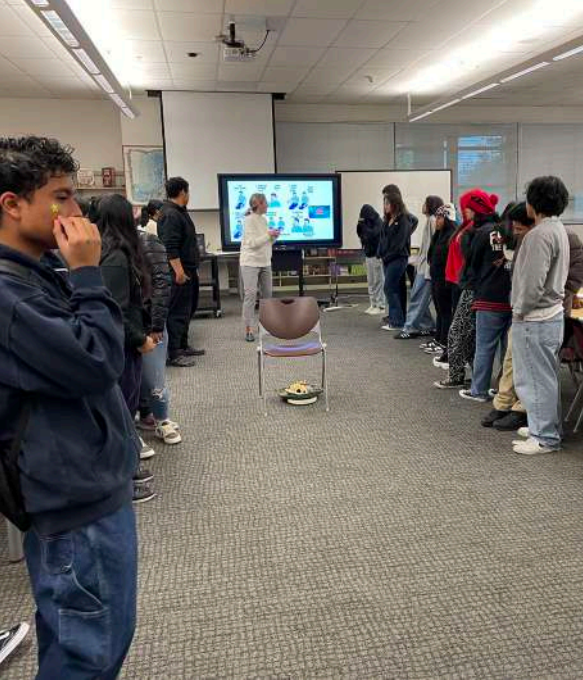
has a total enrollment of 1,186 students, of which 1,150 are socio-economically disadvantaged. It is also worth noting that many students, 327 according to official records, are English language learners. Hawkins is the first school in South Los Angeles to use Restorative Justice, and their strong mission in promoting this is in part why WPDI partnered with WPDI. This is WPDI's first year partnering with Hawkins High School.



Inner Spark students at Hawkins High School on the first day of training

Hawkins' population is composed primarily of Latinx and African American students. The school was created out of overcrowding in the local comprehensive high school as well as a need for trauma-informed schools in a community that continued to experience high levels of violence and poverty. The school experiences a myriad of conflicts including school disruptions, conflict where physical altercations happened or were threatened to happen, possession of tobacco and other controlled substances. The school has a multi-tiered system for addressing student conflict, which involves the use of restorative practices.





Students in Inner Spark workshops delivered by WPDI at Hawkins High School

Upon formally signing our agreement, WPDI delivered a series of introductory sessions to the educators at Hawkins. Immediately after one of our professional development workshops, Ms. LaKeisha Jones, who teaches social work and health at Hawkins, contacted WPDI and showed interest in the Inner Spark program. We explained that our program is a pilot, and was in the formation stage at that time, but she nonetheless wanted to take a leap of faith and collaborate with us to launch Inner Spark at her school. Her enthusiasm and interest in the program are contagious, and she has been an incredible partner in spearheading this work. The students with whom are in her class come from a diverse population, many of whom are English language learners and have experienced poverty and trauma in their lives.



Inner Spark students at Hawkins on a nature walk in their magnificent school garden to practice mindfulness and gratitude.

On the first day of the training in November, the students seemed apprehensive and unsure about the program and the WPDl trainers. The format of our content, which includes sitting in a circle, providing time for meditation, breathing exercises, reflective thought, journaling, and teamwork are different from what they experience on a day-to-day basis inside their traditional classroom settings. However, after a few hours, the students became more interested and more eager to participate. By day 2 of the training, the students were so engaged in the program that they not only

participated more but they began talking about the program to their friends and peers outside of the program! A few of the other students even approached us during lunch break to inquire if they could join the program. Given the need and the interest, we have decided with Ms. Jones to train another cohort of students in the Spring of 2024. At the time of the writing of this report, the 37 students trained at Hawkins have completed all of the exercises in the manual and will need some additional training and support in order to begin accepting referrals to help support their peers.



"Inner Spark was the perfect training for my students. The goal is for them to be mental health peer advocates and ambassadors on campus to support other students on campus. It was so perfect and will greatly support my students in their advocacy work and life itself!"

