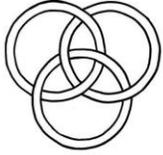


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## *Creating a Space for Dialogue in the San Luis Valley*

### 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

#### **Director's Report:**

The year 2009 brought a whirlwind of activity, from January's move to our new building and its related capital campaign, through the rush of Fall trainings and interventions with students at area schools. Two years ago, our board and staff set goals to raise our profile in the community, broaden and deepen our work and partnerships, and create a sustainable home for our second decade. We have worked diligently to realize these goals, working with the image of "creating a space for dialogue in the San Luis Valley."

The object has not been busyness in itself, though the staff reports that follow underscore that this has certainly been one of the results! The vision is more one of systematic integration of what we have learned from our first decade of helping hundreds of youth throughout the San Luis Valley to step up through restorative dialogue to repair relationships and "make things right", after unwise choices at school, at home, and in the broader community.

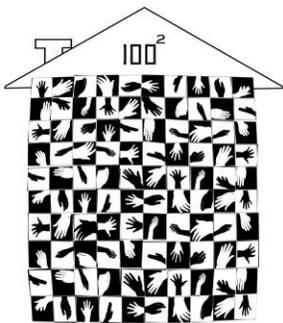
**Broadening and Deepening Our Work** - The questions we are asking include: How do we strengthen and interweave the varied programs our agency now offers, which stretch along a broad spectrum from prevention and skill-building activities to the very direct and immediate work of conflict interventions? Drawing upon and yet looking beyond our own agency strengths and programs, how do we stretch our relationships, to share and mix our competencies more intentionally with varied community partners, youth and families with whom we already work or aspire to work throughout the Valley? And perhaps most importantly, how do we do this "broadening and deepening" of our work and relationships, while holding fast to the core principles and practices of restorative dialogue that give integrity to all we do?

Looking back over the past year, some examples stand out as highlights:

- A truancy mediation last Spring created the bridge between school and a non-English speaking parent, over which a failing kindergartener successfully crossed to first grade. This process in turn strengthened communication between the school and migrant-focused educational resources in the broader community. It also interrupted a cycle of academic unpreparedness, as red tape was cut through for Mom to enroll the next two younger siblings in Headstart this Fall.
- A restorative discipline intervention with cliques of sometimes bullying middle school girls cooled down back-to-school tensions this Fall. This raised awareness among a sizeable group of students, their parents and school staff about typical behaviors, roles and dangers of girl-to-girl social aggression. This in turn opened up inter-generational dialogue for girls and parents together to rethink behaviors, roles and relationships. Opportunities for further work to

strengthen parent-child and peer-to-peer relationships have been offered through Parent-teen mediation and Girls Circles.

- Girls Circles and Boys Councils were provided to all students entering Alamosa Open High School this Fall. The principal's bold move to start the year with this system-wide intervention has produced a first semester largely free of the behavioral and relationship challenges typical to the high-risk youth attending this particular school.
- As partners in a new collaborative staffing model in Alamosa and Conejos counties, we have taken a lead in making this new structure more family-friends. We can now connect youth and families who are experiencing multiple serious challenges to a wrap-around service model. The goal is for youth and their families to feel less overwhelmed at this multi-agency table and better supported in their search for deeper, more customized and better integrated assistance from a variety of community resources.
- This Fall, we added an advanced track to our annual Peer Mediation trainings for area schools. This empowers high school mediators who have had two or more years of training and experience to more effectively assess and intervene in peer conflicts, preventing the academic disruption and potential court charges arising from escalated inter-personal conflicts at school. An event scheduled for January 2010 offers yet another level of skills for youth leaders. It will help them to step out beyond inter-personal conflict mediation, to identify and address broader concerns impacting inter-group relationships and school climate in their communities. These youth, in turn, will move on to strengthen broader community relationships, as they graduate, enter the workforce, and assume roles of civic leadership throughout our Valley.



