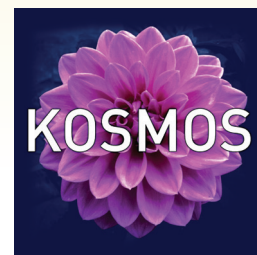


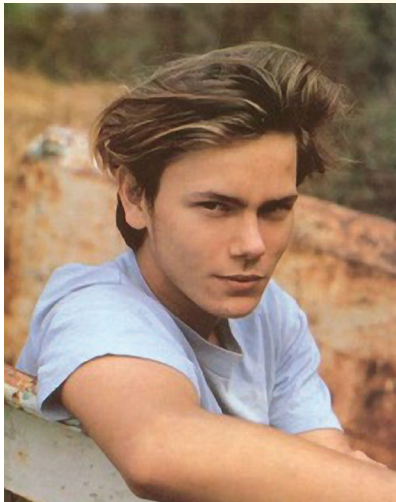
A MODEL FOR BUILDING SAFE COMMUNITIES

River Phoenix Center for
Peacebuilding Leads the Way



by Dot Maver
and Heart Phoenix

A Kosmos Associates
Special Report



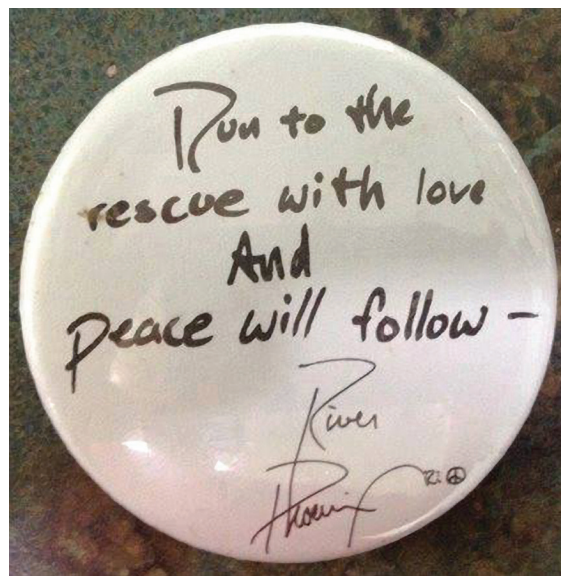
“ If I have some celebrity,
I hope I can use it to make
a difference. The true social
reward is that I can speak my
mind and share my thoughts
about the environment and
civilization itself. ”

— *River Phoenix*

When American actor River Phoenix passed away at the age of 23 in 1993, his mother Heart was moved to start a foundation in his name. River had been an enthusiastic activist throughout his early life and career, and in the wake of his death, his youthful voice continued to resonate with many of his generation and beyond. Along with a close friend, Michael Tubbs, River had created a non-profit to acquire land in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, with the aim of saving endangered species. In 2004, this land was sold to a conservancy for perpetuity and the funds received were earmarked for the new River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP).

The RPCP mission, “to enrich the lives of individuals, families and communities by providing and promoting the best practices and principles of peacebuilding and global sustainability,” was put into action through a threefold vision developed by Heart, Dot, and Jeffrey with input from the RPCP Board:

1. Developing programs and services and sharing best practices from around the country,
2. Building bridges of peace by collaborating with the existing community initiatives, and
3. Creating a translatable process model.



Since its launch RPCP has undertaken many initiatives on its home turf in Gainesville, Florida, including

- Peacebuilding Training for Public School Special Services and School Resource Officers;
- Consulting with businesses to provide conflict resolution, team building, communication skill development, and enhanced leadership for employees;
- Cooperative efforts with the University of Florida around breaking the school-to-prison pipeline and developing a Trauma Response Community (Peace4Gainesville);
- Bringing restorative justice training and practices to community groups—encouraging accountability while giving voice to those who have experienced harm and support to those who have caused harm;
- Nonviolent and compassionate communication workshops and other community peacebuilding events.

