Children behave according to what they see around them. In South Africa, the post apartheid legacy in combination with the media’s generation of violent stimuli means that children are exposed to one dominating method of resolving disputes – the destructive method.

The concept of “clubs” is an effective method of providing positive behaviour models for children. Membership of a club promotes a sense of security and belonging, and gives members an alternative set of accepted values and behaviours to emulate.

With this in mind, the GM South Africa Foundation and its partners created Peace Clubs as an extension of the Peer Mediation Programme.

Goals and objectives of the programme

The overall goal of the programme is to create fun-filled opportunities for the youth to blossom into peaceable beings with solid character and sound morals. Peace Clubs also aim to cultivate leadership skills in young people for the continuation of peaceful approaches to conflict resolution.

The primary objectives of the programme are to:

- Foster a culture of peace and community service.
- Encourage a well balanced lifestyle.
- Instil positive communication skills.
- Teach Peer Mediation skills.
- Encourage development and use of creative skills in peaceful dispute resolution.

Programme background

In 2011 the GM South Africa Foundation consulted with the Safe School Coordinator of the Port Elizabeth District Office. It was decided that the Peer Mediation Programme should be expanded to ensure that principles of the programme are applied systematically in schools, at home and in the community.

This led to the Peace Clubs being conceptualised and piloted in two primary schools in 2012. Since then many valuable lessons have been learned about successful implementation and content delivery.

One particular Peace Club consisted of only Grade sevens, while another included learners from Grades five to seven. It was discovered that the material was easily adapted for these diverse age groups and could be modified to suit the unique context of each school.

Both clubs consisted of about twenty to twenty-five learners who responded well to the interactive nature of the workshops. Learners consistently rose to the occasion with high energy activities such as dancing, singing, drumming or role playing.

This created a fun, safe atmosphere where valuable learning could take place and healthy relationships could be established.
Programme structure and content

The programme encompasses several focal points, namely:

- Peace Education and Rights Awareness
- Community service
- Public speaking
- Games
- Fundraising
- Creative skills

Members of the Peace Club progress through three levels, completing specific tasks and developing certain skills in the process. Each level tackles all of the above focal points, but tasks become more complex at each level.

As members complete a level, they are awarded with a badge and must commit to a Peace Oath. In this manner the learners are held accountable to themselves and each other for upholding and applying the values they have learned.

Partners and stakeholders

In this initiative the GM South African Foundation has partnered with the Port Elizabeth District Office of the Department of Education, community based organisations and participating schools.

Guidelines and support

The following resources are available to assist schools and organisations in implementing Peace Clubs:

- A detailed facilitator manual entitled Peace Clubs and Youth Development.
- Tools and props to assist facilitators with some of the more creative elements of the programme.
- Support for schools and community organisations wishing to implement Peace Clubs, including training for trainers.

Participation in the Peace Clubs helps create a sense of belonging among the children. The Club provides a safe context for children to establish a sound sense of self, to feel free to take the social risks involved in developing and using skills and talents, as well as to cultivate the seeds of a peaceable lifestyle.

In facilitating the Peace Clubs teachers are as enriched as the learners. This promotes the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between teachers and learners.

Feedback from participants and facilitators:

We have been taught that when you see other children fighting you don’t have to take sides but you must stop them.

You must first learn what caused the fight from both sides and then we were also taught how to behave well.

Peer Mediation has changed my life. I was a fighter, now I’m a fixer. I fix instead of running away.

Peer Mediation is about listening with your heart and trying to find a solution that will make both parties happy.

Once you have mastered the 5 steps of Peer Mediation it is difficult to live without it. You just use it automatically.

For further information, kindly contact the GM South Africa Foundation as follows:

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