



Peacebuilding Skills for Youth, Families & Communities



## TESTIMONIALS

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### **Teresa Martin, Principal Nelson Mandela High School (from the Calgary Herald)**

"These relationship skills assist our students in their personal and occupational lives, helping them to make healthy choices, build healthy relationships and prevent their involvement with legal implications. It also provides a safe place for students to deal with their problems and resolve issues between victims and offenders."

### **Brad Adams, Principal of Lord Shaughnessy High School**

The youth have built this process with so much pride – their success rate in actual mediations is over 80%, including student/teacher mediations. We see a significant reduction in confrontations in the school and even outside. Students use these skills in school, at work, on their sports teams and at home. When you hear their stories about how, for the first time, they could do something that stopped a violent situation at home, you have no doubt of the success of this program. The number of students graduating before the program was less than 10%, and significantly increased each year to over 60%.

### **Awards Night after Two Years of PEER program at Lord Shaughnessy**

Every single member of our Peer Mediation team received an award and that was an amazing representation of what the project has done. A student who was being expelled in Grade 10 received an award and a scholarship. A troubled girl who at 16 had spent over a year in lock-up, got involved in our PEER mediation team and was valedictorian of the graduating class and received an academic award. This program is really changing lives.

### **Ryan Reed, Assistant Principal of W.H. Croxford High School**

"In a perfect world every school would be staffed with a mediator who can work with staff, students and families..."

### **Tina Merali, ELL Learning Leader at Nelson Mandela High School**

Our ELL students said the sessions provided by PMAST were very informative and supportive. The sessions helped them learn skills that were new to them as they were adjusting to their new life in Canada. They feel they are able to consider multiple perspectives on issues because of the sessions provided... The students asked for more sessions in the future to follow up on what they had learned already. The facilitators were able to modify the sessions to fit everyone's level of English as appropriate.

### **Erhayat Ozcan, Assistant Principal of W.H. Croxford High School**

PMAST is instrumental in our school because it focuses on teaching high school students the skills they require to develop healthy interpersonal relationships. Through the excellent work of PMAST students are able to learn conflict resolution skills and social skills. This work encourages young people to evaluate their behaviours, challenge their belief systems, and make choices that will positively impact the school community and greater society. Furthermore, this work prevents students from escalating their behaviours and becoming a burden on our justice system. I have spoken with students who have chosen positive actions in stressful situations, and when I ask why they made the positive choice, the students have indicated they remember a conversation they have had with the PMAST Trainer.

As a result of the preventative work of PMAST, administrators are better able to focus on instructional leadership as opposed to a high number of student conflicts. This benefits our entire school community, and aids in the development of a thriving city.

### **Elizabeth Bennett, Principal of Good Shepherd School**

This 8 week workshop supported youth in understanding gender difference and their approaches to dealing with conflict and disputes. Practical skills were shared to help participants reduce bullying and tension in their social environments. The program builds respect, compassion, empathy and resiliency as life long skills.

The YES Program provided significant learning for our students.

Feedback from our students included:

- ♥ understanding the importance of relationships, understanding 'healthy vs un-healthy'
- ♥ being able to solve problems / arguments with others in an easier way;
- ♥ listening and understanding before reacting
- ♥ helped me to understand others and their situation
- ♥ finding out that I'm not alone, some people's problems were bigger than mine
- ♥ we can find solutions without making it a big deal

### **Tracy Sweetapple, Vice Principal of W. H. Croxford High School**

We truly appreciated the considerable time and effort that PMAST organizers and speakers put into the Blue Friday event. It was an incredible day for our students and staff as we set aside our

professional and student 'masks' and 'got real' with one another about respect, relationships and supporting each other socially and emotionally. An event such as this gives students and staff a shared experience that we can draw from to deepen our understanding of how to be a safe and caring community. We deeply value the work of PMAST to raise awareness about the need for healthy relationships at school, home and the community.