Along the way, RPCP has learned that building relationships is the key to building safe community and the whole community has to be involved.

RPCP Mission Statement

Our mission is to enrich the lives of individuals, families and communities by providing and promoting the best practices and principles of peacebuilding and global sustainability.

RPCP is dedicated to working for essential societal transformation by supporting individuals and groups in taking intentional action to create positive change, through programs, services, trainings and collaborative action.



The River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding has developed a successful process model that gives form to the common yearning for equity. The model is based on these principles: 1) we recognize that we are not our behavior; 2) we strive to make resources available; 3) we take time to navigate through restoration rather than punishment; and 4) we seek to answer the need in the moment.

In designing our program, we took a comprehensive approach to creating a process model based on shared purpose, common principles and action that reflects equality and justice for all. As you will read in this report, our partners enthusiastically attest that our collaborative model is making a difference by bringing heart and goodwill to bear on the communities where our programs are offered.

We share our model as an inspiration and affirmation that work is being done that builds safe community. We know now that a community will benefit from a group that has the intention to listen, learn what is needed, and work as solutionaries in support of one another. We also know that building relationships and shifting from a problem-solving to solutions-oriented approach makes a significant difference. We hope you enjoy this immersion into RPCP's world.

Peacekeepers have been a vital part of stabilizing communities and regions that experience violent conflict. Nations send in troops, support personnel, and non-governmental organizations to stop killings and bring some order to areas experiencing instability brought on by civil unrest, armed conflict, and insurgencies. While this strategy has saved countless lives and even protected property, it does not

resolve the problems that created those conditions in the first place. Another layer of intervention is required, one that provides strategies, resources, initiatives, and support to create the conditions and infrastructure for peace to become sustainable. This next level of support is called *peacebuilding*.

Peacebuilding encompasses a wide and comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of violence—internationally, domestically, within a local community, and even for family units. Using the peacebuilding process, stakeholder representatives express their needs and collaborate on successful strategies to address those needs. Applying this comprehensive and coordinated approach ultimately creates the necessary systems for effective change.

Enter the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding (RPCP), a non-profit organization that works toward embedding peacebuilding practices into existing systems within communities. These practices include restorative justice, police/youth dialogues, social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, communication skill building, and mediation. RPCP was founded by Heart Phoenix (current Board President) and Jeffrey Weisberg (current Executive Director). Dot Maver, current Board member and RPCP's founding Executive Director, joined Heart and Jeffrey, and these three (hereafter called Heart, Jeffrey and Dot) mapped out and implemented the organization's initial approach.

In working toward the prevention, interruption, reduction, and healing from violence in all forms, RPCP's initial approach was to identify and understand 1) the core issues within a community that



Gainesville Community Conference hosted by RPCP and P4G at UF.

affected individuals and families and 2) the challenges that were faced by local agencies working towards solutions. Hence, the first step was to meet with a variety of groups already working towards systemic change: the heads of law enforcement and the criminal justice division, school officials, business and community leaders, mental health professionals, and others.

It was through this community outreach that Heart, Jeffrey, and Dot began to see the need for an entity that focused on these peacebuilding skills with an eye to embedding them within the culture. And so, with the support of the local partners who had the power

to make changes, their comprehensive model was born.

The Center's method is simple, yet profound. "When we go into a community, we listen and learn how we can best support people in working together for a safer community," Dot says. "It's not just a strategy, it's about building relationships. We want to connect, not to convince."

Adds Heart, "As important as curricula is, more important is the ability to change hearts and minds. It's about living a new story. In its first four years, the Center has focused its efforts on what seems to have become one of



Heart Phoenix, Jeffrey Weisberg, Dot Maver.

the greatest needs of our time: creating opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building in general, but specifically among black and brown youth and law enforcement officers.

“One of our deepest desires is to disrupt the infamous school-to-prison pipeline, and instead create a pipeline of students who are understood, healthy, and resourced so they can become productive citizens.”