Ms. LaKeisha Jones
Social Work and Health Educator, Hawkins High School



"Hello, my name is Cristy. I would say that it was an incredible experience to be in Inner Spark. It was very incredible to get to topics as deep as emotions as well as physical and mentally. Also, having meditation and using awareness of how we feel to release certain emotions. I would say that I learned more to study myself, to have space to think about what I have been feeling lately. How to calm down after uncomfortable situations. The truth is the coaches were the best, they knew how to talk about certain topics, without making anyone uncomfortable. They made us feel very comfortable. Also, another thing I learned was to have more co-existence with new people, and fill myself with good energy. I just want to say THANK YOU!!!!"

Cristy
Hawkins High School



"My experience so far is pretty good. I've learned how to properly build and main [sic] a relationship and to focus on the positive thoughts. This program so far has helped me find more ways to help with stress and ways to cope with different situations. Ever since I started this program, I've changed the way I handle things. I'm really happy that I get to be a part of something so calming and helpful."

Kayla
Hawkins High School



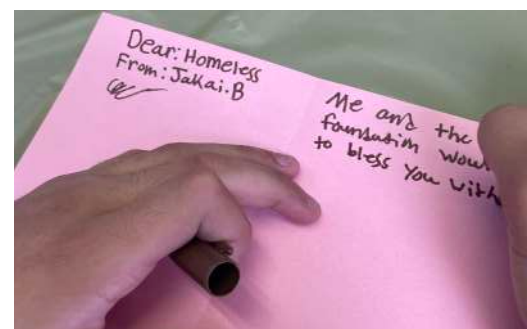
Advocacy Campaigns to Give Peace a Voice

As part of its overall mandate to disseminate a culture of peace across the communities where we are active, we complement our activity in schools with advocacy campaigns that contribute to spread key messages promoting values and attitudes conducive to peace and to improve the visibility of our programs, which ensures that we have a stronger presence on the ground. The combination of the campaigns reached a total of 2,120 individuals who, we hope, will, in turn, contribute to disseminate the culture of peace that is at the core of our mission.

Celebrating the International Day of Peace

To this effect, WPDI hosted, on September 21, six different International Day of Peace events among some of our partner schools, which reached a total of 1,800 individuals. The participating schools included: Cresson Elementary School, Jersey Elementary School, Walker Jr. High School Cambridge Virtual Academy, DNA Prep Academy, and Cypress High School. WPDI sponsored all the events at these schools, which ranged from creating beautiful and colorful peace rocks, having booths for students to create different messages of kindness and peace, and engaging in arts and crafts. DNA Prep Academy took it a step even

further by creating lunch bags and distributing them to 400 homeless on skid row. The creativity, initiative, and spirit of change that the leaders of each of these schools took to make this a special celebration was truly inspiring and has brought more meaning, more hope, and more passion to this important day. The success of this program has paved the way for WPDI to not only continue this annual celebration but to also host another similar event in the Spring for Social Justice Day so that WPDI and our school partners can continue to expand our work and reach more youth and more people.



Students across several WPDI partner schools taking part in International Day of Peace activities, from making creative works of art to writing letters of hope and love to the homeless in Los Angeles.

Helping Student's Personal Growth with Special Guest Anand Chulani

In May, WPDI had the honor of receiving, in the DHP parenting series, life coach Anand Chulani delivered a presentation to an auditorium full of high school students at Cypress High School. Anand Chulani is an award-winning speaker who motivates audiences globally. As a success coach, he empowers high achievers in business, entertainment, and sports to unlock their full potential. Anand's mission is to harmonize Eastern and Western philosophies, fostering balance in people's lives. He strives to create resilient champions who not only protect our planet but also drive positive transformation.

