

## **Peer Mediation Cape Town**

The Peer Mediation project is based in the Quaker Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa, supported by Central England Quakers.

It aims to help pupils and teachers understand the roots of conflict and find alternatives to violence as a way of addressing conflicts within Cape Town's most under-resourced schools.

Currently it is working in six secondary schools to establish Pupils Advisory Forums on Violence (PAFOVs). These diagnose the types and causes of violence in the schools and suggest ways that they can be tackled by teachers and pupils.

In 2015 and 2016, residential training workshops were held at Habonim on the coast near the city, where young people from the six schools participating in the PAFOV programme were able to sleep in cabins surrounded by trees and birds, there were no gunshots and it was safe to visit their friends in another cabin and to run on the beach. They received three cooked meals a day and did not have to share beds, because there was enough space for everyone.

In 2016, 15 teachers from the schools were also trained, enabling them to see how pupils take to peer mediation instinctively and how effective it can be.

The essence of mediation lies in uncovering the deep-seated issue or feeling at the core of the problem while working towards a fair resolution. The pupils identify with these two aspects immediately: they understand that real feelings often remain hidden behind anger or a fake smile, because they are constantly having to protect themselves from derision and bullying; and they also identify with the concept of 'fairness', as so much of what they experience in their homes and communities seems unfair.

Experience so far shows that peer mediation schemes are more effective and sustainable if:

- mediators are fellow pupils, especially those with 'street cred', because young people talk more easily to their peers;
- mediators from higher grades (9 and 10) work with pupils from lower grades (grade 8, the entry grade);
- there is a referral system for pupils seeking mediation, who are assured of confidentiality;

- the schemes are part of ongoing bodies like the Peace Clubs or Representative Councils of Learners;
- at least one teacher in each school is knowledgeable about peer mediation and can introduce the scheme to Grade 8 pupils, mentor and support peer mediators, and train subsequent cohorts of mediators;
- mediators have a space where they can meet.

The challenge now is for the Centre to put the lessons learned into practice to ensure that the peer mediation schemes operating in the six schools are sustained beyond 2017.