The Center has organized workshops, events, programs, and initiatives throughout the community, establishing

a framework for healthier relationships based on mutual respect and authentic communication.

Heart believes it is the organic nature of the practice of peacebuilding that can direct the pathway forward in communities. Most of the following programs and initiatives came to fruition because community partnerships brought a need to RPCP’s attention. The value of having a dedicated Center for Peacebuilding in communities became clear—a center that offers the resources, time, talent, and knowledge to assist in the cultural shift from punitive to restorative. Although the focus of RPCP’s work is in a local community, RPCP believes its peacebuilding model is relevant to communities the world over.

Peace Starts from the Inside Out

Central to the work of RPCP is the premise that building healthy relationships—with oneself and with others—is fundamental to the creation of a peaceful, just, safe community. This peacebuilding work must involve and engage all sectors of a community, and it has to answer a call from within. It cannot simply be a policy framework imposed from without.

To that end, RPCP has developed a continuously evolving series of opportunities designed to demonstrate what is possible when a local group's only agenda encompasses preventing and interrupting violence

while actively promoting the healing of individuals and the damaged social fabric.

The approach is solution based, in fact we call ourselves *solutionaries*. We are local, living in the community. We are not from the outside, and people know we are not going away. We knew from the very beginning, as peacebuilders, that relationship building and a collaborative solutions-oriented approach was the way to work in community. We offered everything as a gift for the first year, striving to bring people together in partnership through various events and programs. People seem to experience that RPCP only wants to add and support and cooperate, not compete. Thus the trust factor has been high since the very beginning.

Early on, the founders and the RPCP Board developed guidelines for action.



Peacebuilding Workshop at Casa Micanopy.



Communication & Self-Esteem Training with YouthBuild.

They made a commitment to a peace-building process that focuses on empathy, nonviolent communication, anger management, de-escalation of violence, listening and dialogue, social-emotional learning, and basic restorative justice principles, including the understanding that unmet needs drive behavior. Community Peacebuilding Dialogues were scheduled with various sectors of the Gainesville community.

While hosting these dialogues, we met with Gretchen Casey, Director of Victim Services at the Office of the State Attorney, who invited us to develop an eight-week course for youth on probation through

the Department of Juvenile Justice. This course, entitled “Communication and Self-Esteem,” has evolved into one of the signature offerings of RPCP. Its basic premises are twofold: 1) violence and conflict between two or more people are often the result of a breakdown in communication, and 2) healthy self-esteem is essential to healthy decision-making and behavior.

“We recognized that vital skills such as social-emotional learning, conflict resolution, peer mediation, resilience building, restorative practices, and communication are rarely taught in schools or even in the home,” says Jeffrey.

And Dot adds,

“We believe that if we can provide opportunities for youth, families, and caregivers to increase their knowledge and competence, we will see a drop in violent crimes, suspensions, arrests, and many other forms of disruptive behaviors.”

There is an ever-increasing body of research to suggest that by developing social-emotional learning, especially from an early age, not only are people happier but academic achievement increases—we see a reduction in disruptive classroom behaviors; reduced use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol; lower levels of emotional distress; and an increased ability of youth to set and achieve goals.”

The value of the Communication and Self-Esteem course was quickly recognized in Gainesville juvenile justice circles,

and RPCP was invited to train probation officers as well as to offer the class in ongoing cycles. Judges began to require certain youth on probation to take the eight-week course as an alternative way to gain community service hours. This alternative enabled them to learn life skills that improved their attitude, increased their knowledge, and changed their behavior for the better. Many probation officers now use the series as part of individual youths’ overall action plans.

At the conclusion of the eight-week program, the young participants are given an empowering opportunity to “teach back” the last class to their parents, probation officers, judges, family and friends. They demonstrate their knowledge and model their new skills. A few graduates of the program have been invited to apprentice with RPCP facilitators in a mentoring program that pays them to engage in more in-depth training and co-facilitate the course for other youth.



