

Education for Conflict Resolution

Reconciliation Notes

Getting Back to Normal

Letter from the Board Chair



It feels like we are all in the movie, *Groundhog Day*—like we are in this repetitive holding pattern from which there is no escape until we do it right. The old adage, “the more things change, the more they stay the same,” has certainly been the case for this late winter and early spring period. Weren’t we at almost the same place last spring? Oh, sure, we have the vaccine now, and many of us have acquired immunity, but there are these pesky new strains of COVID floating around in the biosphere, which means it is still not safe to unmask in public or go to large gatherings.

At this point, we are all experiencing some form of isolation/disease fatigue. How many people have I heard say, “I just miss hugging my family and friends?” At **ECR** we would also like to see things get back to at least a “new normal” because requests for mediations, both court-ordered and school-ordered, have fallen off somewhat this last year, and since we are in the business of helping people solve their conflicts, we would really like to see that trend take a turn to the North.

While we have done some **School Attendance Mediations (SAM’s)** this academic year— in-person, in-school settings where safe distancing and masking are practiced—it has not been easy to find mediators who feel safe enough to conduct those mediations. Now that the vaccine has made more of us feel safer, we are seeing more mediators step forward to work with students, but online education, as we all know, has blurred attendance standards and **SAM** requests are not coming in as often as we would like.

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Thank you for supporting us!

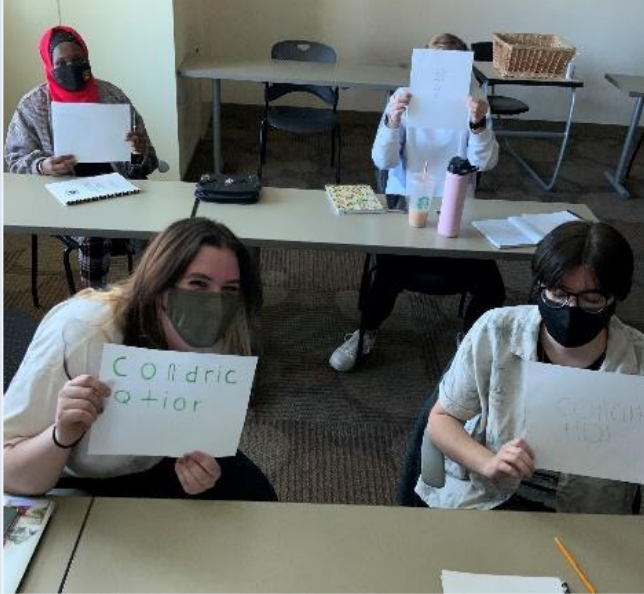
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Leaning Into Conversation



On Saturday, March 13, ECR hosted a **Productive Communication and Conflict** training at Manchester University. This event was open to MU faculty, staff, and students, as well as community members.

In reflection of the previous year while projecting the year ahead, we recognize the continued delay in the return to 'normalcy,' or perceived balance, and its impact on how we work together. The influence of conflict, difference of opinion, and disagreement remains persistent in both interpersonal and working relationships. A glimpse of the evening news or one's social media feed can be a constant reminder of the significance of effective communication skills.

Skills essential to effective dialogue include active listening and attending to the content of the speaker's words instead of urging them on to merely deliver our own response. Summarizing what a speaker says and inquiring more details promotes conversation. Many of us look to respond to or offer comment to 'fix' a speaker's dilemma; sometimes, the speaker simply needs to have an opportunity to be heard.

Being in the business of communication, we affirm what is crucial to sustain and build relationship. We recently facilitated our **Productive Communication and Conflict** training. Here are a few of the participant's comments regarding its value:

- "Using 'I' messages and taking ownership of my feelings, without blaming someone else when communicating."
- "Learning more about understanding common ground and the differences between positions and interests."
- "How to use language to express emotions and without placing blame."
- "A practical way drawing on and introducing discourse needed to move below the 'tip of the iceberg.'"

