

PEACEMAKERS ACROSS CULTURES

As part of its *Enhancing Communication between New-comer and Native-born* project, which strives to promote harmony among refugee and American youths in Prince George's County, MONA sponsored a special event on January 20th. More than a hundred people attended *Breaking the Fast*, a community dinner at Parkdale High School in Riverdale. The dinner's purpose was to celebrate the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and to launch a three-day training (January 21-23).

Offered by the Peacemaking and Conflict Studies program of Fresno Pacific University, the subsequent training provided opportunities for twenty students, two teachers, and a handful of refugee service providers to discuss the kinds of conflicts that occur at school and to learn how to resolve these conflicts. Discussions focused primarily on cross-cultural misunderstandings both in and out of the classroom. Through role plays and other activities, students practiced how peacefully to resolve problems that occur among youths from varied ethnic backgrounds.

The final day culminated in a brainstorming session on the most important issues to students, and actions they would like to take to address them.



Photo by Jacqueline DeCarlo

Parkdale High School students Khalida Omar and Shukri Sheikh-Salah complete a written exercise at a MONA-sponsored training offered by the Peacemaking and Conflict Studies (PACS) program of Fresno Pacific University. Both girls are from Somalia and now live in Riverdale.



Photo by Jacqueline DeCarlo

Sorkis Showae, from Iraq, and Amela Rustemovic, from Bosnia, were eager participants in the PACS training, which taught students how to resolve cross-cultural tensions at school. Riverdale High School is located in Prince George's County, which has one of the state's largest refugee populations.

Despite their divergent backgrounds, students were enthusiastic about trying to work together as a group to resolve problems and plan future activities. They called themselves Peacemakers Across Cultures (PAC). The group met on several occasions to develop and rehearse a dramatic skit for a Black History Month school assembly. They also planned field trips to Philadelphia's Independence Hall and Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies and to Washington, DC, where they will tour the Supreme Court Building.

In March, PAC students led a series of structured dialogues, called "RAP Sessions" at Parkdale High School. RAP stands for "Respect Among People." The Prince George's County Human Relations Commission designed the sessions with student help. The dialogues aimed at providing a safe forum for teenagers to talk about potentially controversial issues and enabled Parkdale students to continue the meaningful discussions that began at the January training.

Special thanks to Parkdale High School teachers Linda Cooper and Richard Moody for putting together a great student team. Thanks, too, to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement for funding the project.

—Shelley Preston, MONA Intern