Youth teach back at final Communication & Self-Esteem Class

“The judge made it mandatory for me to take this class as part of my probation,” recalls participant LaQuan Boland. “At first I was going through the motions because I was ordered to do it, but the class helped me to look at my life through different eyes. The program pretty much changed my life.”



LaQuan Boland

“The Communication and Self Esteem program gives young people an opportunity to learn how to communicate better; and because of these skills they do better in schools, they do better in their community and in their interaction with probation officers and law enforcement,” says Jill Wells, former Chief of Probation in the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, Circuit 8.

To date, the Communication and Self Esteem program has served over 200 Department of Juvenile Justice youth. Of those youth who were on probation, 86 percent avoided reoffending for at least 90 days following program completion.

The Communication and Self-Esteem program is offered at detention centers, schools, and other community sites. “We are currently in talks with one of the largest women’s prisons in Florida to offer a one-year training to a team of inmates who will then teach the curriculum to the entire population of inmates,” shares Jeffrey.

In a video interview early on, Alachua County School Board Chair Eileen Roy stated, “Everyone that has the slightest bit of exposure to what RPCP is doing is completely invested in the idea. We have all been looking for new ways to help these children, and this has been almost an answer to a prayer. I see this model spreading far beyond Gainesville.”

As we met with leaders and activists in all sectors of the community, we realized there was a shared purpose that all could say yes to: *Working Together for a Safe Community*. With that in mind, we began to offer best and next practices through workshops and trainings, and developed our own curriculum and course offerings to meet the need, based on common principles:

- Building relationship as a cornerstone of community organizing.
- Collaboration and shared responsibility as a key to success.
- Developing and offering programs that honor, express and reflect our uniqueness and interconnectedness.

- Belief in the inherent goodness of humanity; given similar opportunities and resources we trust that people will reach their highest potential.
- Acknowledgement of the struggle of many to achieve, given marginalization or the circumstance into which we are born.
- Striving to relieve the struggle by offering compassion, empathy and understanding in order to translate 'everyone matters.'

May this sharing of good news inspire you!

Promoting Respect and Understanding through Police–Youth Dialogues

Looking more deeply into the social realities of life in Gainesville, RPCP recognized that, within the larger context of peacebuilding, it was essential to address the underlying factors contributing to the high rates of school truancy, unemployment, homicides, arrests, incarceration, and traumatic experiences among young people of color.

“African American youth have higher rates of arrest, secured detention, probation, confinement, and youth waived to adult criminal court,” Jeffrey says. “In our schools, youth of color are more likely to be expelled or suspended, resulting in lower graduation rates and the highest unemployment rates of any demographic.”



Gainesville Police-Youth Dialogue:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=KInLZloBGs8

“Fairness and justice are core and guiding principles for our nation, yet all too often that fairness is not equal when it comes to the disproportionate numbers of black and brown youth coming in contact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system.”

says Jeffrey. Gainesville’s Police Chief, Tony Jones, had been working on finding solutions to the increasing trend of Disproportionate Minority Contact and Racial and Ethnic Disparity in law enforcement and criminal justice.

In an effort to disrupt this trend, RPCP, in partnership with the Gainesville Police Department, developed the Police–Youth Dialogues. These dialogues bring together 12 to 15 officers and the same number of youth of color for a five-hour training. Meeting separately for the first part of the session, the officers and young people explore topics such as stereotypes and discuss among themselves key factors that explain why youth and police officers act the way they do. The officers are also educated on adolescent brain development, how childhood trauma can affect young people’s attitudes and behaviors, new ways of de-escalating conflict, and alternatives to arrest.

“We then come together to begin to dismantle the stereotypes, which often are very polarizing and can lead to escalated interactions in schools, in homes, and in communities,” says Jeffrey. “Our data show that we are having an impact on changing perceptions and attitudes that ultimately can lead to improved relationships and enhanced community policing.”

