

Making Peace in Conflict

NCRC aids conversations to reach healthy resolutions



NCRC's Francisco Carbajal (center) with two graduates of the organization's Restorative Justice program

FOUNDED IN 1983 BY THE University of San Diego Law Center and the San Diego County Bar Association, the National Conflict Resolution Center celebrates 35 years of service this year. The organization, which began as the Golden Hill Mediation Center, offers a wealth of services including divorce mediation, communication training for businesses, restorative initiatives, neighborhood communication workshops, aid for those in the immigration process, and much more.

“We have a menu of services that all deal with the idea of healthy dialogue and communication,” explains Ashley Virtue, director of external relations. “Our work stems from the belief it’s important to hear both sides of an argument; to solve issues faster while having your own voice heard.”

“We’re in such an interesting time in the country right now that we’re seeing more desire for our services than ever before,” she continues. “Right now, people are more attentive to the idea of civility. We’re seeing lots of companies and individuals reach out to us for training to learn how to have healthy dialogues.”

NCRC’s valuable offerings include the new Bystander Challenge, which coaches those who witness workplace conflict on how to help resolve issues

before they escalate, plus many programs geared toward refugee communities. “We teach many refugees basic communication skills for when they’re trying to get a job, or trying to integrate into the neighborhood,” says Virtue. “For someone coming from a different culture, things can be miscommunicated or taken the wrong way. We help them work through issues faster despite language barriers.”

One of NCRC’s most successful initiatives is its “Avoiding the Pipeline to Prison” program, in which they work in conjunction with the DA’s office, Sheriff’s department, and school districts, offering restorative measures for juveniles who have been arrested for a crime, and who may have been expelled from school. NCRC educates them on how their behavior negatively impacts the community and gives them opportunities to clear their record and make amends.

“I believe they’re held more accountable than if they spend time behind bars,” Virtue says. “They talk with community leaders and learn about crime’s ripple effect, ask for forgiveness, get mentoring and counseling to move forward. It’s an eye-opening experience for them. Many speak at school assemblies about their transformation afterward.”

Virtue says the program also eases the burden on taxpayers. “It costs about \$100,000 to send a youth through the court system, house them in jail, and do probation afterwards. For only \$1,200, we can go through the restorative conference and keep them out of prison,” she says.

Virtue encourages the public to come see for themselves what else the NCRC can do. Public training workshops, such as the “Communicate. Collaborate. Connect.” series, are unique opportunities for anyone interested in the best methods for solving conflicts without wasting money and time, while still having a voice. ncrconline.com RYAN THOMAS