We value the opportunity to continue the work of our mission statement. A note of thanks to our supporters; their contributions help to sustain our outreach. Look for training and workshop information on our website, www.WorkItOut.org.

~Theresa Onderko



Held in cooperation with the MU Peace Studies department, eight people (1 professor, 1 staff member, and 6 students) attended this 6 hour training. The Peace Studies department subsidized registration fees for MU student, faculty, and staff.

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Yet, we have not given up. The **ECR Board of Directors** has been busy working on new ways to reach people in need of mediations. We know that the need will always be there. We just have to find ways to keep **ECR** on center-stage for providing conflict resolution, conflict-management, and conflict-transformation services. The Board **Strategic Planning Committee** is working on a new initiative for meeting the needs of area public schools; the Board **Resource Development Committee** wrote and published an article in *The Manchester News Journal* a couple of months back, reacquainting the community with **ECR's** services. It is also in the process of exploring grant opportunities that will provide us new funding for services we hope to offer.

As an organization, **ECR** has also been exploring new avenues for providing the kind of trainings that will help people learn and practice effective communication skills. Staff member Theresa Onderko, **ECR's** liaison to Manchester University (**MU**), has recently offered Manchester University students and faculty a training in **"Productive Communication and Conflict"** (see her article on this training in this issue). **ECR** hopes to fine-tune this training and offer it in more settings and to larger audiences, because while not everyone wants to become mediators (see our **ECR Spotlight** article), most of us do need to know how to communicate with others in ways that head off toxic interpersonal conflicts before they erupt.

So you see, we are still "hangin' in there," planning for a new day, a new season, and a new era. We are hoping that you will stay with us and keep supporting us as we fine-tune our organization to meet the challenges and needs of these unprecedented times.

~Linda Troop

Mediator Gathering



On April 11, ECR held its semi-annual Mediator Refresher: a time for mediators to process mediations (in a manner that honors confidentiality) and receive training that can be used in future mediations.

This Refresher was also a part of Manchester University's Peace Week. ECR Mediators gathered with MU students, faculty, and staff via Zoom for a workshop on communication. Using discussion, clips from television shows, and a slide presentation, Theresa Onderko led us to explore how we communicate, the use of "I" statements, rephrasing and paraphrasing, and assessing body language. We also looked at power and power dynamics. We ended our time discussing the marks of a "successful" mediation.

~Wendy Erbaugh

ECR Spotlight

ECR offers trainings for anyone wanting to learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully, to practice advanced communication skills, to understand the dynamics of conflict, and/or to practice negotiation skills.

Mediating Interpersonal Conflict (MIC) goes beyond teaching participants how to manage their own interpersonal conflicts. It coaches them toward becoming certified **ECR** mediators. The training, offered for a nominal fee and spread out over 4 consecutive weekend days, teaches participants how to become skillful in managing and transforming conflicts in the work environment, in the community, and in the family.

Mediators-in-training learn how to help people in conflict to work out their differences and come to mutually satisfactory agreements. If you are interested in this type of training, contact Wendy at (260) 982-4621 or at info@workitout.org.



ECR Mediator and Trainer Beverly Eikenberry assists Manchester University students at a pre-pandemic **Mediating Interpersonal Conflict (MIC)** workshop.

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ECR Needs You!

Education for Conflict Resolution (ECR) is in the business of creating a more peaceful world by promoting and teaching productive conflict resolution. The impact of ECR in our community is significant: through training elementary aged children, mediating with parents or neighbors in conflict, collaborating with Manchester University's Peace Studies program, and providing community workshops.

Sources of income for ECR include local businesses, churches, clubs, organizations, and foundations. Fees for training workshops and mediation comprise another segment of our income. But, **critical funding for ECR comes from individuals -- friends and supporters who recognize the contribution of the organization to our community.** Your gift helps ensure the continuation and growth of ECR's innovative programs and services.

An envelope is enclosed for your convenience, or donate online at www.WorkItOut.org



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