Comparison of results from pre surveys and post surveys demonstrates that a majority of officers increase their ability to effectively interact with youth, realize that they can have a positive impact on youth, recognize that they have an important role in addressing unequal treatment of minority youth, and increase their awareness that youth are assets in our community. Many youth increase their comfort with law enforcement and their perception of officers being helpful in the community and caring about youth. They also realize that many officers want to be kind and helpful and perceive less discrimination from officers.

In the one-day training that the police officers and young people are in together, some dramatic changes have occurred. “In the beginning, it can be very uncomfortable, for both the cops and the kids,” says Heart. “The police generally only see these kids when they are in trouble or when something serious is going on in their families or neighborhoods. To counter the discomfort, we start with an ‘ice-breaker’ game that gets everyone moving and laughing. And then during the session, the cops learn that these kids have dreams and goals and that keeping them out of the criminal justice system, if at all possible, is important. They learn that most of the time arrest and punishment is not a positive solution. Meanwhile, the kids learn that the cops are human beings with families, some of whom have come from troubled pasts of their own. Both groups learn that they have more in common with each other than they thought and that they can even form friendships with one another.”

One of the highlights of the dialogue session is eating dinner together, with an officer and a young person paired to interview each other over the meal. “Eating dinner together one-on-one can bring a very surprising intimacy,” Heart observes. “After dinner, when the full circle is resumed, the facilitators will ask, ‘Who had the best kid?’ and many officers will raise their hands and explain why they did. Then we ask ‘Who had the best cop?;’ and often times most of the youth, surprisingly, will speak up that they had the best officer and acknowledge something positive they learned from their short time together. We are always gratefully astounded at the connection that has been formed.”



Police-Youth Dialogue

The Gainesville law enforcement community has enthusiastically endorsed the Police-Youth Dialogues. “We look at the commitment and the passion that RPCP brings when they come to the table with their ideas and their new approach,” says Gainesville Police Department Retired Captain Will Halvosa. “Even the biggest naysayers are realizing that we just have to try this.”

Gainesville Police Chief Tony Jones is committed to having all 320 officers participate in the Police-Youth Dialogues. In 2014, Chief Jones presented RPCP with a Community Hero Award, saying:

“The men and women of the Gainesville Police Department rely on the community and community partners to help make Gainesville a safe city for everyone. The River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding is a great example of an organization that works toward this same goal with youth and community partners from all demographics and walks of life in Gainesville, Florida, and Alachua County.”



We have seen changes in community policing as the dialogues program continues within Gainesville. Our police continue to use de-escalation and conflict resolution tools with the youth, thus creating more opportunities for respect on both ends and a healthier interaction. Officers are more readily available to see that the behavior in children is a symptom of something that has happened in their lives rather than a moral failing. We are all beginning to understand the meaning of the phrase ‘unmet needs drive behavior,’ which is at the heart of Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication. This creates the much-needed shift from punishment and blame

to a deeper commitment to understanding and healing the underlying causes of the unhealthy behavior.

The process of offering these dialogues and trainings to police, deputies, youth, and the community at large has begun to help address many of the society’s costly ills—by reducing crime, engaging kids in school, keeping youth out of the criminal justice system, and helping them accomplish their goals and dreams.

At a recent citizen dialogue meeting hosted by the League of Women Voters, Captain Will Halvosa reported, “After two years of implementing sustainable



Spirit of Blue Board Members Diane Harbor and Sue Post present Safety Grant to GPD Chief Tony Jones, with Jeffrey Weisberg

policing strategies designed to reduce and eliminate Disproportionate Minority Contact, Racial and Ethnic Disparity, and the ‘School to Prison Pipeline,’ the Gainesville Police Department and its community partners are extremely proud to highlight some initial promising data. Although incidents of crime and misbehavior did not decrease, solutions to address behavior have shifted from arrests to diversions, alternatives, and broad officer discretion. Trauma awareness, mental health, and understanding adolescent behavior followed by policy changes have positively affected past traditional practice of arrest and zero tolerance. Additionally, transparency and dialogue with our youth have enhanced both officer and adolescent understanding and respect for each other. Prevention and Intervention has been embraced through our on-campus System of Care efforts. These results are community driven and reflect the collaboration and expectation of our community. In 2014 there were 615 city-wide juvenile arrests. In 2015 there were 356, a 42 percent reduction.”

