

Mission:

Network for Peace through Dialogue creates opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in constructive conversation in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect.



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Beyond Party Platforms: Asking the Right Questions about Immigration

What if, instead of debates among candidates for election, we had election dialogues? What would they look like?

What would it be like to have discussions of the issues that were not rancorous and combative, but conducted with the intention of seeking understanding and exploring options? And what if candidates were not forced into rigid, polarized positions and accused of “flip-flopping” if they modified their thinking, but actually were encouraged to entertain alternative ideas, if only for a moment?

At the Network, we have tried to imagine such an event, and it will take place October 16, 6:30 pm, at Marymount College, 221 E. 71st St., NYC. We have chosen the contentious issue of immigration for this experiment and are inviting two professionals who are experts on the subject but hold divergent views to explain the issue as they see it and to offer any recommendations they might have.

Professionals Model Active Listening

Once each expert has had an opportunity to outline his view, an “active listener” will feed back to the speaker what she has heard and ask clarifying questions. We have invited Deborah Zarsky and Ariel Lublin, both lawyers who facilitate dialogues and mediations at Consensus, a global consulting firm that specializes in communication, negotiation and conflict resolution, to model this process of active listening.

After the experts have spoken and responded to the active listeners, there will be a discussion during which members of the audience will have an opportunity to express their own views and ask questions about both the substance of the issue and the dialogue process.

Non-Partisan Organization

This is meant to be an intelligent exchange of views. The objective is to hear others, to understand where they are coming from, to see the operative values they hold, and to realize how they have arrived at the conclusions they have reached.

The Network for Peace through Dialogue is a non-partisan organization with no position on the immigration issue. Its sole goal is to create opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in constructive conversations in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect.

From the Director

In our last newsletter we mentioned several conferences which we hoped to attend in the fall and all of them are coming to fruition. Our Shaping Our Future coordinator, Karen Ross, will be making a presentation about that program at the Peace and Justice Studies Association conference in Portland, OR, September 11-14. A week later, staff members Kathleen Kanet and Peggy Ray will describe our program for youth, *Confronting Concerns*, in a conference sponsored by our sister organization *Christliche Initiative Internationales Lernen* in Germany. The three day event, which will be held near Frankfurt, is called "The Dialogue Form and the Concept of Development: An Intercultural / International and Interdisciplinary Exercise between Partners from the North-South-East." Sounds impressive, doesn't it? Then from October 3-5, Program Director Pamela Zivari and I will be attending the biannual conference of the National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation in Austin, TX.

Local Dialogues Continue

Our Dialogue Facilitators Networking Group has met twice and will continue to meet monthly through December. Our plan is to harvest the insights about conducting fruitful dialogues that arise in this group and publish the results. We'll let you know as soon as they are ready.

We continue to have interesting and provocative Living Room Dialogues. You can find full reports of each one on our website, www.networkforpeace.com. In May, Rachel Lloyd, the director of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, rebutted the notion that young women freely choose prostitution as an occupation. More recently, Samir Ashraf, who recently spent nine months in India volunteering at the Baha'i House of Worship in New Delhi, shared his impressions of India and its people.

Please continue to help with your generous financial contributions to our work. Participate in our Recognition Night on October 30 if you can. In addition, we welcome your assistance with our outreach to foundations. If you have any connections please let us know.

—Virginia Dorgan, RSHM

Coming Up

Wednesday, Sept. 10 6:30 pm

240 E. 93d St. #3H, NYC

Living Room Dialogue: "Natural Building for Sustainable Communities."

Melanie Nanez will discuss her experience in an ecovillage in British Columbia, Canada, dedicated to the development of sustainable living options.

(If this has already occurred by the time this Newsletter arrives see the report at www.networkforpeace.com.)

Thursday, October 16 6:30 pm

Marymount Manhattan College

221 East 71 Street, NYC

Living Room Dialogue: "Beyond Party Platforms: Asking the right questions about immigration."

(See page 1 for description.)

Thursday, October 30 6:00 –9:00 pm

Marymount School, 1026 Fifth Ave., NYC

Recognition Night 2008:

Instruments of Peace

We will honor Maria Volpe of John Jay College (see article on p. 5) and other instruments of peace including Leo Corbie, posthumously. Guy Bennett of Christie's will lead the auction. The requested donation for this delightful evening is \$100. Call 212-426-5818 and reserve your space.

