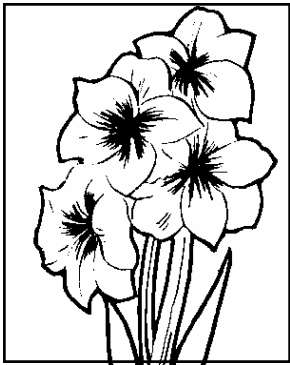


Calgary Community Conferencing

Spring 2008



Inside this issue:

- *Victim of Egg Attack Befriends Offenders*
- *Who's New in the Zoo: The Conferencing Team*
- *Insert: An Investigation of the impacts and Participant Experiences of Calgary Community Conferencing*
- *Testimonial: The experience of a school administrator*
- *The latest Professional Development Opportunities*

Victim of Egg Attack Befriends Offenders

Taken from an article by Gladys Terichow, Printed on October 31, 2007

CALGARY, Alta. —Earlier this year a Calgary youth threw an egg at a convenience store clerk who was working the night shift. His friend recorded the incident with a video camera.

Their plans to submit this video to the popular video sharing website, YouTube, ended abruptly with an arrest. A bystander had called the police when he saw the young men, ages 16 and 17, covering their faces in the parking lot before entering the store. The boys were arrested in the parking lot and faced charges of assault with a weapon.

The unsuspecting victim of this prank, Zenebe Gebrewold said his initial reaction was anger and thoughts of revenge.

But after meeting the young offenders and hearing them express genuine remorse for their actions he told them, "We weren't enemies before this happened—we don't have to be enemies now."

This face-to-face meeting between the young offenders, their parents and Gebrewold was facilitated by Calgary Community Conferencing, a restorative justice program started in 1998

The goal of community conferencing is to reduce youth crime through helping young people acknowledge

and address the consequences of harmful behavior, said conference facilitator Darrel Heidebrecht, who also represents MCC Alberta in this program.

A conference is a structured process that gives victims of crime or harmful actions the opportunity to ask questions—an opportunity not available under the centuries old retributive model of justice where offenders are passive and victims largely ignored.

"We don't do conferences without victims—without the participation of

victims there is no point to it," said Heidebrecht, adding conferences take place in churches, schools or community

centers in neighbourhoods where victims work or live.

"This is getting tough on crime—we are asking kids to do things that are way more challenging than facing a judge in a courtroom," he added.

"Victims typically have a lot of questions and we try to help young people answer these questions. We want this to be a positive learning experience for kids but we also want them to take full responsibility for their actions. Our program is a grassroots attempt to resolve conflict in a meaningful way."

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

The conference concludes with offenders developing an agreement or action plan that addresses the needs and concerns of victims.

“We work towards a youth initiated agreement —what do they think they should do to repair the harm,” explained Heidebrecht. “Some things can’t be undone but they still need to be addressed.”

Action plans suggested by offenders are usually creative and effective, said Heidebrecht. The action plan developed by the offenders during this conference was that they would meet Gebrewold for coffee; a meeting to help see Gebrewold as a person, and not just a store clerk.

When the youth appeared in youth court a few months later, the impact of the conference was taken into consideration by the judge who sentenced them to a period of probation, with the conditions including their offer to meet with the victim for coffee.

Gebrewold said he wanted to participate in the conference because “I was curious to hear why

the boys decided to do this.” He was surprised to learn that the motivation for this offense was a few minutes of fame on You Tube.

Gebrewold, a teacher in Ethiopia, moved to Canada three years ago. When the youth met him for coffee he talked about his experiences in Ethiopia and told the boys how fortunate they are to live in Canada. “They have so many opportunities in Canada, in comparison to what young people have in Africa. I asked them why they were doing this unnecessary stuff,” he recalled.

“We work towards a youth initiated agreement —what do they think they should do to repair the harm,” explained Heidebrecht. “Some things can’t be undone but they still need to be addressed.”

Heidebrecht’s long history of involvement in alternative justice programs helps him bring valuable resources and insights to Calgary Community Conferencing, a program often cited “as an excellent example of organizations working together to make this city a better place to live.”



Did You Know...?

The Calgary Community Conferencing website www.calgarycommunityconferencing.com has links to two exciting videos that highlight the experiences and reflections of past participants:



- Global TV Part I, II, III
- Desire 2 Learn (D2L)

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Who is new in the Zoo

By Sheila Brantnall

I just thought I would take this opportunity to introduce the newest members of the Community Conferencing Team...