RPCP has been invited to replicate the Police–Youth Dialogues through the Alachua County Sheriff’s Department, University of Florida’s Police Department, and Santa Fe College in Gainesville. When this occurs, every law enforcement officer and agency will receive training in de-escalation, conflict resolution, empathy, adolescent brain development, and the like.

Interrupting Bullying and Working toward Restorative Justice

Although the work of River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in law enforcement and criminal justice has been pivotal in raising awareness of peacebuilding in the community, the guiding force of peacebuilding has found expression in other sectors of the Gainesville community as well.



Aameena Matthews from Chicago Interrupters speaks with youth and staff at Boys and Girls Club

In 2012, RPCP hosted a screening of the documentary film *The Interrupters*, which tells the moving story of three “violence interrupters” in Chicago who, with

bravado, humility, and humor, try to protect their communities from the gang violence they themselves once employed. More than 300 Gainesville residents



Unity Day March and Rally



GPD Chief Tony Jones and Alachua County Sheriff Sadie Darnell

turned out to see the film, and it led to a new community initiative coordinated by the RPCP: a Unity Day March and Rally, with a focus on ending bullying.

“We at the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice stand with you on Unity Day,” said then Secretary Wansley Walters of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. “I commend you and your community partners for your courageous efforts to end the cycle of malicious, misguided behavior that leads to bullying.”

Gainesville Police Department Sergeant Steve Bradford comments, “In the past, a lot of kids would say nothing about bullying. They just took it. The River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding has taught them

alternatives to resolving conflict through violence or harassment. Now they know other ways to solve problems, besides hurting someone or getting hurt. And they know that they have allies in law enforcement, in RPCP, and in their peers.” The success to RPCP is that school administration, parents, and the youth themselves have risen up with a new focus on the problem of bullying.

Unity Day was such a success that in its second year we expanded to establish Conflict Resolution Week in collaboration with the University of Florida. During this time, the university’s Department of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution partnered with RPCP to provide university students with skills and resources to support nonviolence and peacebuilding. “By

the third year,” recalls Dot, “there was a banner across University Avenue, and the community was celebrating Community Peacebuilding Month!”

RPCP has begun to work more intensively with administrators at the University of Florida. The university hosts regular Restorative Justice Trainings for students and staff. Chris Loschiavo, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution, and attorney Robin Davis, Director of the Institute for Dispute Resolution at the University of Florida College of Law, are key partners in this effort.

RPCP has also developed a Peer Mediation Program that brings middle school students to the University of Florida campus to serve as conflict coaches. This work was started in collaboration with Dr. Russ Froman, former Assistant Principal of Student Life and Behavioral Support at P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School.

One of the guiding principles of mediation is empowerment of the parties. When we combine this principle with youth facilitators, we can get a powerful outcome for resolving interpersonal disputes and minor offenses that include theft, rumors, bullying, and other disruptions.

“We found that the old style of discipline—having a punitive measure attached to every discipline action—wasn’t helping,” said Dr. Froman. “The same students were coming back again and again making the same mistakes. So we realized they needed an alternative means of learning through their behavior and actions.”

Training youth to facilitate their own disputes imparts vital life skills of



PK Yonge Peer Mediators on University of Florida Campus

negotiation, listening, de-escalation, communication and reflection. These skills are transferrable to other relationships and serve youth into adulthood.

RPCP has introduced peer mediation programs in local schools. Although these programs are only as good as the adults and faculty who support them, they give youth a sense of ownership in building a school culture of cooperation, accountability, safety and empowerment.