Approximately 200 students attended this special event, which was geared towards motivating students to be the most limitless versions of themselves. During this hour-long presentation, Mr. Chulani shared his own personal story

growing up, and his struggles trying to find his true path. He invited students from the audience to come to the stage with him and share some of their personal challenges and helped them get to the core of the hurdles they faced. For example, one student shared how he is struggling academically, and to address this, Mr. Chulani noticed that this student is a kinesthetic learner based on the student's body language. He suggested that to help his learning process, he needs to move while studying by shooting hoops or doing other activities that help the student be physically mobile while studying. He also was able to get a very shy and reserved student in the audience to not only volunteer to speak in front of the entire group, but to sing a Mariah Carey song with him. These were two of many inspiring moments from this special event that WPDI is happy to coordinate with our partner school, Cypress.

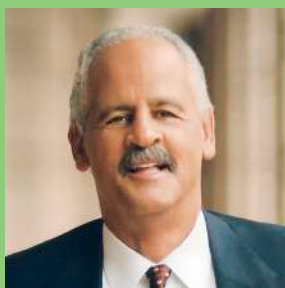
Parenting Series

The DHP team also promoted our parenting series in 2023 and we reached 338 parents across 7 schools in the Anaheim Unified High School District throughout the year. The program was spearheaded through our parenting coordinators at Walker Jr. High School and promoted the event to parents across other schools in the district, existing partners of WPDI as well as those that do not have current MOUs with WPDI, including Oxford Academy, Cambridge Virtual Academy, Cypress High School, Western High School, Kennedy High School, and Lexington High School. These

parenting series are the primary way that we are reaching busy and often stressed parents who are doing their best to meet their own needs and those of their children. In this series, parents learn about the importance of understanding your identity, tools to communicate effectively with your children, and ways to encourage family healing.

Our virtual parenting series, Parenting to *Meet our Children's Needs*, is offered to parents in 3 parts, each of which focus on different ways of growing the family unit.

Part 1: Identity Leadership



The first part of the series is led by Mr. Stedman Graham, business advisor, educator and author of numerous best-selling books. Stedman Graham, with over 30 years of experience, champions Identity Leadership, emphasizing that self-leadership is fundamental to guiding others. By bridging Eastern and Western philosophies, he empowers individuals to thrive holistically—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Stedman sees his mission as creating resilient champions who positively impact the world through self-awareness and purpose-driven leadership.

Stedman Graham's multifaceted work served as a strong call to action to parents to build themselves first before they can lead their children. Mr. Graham's content-rich workshop emphasized the need for parents to lead by example by learning by themselves, being a good role model for their children in communication, in their work ethic and personal habits. He urged parents to read a lot to grow themselves, which is more important today in our ever-changing society than ever before. He also encouraged parents to really understand who they are and where they are headed, and to build a vision for their lives and a vision for the family too. Nobody, he insisted, is going to bring value to a person's life but each of us is doing that for ourselves. This segment helped parents learn that they must put their own growth at the top of their priority so that their growth inspires their children's growth too.



Part 2: Communication to Understand our Children's Needs



The part of the series is delivered by Mrs. Karen DeVoogd, K-12 educator, former professor, and Conflict Resolution Education Trainer at WPDI. Her session offered communication strategies so that parents and their children can develop stronger interpersonal relationships using proven communication strategies. As children grow up and enter the pre-teen and adolescent age, she highlighted, they look less and less to their parents for approval and communication, and more towards their peers. They also seek out more autonomy, and at times, test the boundaries of what they are and are not allowed to do, which may result in communication and relational gaps between parents and their children. Mrs. DeVoogd's session provided an open-minded lens through which parents and children can understand one another; the lens of unmet needs. She encouraged parents to use this construct

and its related communication tools to build and maintain ongoing channels of dialogue and understanding with one another.