Scott Warkentin originally joined us in January 2007 to fill a maternity leave. In September he was the successful candidate for the Probation Assistant position. Scott hails from Winnipeg, Manitoba where he worked in the school system as an Educational Assistant. He also has experience as a Summer Camp Program Director.



In September 2007, Sue Stretton, a Specialist from the Calgary Board of Education, joined us. With many years of experience in the CBE, Sue has been a welcome addition to our team.

Our most recent addition to the team is Maria McBain, who also comes to us from Winnipeg. Maria is a recent graduate with a degree in Sociology, who relocated to Calgary just three months ago. She brings with her a keen enthusiasm for working with adolescents.

Still with the program are: Darrel Heidebrecht, from Mennonite Central Committee; Debbie Nowakowski, from John Howard Society; and Sheila Brantnall, from City of Calgary, Youth Probation.



Testimonial: Our Experience

By Cyndi McNiven,
Assistant Principal
G.W. Skene

Over the last several years, we have accessed Calgary Community Conferencing, in order to assist us with complex issues within our school. This intervention has always resulted in positive outcomes for all participants. Not only is there tremendous learning in the actual conference, but the process of working with and preparing the participants holds much value as well.

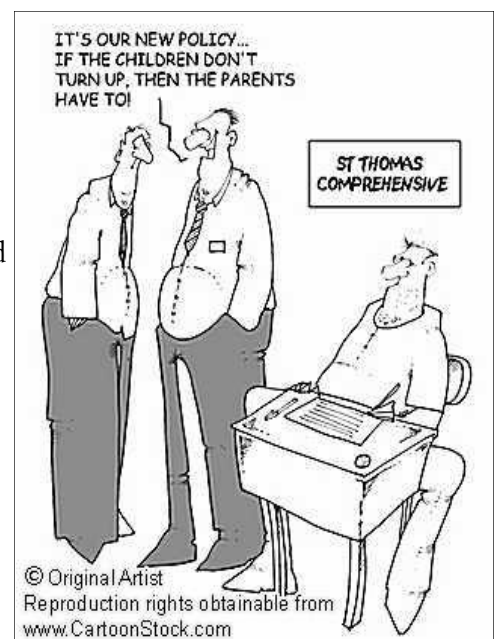
The incidents we have referred to the program have been ones that negatively impacted the learning and culture of our school. Working through the conferencing process with students and their families, gives all parties a voice, and a chance to feel that their story is val-

ued. Participants are then open to hearing another viewpoint, and understanding how they have impacted the lives of others. Parents of children in conflict are given the opportunity to come together, meet, and find common ground. Students are able to find solutions that restore safety and rebuild relationships and trust.

The program brings together students, their families, school administrators, and staff. This helps students build connections with significant adults at our school

and in the community.

In addition to these outcomes, community conferencing can connect participants to community resources and programs.



Community Education



Calgary Community Conferencing is pleased to offer the following professional development workshops:

Crazy by Design

October 9th & 10th

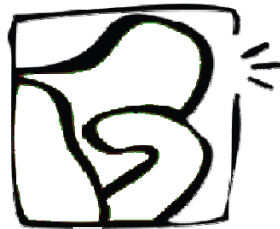
A training program designed to meet the needs of professionals working with challenging pre-teens and adolescents within their community. Presenter, Gail Smilie, provides a unique understanding of teen brain development, adapted from Barbara Strauch's book, *The Primal Teen*, as well as various other experts in the fields of neurology and trauma recovery. The synthesis of the research provides us with the first scientific explanation of the mysterious, frustrating and often downright strange behavior of

teenagers!

Beyond the Comfort Zone

A half day workshop providing skills, tools and strategies to use in the class room to promote restorative communities.

* **Contact us to schedule this**



Participant testimony:

"I learned that all members of an incident have needs [not just the victim]."

"Good thought-provoking discussions!"

workshop for your group.



Calgary Community Conferencing

hosts numerous professional development workshops each year. We welcome suggestions you might have about topics for future workshops. Feel free to forward ideas to Debbie Nowakowski:

ccc.debbie@shawcable.com.

"I enjoyed conversations with colleagues because we got a chance to share our values, and perspectives on how to handle situations."

Resilience

Stay tuned for more information on this

The Lighthouse Award

Calgary Community Conferencing recently received the Lighthouse Award from the Calgary Board of Education. This award honours organizations that "have provided a beacon of light to enhance learning opportunities for CBE students." The Lighthouse award publicly acknowledges the contribution of organizations partnering with the CBE. This award recognizes the contribution CCC makes to creating safer school communities in Calgary.

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"Your head weighs 26 pounds, same as your feet."