In addition, University students often-times serve as RPCP interns and help to coordinate events and what has come to be known as “Peacebuilding 101,” the Peacebuilding Leadership Workshops. These workshops address the identified need throughout the community for increased social-emotional learning, communication skills, and a deeper understanding of the consequences of unmet needs.

*Harvard Intern
Enumale Agada
with Heart Phoenix
and Katie Fields,
Managing Director*



“We customized this workshop for various groups; offered it consistently to our staff, interns and volunteers; and made it available to the public every few months,” says Jeffrey.

“We think of the Peacebuilding 101 course as the very core of the systems change we’re looking to create. As people get to know how to relate to self, others, and the environment—in safe, nonviolent, nurturing and empathic ways—their attitudes change. Thus their behavior changes, leading to a shift in cultural norms, ultimately resulting in policy change.”

“Throughout our first four years, our vision has been consistent,” Heart continues. “We focus on bringing community members together around the shared goal of a peaceful, just society; and we demonstrate

how a community, working cooperatively, can break the cycle of violence as we work together for a safer community.”

Students to Successful Citizens: A System of Care

RPCP has been a founding member of Students to Successful Citizens, a collaborative community group that developed the Alachua County System of Care. This system of care comprises a group of multi-disciplinary agencies and organizations that offer wrap-around services to students and their families who have certain risk factors. This system of care is designed to ensure that Alachua County youth and their families receive necessary resources to be safe, healthy, educated, and work ready. Because schools constantly face issues that youth bring to the school

from home but do not have the resources to comprehensively address them, schools are the primary agency reaching out to different sectors for help in resolving behavioral problems. This system is being piloted in at least eight elementary and middle schools. “What is particularly thrilling to me,” shares Heart, “is that all of our partner agencies are bringing to bear additional resources and support for youth in the community to reach their highest potential.”

Restorative Justice Practices

Restorative Justice is a process that seeks to interrupt cycles of violence by addressing harmful actions through dialogues with all the parties who are affected by the situation. This process seeks to increase understanding of the impact one's actions have upon others and then to find ways to rebuild relationships through acts of accountability and personal responsibility. Through this process, empathy oftentimes emerges and an agreement between parties is formed. Over the past few years, the Department of Juvenile Justice has contracted with RPCP to facilitate Restorative Justice Circles with youth who have been charged with domestic battery. This program has been very successful, and the department has expanded the program for non-felony offenses. All the youth who successfully completed the Restorative Justice Program remained crime-free for at least 30 days, with 89 percent remaining crime-free for 90 days post completion. Notably, restorative practices have been written into the guidelines for Students to Successful Citizens.

The Iceberg

All too often we see only a small portion of life. Whether we are looking at people, nature, or complex issues, we tend to look only “skin deep.” Regardless of the reason, we miss a vastness to life’s richness if we do not look deeper into the lives and stories of everyday events. Consider the example of an iceberg. It has been scientifically determined that approximately 85 percent of an iceberg is below the waterline. This simple example can serve as a metaphor for human beings: what we see and attend to is only about 15 percent of the whole, while the vastness that exists “below the waterline” is the other 85 percent.



Jeffrey Weisberg facilitates Peacebuilding Training

When we look at a behavior such as violence, we can name many examples of what it looks like, including fighting, stealing, arguing, rape, war, bullying, and others. What we seldom look for or consider is what might have happened in someone's life that contributed to those behaviors. What is below the tip of the

iceberg may be loss, depression, fears and stress, poverty, abuse (physical, emotional and sexual), poor role models, low self esteem, deep resentments, neglect; and the list can go on and on.

When we are willing to look below the waterline and share with one another on that level, we bring an authenticity to life that considers the whole person. We begin to realize that we are *not* our behavior and that our effort to survive and meet our own needs is something to acknowledge and not punish. We can create a safe and vibrant community while holding each other accountable for our actions and their impact on others and while simultaneously extending compassion and a deeper understanding of what has driven the behavior.