**100<sup>2</sup> Campaign** - In terms of creating a sustainable home for our work, 2009 was truly a watershed year. In January, we officially moved into 714 Third Street, a small house just a short walk from downtown Alamosa and many of our key juvenile justice partners. Through the generosity and wisdom of the El Pomar Regional Council, we undertook a capital campaign shortly thereafter to raise \$50,000 towards our \$100,000 mortgage. Despite what seemed a daunting task in the face of a broken economy, our board and staff took El Pomar's challenge and designed a campaign to earn their \$25,000 match. The image

to the left reflects our vision of bringing together at least 100 community partners, giving \$100 or more, to join hands in making this goal a reality. With the help of four other foundations and too many individuals and local organizations to name here, we met and even exceeded the match by its November deadline.

In December, the executive director and board treasurer had the privilege of signing a \$50,000 check to our mortgage holder, drawn from our capital fund account. In addition to El Pomar Foundation, our



foundation partners for the down-payment and matching campaign included Adolph Coors Foundation, Anschutz Family Foundation, Frontier Village Foundation, Mennonite Mutual Aid, and three family funds accessed through personal relationships of board members. We were able to end the year with a small capital reserve and modest carry-over balance in our program operating account. With the profound impact that the economic recession has had on many Colorado non-profits, we do indeed feel privileged to end 2009 in a sound economic position.

### ***Victim-Offender Dialogue and Restorative Discipline Conferences:***

In 2009 our caseload increased by approximately 40 cases because of our early intervention work with the Alamosa School District. Claire and Paula worked closely together on these victim-offender/school referrals due to their being interwoven in most cases.

We received 101 new referrals in this program area. With our growing emphasis on early intervention in school settings, a majority of the offenses or conflicts referred were school-site incidents. This included a combination of teen-to-teen harassment and fights, school disciplinary offenses, truancy, teacher-student conflict and other school concerns. For the year, 85 referrals were initiated directly by school personnel. One case involved adults with a neighbor dispute. This case is still open but both parties have agreed to mediation. Of the 90 cases closed during the year, 82 completed mediation or restorative dialogue, or were otherwise conciliated. We completed intakes in the remaining 8 cases, but they did not move forward due to parties choosing not to proceed, being unavailable, or other circumstances. Of the 90 cases closed, most involved teen offenders. Another 17 involved truancy. We carried over 14 cases in 2009 and 19 cases remain open and will carry into 2010.

Our referral level stayed fairly steady throughout the year, with cases received from most counties in the valley. The majority came from our close partnership with the Alamosa School District. The new administrators there have continued the proactive stance of making student referrals before they reach more escalated levels. We have also facilitated discussions with administration, parents and students who are at risk of expulsion and need to have a preventive behavior plan in place. Additional referrals came from social services offices throughout the Valley and Alamosa Municipal Court

Paula Medina continues to provide oversight to this program area, as well as general coordination of our volunteer mediators. We have a small, but dedicated group of volunteers. Without them, we could not serve our widespread communities as effectively. We will be training new mediators in February 2010.

### ***School Programs:***

During 2009, we devoted a significant amount of time to school programming. Claire McArdle has provided over-all coordination of school services. As noted above, many of our case referrals were generated through school contacts. We continue to offer truancy mediation, Girls Circles, peer mediation training and anti-bullying education. In addition we helped to develop capacity for Boys Councils throughout the Valley and have been active in the development of a new collaboration known as Individualized Service and Support Team (ISST) in Alamosa and Conejos counties. We also participate in Alamosa Safe Schools meetings and the Alamosa and Valley prevention coalitions. **ISST Partnership** - We have partnered with the Individualized Service and Support Team (ISST) to develop a service and support plan and to provide services to children and families who would benefit

from integrated multi-agency services. ISST teams in both Alamosa and Conejos counties review children and youth who are receiving or are in need of receiving multi-agency services. Through this collaboration we are able to communicate with other agencies providing services to our clients, so that services are not duplicated and families do not fall through the cracks.

**Truancy Mediation**– We continue to focus our model on early truancy interventions at the elementary level. In 2009 our office mediated or conciliated 17 cases between school administrators, teachers and parents of elementary students, with a high level of success.