Summer 2009

Dialogue Conference — Exact dates and location are being planned. Watch for updates on the web or in our Spring newsletter.

Network for Peace through Dialogue is a 501(c)3 organization and depends on individual contributions. Any contribution you can make in cash, stock, or a bequest will help to further our work. The address and phone number are on the cover of this newsletter. Thank you.

Meet the Staff

Office Manager Bret Nelson

Bret Nelson, the Network's new Office Manager, describes his job as handling the administrative work and making sure the rest of the staff has all the logistical and practical support they need to be effective. In the coming year he will also take on coordination of our 2009 Dialogue Conference, now in the planning stages.

Newly arrived in New York City from the suburbs of Chicago, Bret attends graduate school at Fordham University, where he is studying international relations with a focus on the Middle East. He says that in his undergraduate days at Lake Forest College he studied philosophy and religion because he wanted to explore big questions like "what is right and wrong?" and "why are we here?" All that was interesting theoretically, but he sees his current studies as a possible avenue for making the world a better place in a more practical way.

As he has been studying Arabic for the last year, Bret is particularly aware of miscommunication and suspicion between U.S. and Arab peoples. As he notes, this can take the form of "simplistic statements like 'they hate us for our freedom.'" He sees his work at the Network as overlapping with his academic goals since the aim of both is to find ways to address intercultural misunderstandings.

Bret finds that dialogue is reflected in the ways people communicate in the Network office. He particularly likes the genuineness and lack of pretention he finds among his colleagues here.



Bret Nelson

Teen Coordinator Tene Howard



Tene Howard

Over the past two years, I have worked with the Confronting Concerns program as the Teen Coordinator. The goals of the Confronting Concerns project struck a chord with me when I first heard about it-- a project that engaged young people in investigating the issues facing their community and offered them the opportunity to take action on those issues. Often, youth voices are left out of dialogues about how to address community issues or they are not asked to present their perspectives on these issues.

Youth have a unique perspective because in many cases, they are most affected by some of the more troubling problems taking place in communities. The young women who have participated as leaders in the Confronting Concerns project have talked to peers about problems faced in the Harlem community, have facilitated workshops on difficult issues such as teen sex and its negative consequences, violence and drugs. They have also reached out to their parents and other elders in the community to provide a space for them to engage in dialogue about these issues as well. Through peer dialogues as well as intergenerational dialogues, they have been able to get people talking about issues that are very difficult to broach. Along the way they have also improved their own leadership skills -- learning how to plan and facilitate workshops, speak in public and present their ideas to various groups of people.

This year, the Leadership Institute was created in order to bolster the youth leaders' skills through a series of focused workshops, tailored to address the specific needs of the young women who are taking part in the institute. They worked with Sister Kathleen and myself to set both personal and group goals. Together we pushed each other on our personal goals, some of which were to become more confident speaking

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Can Dialogue Protect Us From Propaganda?

Adolph Hitler outlined the basics of modern political propaganda in his book *Mein Kampf*. There were three elements to his scheme: a simple message, repetition and mass media. He and his henchman, Joseph Goebbels, used this formula to push their Nazi ideology, but it works just as well for any set of ideas. It's a simple formulation and anyone with free use of mass media can use it to push any ideology at all.

In a way it doesn't matter much what the content of the message is, so long as it is simple and reinforced by relentless repetition. Propaganda offers easy answers to complex problems and charges political debate with raw emotion, driving home whatever the message is by repeating it over and over again until the audience is left thinking and feeling that it's just plain common sense (no matter how absurd and offensive, as, for example, the Nazi propaganda against the Jews).

A Form of Force

Constant repetition by means of mass media is a form of force in the world of ideas, a way to defeat targeted ideas and arguments without having to offer better ideas and arguments. Like physical force, which moves or destroys things and bodies, propaganda moves people in their thinking, uprooting and destroying certain ideas and ways of looking at the world and substituting others in their place.

With the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine in the United States, all three elements of propaganda are in place. The mass media is largely dominated by a relatively few large corporations that have their own special political interests – to promote corporate-friendly policies – but some are also overtly political in other ways as well, using mass media to promote messages which they reinforce through constant repetition. Propaganda works best when aimed at some enemy, typically anyone who disagrees.

What Can We Do?