### Jenny's Story

For as long as I can remember I was fighting someone or something. As a teenager I did a lot of drugs and alcohol and I hardly remember my first year of high school. At 15 I was brutally assaulted by an older man and went further downhill. I became suicidal. Then in danger of being expelled, I was sent to the PEER Mediation Program in our school. It showed me a path I wanted to follow and allowed me to engage in the school in a positive way. I was a part of the bullying and now I was part of the solution. With PMAST my self-esteem and my sense of self worth improved. It gave me a path that I wanted to be a part of.

I went from showing up 5% of the time and having very low grades, to being there every day, working hard and getting grades in the 90's. It was a phenomenal journey. Then I went on to pursue formal mediation training and then social work. I helped develop and taught PMAST's No More Drama Program to girls dealing with issues that I had overcome. Getting to see the girls have their "aha moment" was an incredible experience. I now work alongside family and Community Support Services and am a strong supporter of the LGBTQ community and work with youth facing these issues and help them to deal with the reactions they receive.

I have come so far and I am so grateful for the healing it has given me and for the ability to believe in myself and make better decisions for my own beautiful daughters.

### Sam's Story

Meet Sam, a troubled and bullied 14 year old who struggled in and out of school and was considered "high risk". He had already experienced many challenges in his young life; home was abusive and unhealthy, filled with dangers and school was unsafe, filled with bullying and pain. Sam often stayed on the streets to escape both environments. He was hurt, fed up, angry and defensive, and quickly falling through the cracks.

Sam was sent to our class under duress, yet the idea of being able to deal with conflict and bullying and help others deal with their issues somehow caught his attention. He volunteered to take advanced training and became a leader of the school's PEER Mediation Team. He became so proficient at mediating that he became part of a program teaching these skills to junior high school students. Upon graduation he went on to pursue professional training in Conflict Resolution at Mount Royal University, becoming one of the youngest members to receive accreditation as a Chartered Mediator. Sam worked for PMAST for nearly a decade, teaching and sharing his story and skills with many youth and is now a highly functioning member of the work force and his community.

## Alex's Story

I was a poor Russian Immigrant who was poorly dressed and could barely speak English – an easy target for bullies. By the time I got to high school, I began fighting back and ended up getting into trouble. Becoming a PEER mediator completely changed my high school experience. I was now a leader, someone people could confide in when they had a personal/school conflict. It also allowed me to use mediation skills in my personal life. I was able to make friends more easily and resolve any conflicts by identifying the core issues and breaking down communication barriers with my peers and teachers.

The most rewarding moment was when I had a friend call me one evening, who had come out to his mother, being openly gay and they had a huge argument. He called me in tears and we spent 3 hours discussing different ways to deal with the issue. I later found out from a mutual friend that he was planning on committing suicide that night but talking to me had helped him approach the conflict with his mother differently and he felt like he had the support of his friends to help him through his tough times. I don't believe I would have been able to help him without the skills that PMAST taught me. Years later I saw him again at an expo, we hugged, talked, laughed and it made me realize that we all need to have those skills to help everyone in our life.

## And from the students...

This class was absolutely life changing..."

"I can overcome my limitations and be the best I can be..."

"It doesn't matter how old you are you can make a difference - I can do so much more..."

"The response to bullying should change, not let it get to you... you are in control..." "That doing the simplest thing can stop anger..."

"Being yourself and unique is a valuable trait..."

"I learned a lot of new information with how to deal with bullying..."

"It was really great to learn good ways to solve conflicts..."

"It was very interesting, she told stories of those who made great success. Made me think about my life..."

"It was actually fun and helped me to stop bullying someone"

"Humour is an awesome solution—the best class I ever attended"

"I am a pretty stressed out person ... now I know how to change! :)"

"I feel so much braver and I know I am not alone"

"I learned the concept of trust and how important it was to each individual..."

"I was bullied before and he helped me understand I don't have to hide from anyone" "It was a class where it changed my perspective"

"Sometimes you just have to forgive and let go"

"That we should never be afraid of being yourself"

"The speaker was the funniest most interesting person I ever met..."

"We don't need violence to stop a bully"

"The choices you make now are important... it was amazing"