**Girls Circle and Boys Council Model** – CRP staff continues to facilitate several girls circles a year and in 2009 helped to organize a Boys Council facilitator training. This two-day training was, like the Girls Circle training last year, funded by the SB94 committee. A diverse group of 37 men and women from around the Valley participated in the training. They included teachers, school administrators, mental health providers, domestic violence prevention advocates, college students, youth group sponsors, and others. Our Center facilitated two intensive week-long Girls Circles this summer during Alamosa School District's YEA program, one for 6th graders and one for 7th and 8th graders. We also organized and staffed, along with Tu Casa and the Mental Health Center, two Girls Circles and two Boys Councils at the Alamosa Open High School during the first two weeks of school. For both Girls Circle and Boys Councils, our goal is to help oversee the development and implementation of these proven models, by supporting facilitator skill-development, matching facilitators to sites, collecting impact data, and generally allowing these models to grow organically in a variety of youth-serving sites around our valley.

**Peer Mediation** – In January 2009, we hosted a peer mediation training for 20 Monte Vista and Del Norte High School students. In the Fall, we hosted five full-day trainings for ten area high schools and middle schools. High schools included Moffat, Center, Creede, Sangre de Cristo, Cotopaxi, Mountain Valley, Centauri, Antonito and Monte Vista. Middle schools were Del Norte and Ortega. Close to 160 students, along with adults sponsors, attended the Fall trainings. This year, we offered two tracks, advanced and beginner. Advanced students studied more challenging situations and had the opportunity to demonstrate a mediation role play for their beginner peers. Students learned various skills and techniques important for mediators, and role played situations appropriate for peer mediation.

**Other Training Activities** – In addition to regular programming, our staff provided professional development and consultation throughout the year for educators in various public school, after-school and higher education settings. This included new teacher training for the Alamosa School District and a beginning of the year refresher on restorative discipline for a general staff development day. Additionally, our staff presented anti-bullying and conflict resolution material to Boys & Girls Club staff and members, to Center High School students, and to the annual Parent Institute at ASC.

### ***Parent-Teen Mediation:***

Parent-teen mediations are another important service offered by the Center. These interventions allow parents and their teenage children to sit down with two mediators, to communicate about the rough spots in their relationship and hopefully reach agreements that will work for everyone involved. This year Renee Mackey stepped down from the position of Parent-Teen Coordinator and Joanna Visser, CRP's new Mennonite Volunteer, began coordinating these cases. In 2009, we opened 16 new cases, which quadrupled the number that were opened last year. Many of these referrals made it to at least one mediation session. Although some were not mediated, the

intake process provided families with information on how to access other services in the community to better meet their current needs. It has been exciting to see growth in the program, both in the number of referrals and mediations, as well as in the variety of populations with which we have worked. As a result of the community outreach the Center did this fall, we have received an increased number of referrals from the Department of Human Services' case workers, Alamosa and Conejos Counties ISST teams, and the local schools. Due to an increase in referrals, we have relied on volunteer mediators in several of these cases and are thankful for their support in continuing this meaningful program. We look forward to the many ways in which the Center will continue to support teenagers and their families in the coming year.

***Other Community Involvements:***

Claire McArdle volunteered weekly throughout 2009 with Alamosa County Judge Mike Gonzales in the small claims arena. She mediated approximately 2 cases per court session, which work is outside our main focus area and not included in our case statistics. However, we consider this a contribution we can make to strengthening our partnership with the local courts. As in the past, we have participated in various community collaboratives, including the SB94 Youth Services Planning Committee and the Immigrant Integration Project. We have also responded to numerous requests from ASC, La Puente, area schools and other community agencies, to attend community fairs and to provide general presentations about our work to students, staff, and parents. This Fall, we also sponsored a weekend training on Non-Violent Communication. Targeted to ASC students, staff and the general public at the ASC Community Partnerships office, this intensive workshop was presented by NVC specialist Paul Shippee. Beginning in January 2010, we look forward to sponsoring an ASC sociology intern in our office.

As time allows, we also participate in state-wide organizations and events related to restorative justice, including an outstanding state-wide conference in Colorado Springs in September and occasional meetings with the Colorado RJ Program Directors' network. Other professional development this past year has focused on Spanish language skills for all staff.

**Prepared by the staff: Alice M. Price, Paula Medina, Claire McArdle and Joanna Visser**