Of course we can simply turn off the radio and television or tune out, but we still live with people who watch and listen and are swayed, and besides, ideas that are literally in the air (the airwaves) are contagious, provoking either acceptance or rejection, splitting society, dividing friends and family.

Dialogue is a way of bridging these divides, but what can small groups in dialogue accomplish compared with the sheer force of repeating a simple message over mass media? At least we can begin.

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in front of large groups or to extend our leadership skills into school and family life.

As a group, we intended to facilitate at least three workshops with new groups of youth and adults. So far, the youth leaders have facilitated a Living Room Dialogue with adults, and two youth workshops-- one with a girls group at the Little Sisters of the Assumption organization and one with 15 young women from the community at the All Saints Parish house.

While we have been able to achieve some of the goals we set out, as an educator it has been important for me to see the transformation and growth that the youth leaders have undergone. What is most important to me is that the young women can see themselves as successful and can make the link between the work that they put in and the outcomes gained. In my own vision, this is the way that social change comes about--starting from within and then extending outward. I am blessed to work with a project that embraces that idea and actively promotes it with our young people.

—Tene Howard



**Having fun at the workshop
at All Saints Parish house**

Recognition Night Honoree Is Hopeful About the Future

Dr. Maria Volpe, who will be honored at the Network's Recognition Night on October 30, is very optimistic about a more peaceful future. That's because, she says, "thousands and thousands of people have been learning better ways to manage conflicts worldwide. The good news is that we have a generation growing up that has a new set of skills in school."



Maria Volpe

She ought to know. A professor of sociology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice-City University of New York, Director of the Dispute Resolution Program there, and convener of the City University's Dispute Resolution Consortium, Dr. Volpe has been personally involved in groundbreaking work developing educational and training programs.

At John Jay College, she wears many hats. In addition to teaching, writing, conducting mediations, and managing the Dispute Resolution Program, she also facilitates dialogues. The difference between a dialogue and a mediation, she says, is that in a dialogue there is no expectation that participants will necessarily arrive at mutually agreed upon understanding or even so much as a handshake, though both may occur. The aim is to facilitate conversation between or among parties who might not otherwise come into contact with one another.

"Cops and Kids"

Some of the dialogues that she has facilitated off and on for many years have been between "Cops and Kids." These are usually conducted to help police and young people engage in difficult conversations. Perhaps there is an issue because youth are playing in a particular park after hours and the police make them leave. The youth see themselves as being harassed; the police view the situation as just enforcing the rules.

In such cases, the facilitators will work with both groups ahead of time to introduce the guidelines that will be followed. When the dialogues begin, the facilitators provide a safe structure for the conversation. The youths are usually apprehensive when they come in. Stereotypes are addressed and perceptions are shared. For instance, the youth find out that police don't eat donuts all the time, as they believe, when police explain that they frequent donut shops because they are often the only places where they can get something to eat at odd hours.

Making Talk Work

Since 9/11, Dr. Volpe has been spearheading a public awareness initiative to share with the public tips from the dispute resolution field on how to "Make Talk Work." Two of the best known projects, which have been funded by the JAMS Foundation, are the very popular bookmarks (see adjoining box) and an international video competition. Dr. Volpe likes to show the winning videos of youngsters demonstrating communication skills. "You can see kids giving 'I' messages and finding win-win solutions," she says proudly. It's pictures like this that inspire hope for the future.

—Peggy Ray

Bookmarks Offer Tips for Effective Communication

The bookmark project consists of 24 colorful and well-designed bookmarks with tips on effective ways to manage talk with others. Dispute resolution professionals designed them to provide the public with simple messages that draw on principles and processes they use in their work.

A Few Of the Tips:

To Keep an Open Mind: Listen without interrupting. Consider other ideas. Ask questions to understand.

Try to understand others: Recognize differences. Acknowledge another's feelings. Put yourself in the other person's shoes.

To Highlight the Main Points you heard... SUMMARIZE: Review key ideas. Ask: Was anything important missed?

Find Common Ground. Explain What Matters and Why.

Order bookmarks at <http://johnjay.jjay.cuny.edu/dispute>

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BE AN INSTRUMENT OF PEACE

***Recognition Night 2008
Honoring Maria Volpe, PhD
& other instruments of peace***

**Thursday, October 30
6-9 pm**

Marymount School – Fifth Avenue at 84th St.

Please join us —Details inside.