Part 3: Family Healing



The third part of the series was delivered by Mr. Anand Chulani, Founder of the Absolute Champion Methodology and expert on mental health. His session is centered on family healing by looking at the family dynamic and seeing how we are all unlimited in our own unique ways. By embracing the uniqueness of each of us within the family unit, we can begin to remove unreasonable expectations and begin accepting each of our differences and gifts. Mr. Chulani's session also encourages parents to spend more time with their children and to be adaptive to our children's evolving phases

The DHP's parenting workshops are of paramount importance in fostering healthy family dynamics and supporting emotional development of children. Our 3-part virtual series provided parents with valuable tools, concepts, and strategies to navigate the inevitable conflicts that arise within family settings. Our workshops aimed to offer parents effective tools to understand themselves and make time for themselves as they lead busy lives as to provide for their families. Our workshops also offered the audiences tools for effective communication, active listening, and problem-solving techniques aimed at getting to the unmet need of a child. These sessions helped parents learn actionable tools to create an environment within their homes where conflicts are approached constructively. Teaching conflict resolution in parenting workshops not only equips parents with the skills to manage disagreements but also serves as a powerful model for children. When children of any age range watch their parents engage in respectful and empathetic conflict resolution, they also develop crucial social and emotional skills, which shapes their own approach to resolving disputes in the future. Ultimately, these workshops contributed to the creation of a nurturing and supportive family atmosphere and helped us to connect with families to understand their challenges in communicating and leading their families.

Below are some of the anonymous feedback sent by parents through online surveys following the online workshops:

"I learned a lot and feel and believe that if our parents would have known this information and guided us and we continue with our children we would live in a whole different world. However, it is never too late and I hope I can define myself and be able to guide my kids."

"I'll use what I learned every day when communicating with my teens and others in my life."

"I learned and reminded myself of the tools to have better communication with my kids and husband."

"Listen and be more open and vulnerable with my child so he learns from me firsthand."

"I have to practice the tools and learnings myself to be able to impart and teach it to my son"

"I learned that in order to be an effective leader, one must be willing to change. Change starts with self-love and from within."

"Pyramid of needs, and that is not only to motivate our children but also to activate them in their purpose."



Conclusion

The year 2023 marked a significant expansion of WPDI's DHP, reaching out to 3 additional elementary schools and making its debut in 2 high schools. As a result, we been able to deliver programs into 10 schools hosting, training 1,318 learners and teachers and reaching 2,120 people through advocacy campaigns in schools. We are proud also that our efforts have indirectly impacted nearly 11,000 people, demonstrating the cascading effect of the culture of peace we aim to instill in schools. We could achieve these results thanks in part to a surge in the number of students from grades 4-12 receiving training in peer mediation, empowering them to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution among their peers. The launch of our inaugural train-the-trainers course enabled counselors across Los Angeles County to establish their own peer mediation programs. A notable achievement was the initiation of Inner Spark, a peer-to-peer mentoring program aimed at fostering social-emotional resilience, trauma-informed care, and personal growth among high school students. These accomplishments have solidified DHP's reputation as a robust peace education program in the region and beyond.

Looking forward, 2024 presents both challenges and opportunities. Navigating the complexities of working with schools, addressing the needs of overworked educators, and overcoming the limitations in reaching parents are some of the challenges we anticipate. Despite these hurdles, our commitment remains unwavering, and we will continue to adapt to the needs and constraints of each partner school. On the horizon are promising opportunities, including the expansion of our Inner Spark program, extending our reach to more schools in the Greater Los Angeles Area, and working with non-traditional institutions like Switzer. A



Image of hope and connection from DHP event

significant development is our upcoming collaboration with the Northwest Educational Services District 189 (NWESD) in Washington State, which will allow us to develop and implement comprehensive conflict resolution programs for students, educators, and parents across 35 school districts.

In conclusion, we would like to express our gratitude to our partners, Verizon and the Bank of Montreal, for their trust and support in our quest for grassroots peace. Their commitment to embracing the future by working with children and youths is commendable. As we continue to work at the grassroots level with students, teachers, and parents, we remain hopeful that our efforts will create local communities of practice around peace, generating cascading effects beyond the scope of our intervention.

Partners



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