

Allen Raymond, Peer Mediator and Intern

Allen Raymond, a 2009 graduate of Keene High School, was chosen nine years ago by his fourth grade teacher for training in basic mediation and conflict resolution skills. He was a natural! From that initial training, Allen went on to do peer mediation, to join with others in justifying and developing the high school anti-bullying program, to become a trainer, and more recently to serve as an intern in the Monadnock Family Services (MFS) program, "Talk it Out."

In fourth and fifth grades, Allen did his peer mediations with an advisor present. He knew he was on the right path but was slowed down in middle school because it did not have a peer mediation program. He did, however, meet Kate Kerman when he started middle school. He became fast friends with Kate, a mediator with 20 years experience, who has coordinated youth conflict resolution programs for MFS for 11 years. With Kate and others, Allen worked to focus attention on how big a problem there was in the school with conflict and bullying. "Sixth grade is a pivotal year in development for kids," noted Allen. "That is when cliques start."

At Keene High School, Allen joined the Peer Mediation Club, which met monthly. The peer mediators, trained by Kate, took on cases as requested by students, teachers, and/or guidance counselors after screening by Kate. They met with groups ranging in size from a pair of students up to a class. Kate was present at the mediation only if necessary. Allen's most satisfying case involved a student who was ostracized and criticized by two groups, each of which wanted her to side with them in a dispute. Allen, who worked with the students alone, got all the parties to the table. The target student was able to start to express her unhappiness by how she was treated; the others were able to understand how unfair it was to put her in the middle and began to deal with their conflict directly with each other. When he was asked to describe the kinds of disputes he worked on, Allen said they frequently involved tensions around girlfriends, boyfriends, and their communication problems.

In Allen's sophomore year, he and the other peer mediators participated in doing a survey of the high school students and their sense of the extent of bullying. A significant number of students reported observing bullying behaviors six or more times per day. The mediators discussed the reality that they were called in after conflicts escalated, sometimes to the point of physical violence. They and their advisors decided to include a prevention approach in their work. They took on the challenge of fundraising and grant writing and started the Safe School Ambassadors program at the high school. The emphasis is on the Ambassadors working to change the atmosphere at the school by recognizing and naming bullying behavior and using strategies such as distraction or redirection to intervene and reduce the bullying. The 30 Ambassadors last year reported doing an average of two interventions per day for the 180 school days.

Although it was hard for Allen to leave his high school mediation work behind, he is now working as an intern with Kate. He is a mediation trainer and coach; he participates in parent-youth mediations; and he serves as a member of Circles of Support and

Accountability, groups of up to four teens and adults who work with at-risk youth. And he is always on the lookout for that next fourth grade boy (or girl) who loves peacemaking and is a natural.

Charlotte Guyer January 17, 2010