Peace through Sports

RPCP has partnered with Aces in Motion, the Gainesville Area Community Tennis Association's youth program. Aces in Motion uses tennis (and other sports) to promote character development, academic support, and healthy lifestyle skills among people of all abilities, with a focus on underserved youth. We have been invited to deliver the social/emotional learning component of the program, which promotes physical literacy and emotional literacy, conflict resolution, respect, and communication skills. RPCP's component encourages collective efficacy, good sportsmanship and teamwork as the youth work together for a common goal. Youth who participate in team sports have been found



River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding and ACES support Peace through Sports and the campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons on the International Day of Peace



Addison Stapes and Jeffrey Weisberg with youth at Boulware Springs Charter School for Peace in Sports Tennis Program

to stay in school, have better graduation rates, be less apt to be involved with drugs and alcohol, and be less likely to enter the criminal justice system.

The University of Florida is currently evaluating this joint program of Aces in Motion and RPCP.

A Trauma Responsive Community Initiative

Searching for the root causes of violence within the Gainesville community led RPCP to the realization that deeper work and more education were needed not only

for at-risk youth, but also for the community at large. Many young people who end up in the Juvenile Justice system are experiencing the consequences of childhood trauma, which can affect children, adolescents, and young adults in various ways.

Working with Dr. Nancy Hardt of the University of Florida's College of Medicine, RPCP co-sponsored a day-long conference in 2014 attended by more than 70 professionals from such disciplines as child welfare, law enforcement, the court system, education, child protection, local government, medicine, psychiatry, and academia. "Dr. Hardt outlined the famous Adverse Childhood Experience Study (ACES) done by Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control that links

childhood maltreatment and later-life health and well-being,” recalls Dot. “Dr. Dan Goldowitz, a neuropsychobiologist from British Columbia, presented the latest scientific research on the effects of trauma on the brains of young children.”

Building on this initial event, RPCP leadership, together with the other co-sponsors, began to envision the creation of a Trauma Responsive Community Initiative in Gainesville. The design was similar to that of the Peace4Tarpon movement in Tarpon Springs, Florida, one of the nation’s first trauma-informed communities. Peace4Gainesville.org (P4G) was launched in November 2014 with a conference called “Seeds of Violence: Developing a Trauma Responsive Community.” More than 300 community professionals

participated in building the framework for P4G through presentations, panel discussions and breakouts. P4G is in the process of incorporating as an independent non-profit.

As its mission statement proclaims, “To Advocate, Coordinate and Educate to build resilience, aimed at reducing the effect of trauma on the individual, family, and community, P4G strives to increase awareness of the high prevalence of traumatic experiences found in the children and community and values and supports prevention and healing through resilience building.”

According to co-founder Teresa Drake, Director of the Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Clinic at the University of



Jeffrey Weisberg speaking at Peace4Gainesville Conference

Florida, “On their website, P4G has created a community resource map that outlines children’s services by profession and by child age-groups. A speaker’s bureau offers trauma responsive education to organizations interested in adopting resilience-building for their employees and their clientele and agencies, and entities that have developed trauma-responsive practices share their experiences monthly at community meetings.”

Peace4Gainesville and RPCP recently offered a training called “Climate Change: Creating a Trauma Sensitive Work Environment” offered by Professor Sue Green, LSCW of the University of

Buffalo, School of Social Work. The invitation was extended to the heads of various agencies and organizations to gain support for the training of their staff and volunteers. We were very fortunate to attract about 60 of the major heads of mental health organizations, homeless shelters, schools, law enforcement, domestic violence centers, etc. More speaking engagements and trainings are being scheduled.

P4G and RPCP screened the documentary *Paper Tigers* community wide. This included an emphasis on introducing findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study and building resilience



RPCP Peacebuilding Center



Camp MORE with Be More Heroic

through the school system. The focus on Trauma Response, specifically resiliency skill building, has been very well received—particularly by those who serve youth, such as schools and after-school programs. Alachua County schools and Girls Place have invited RPCP to collaborate with them on ways to embed trauma-sensitivity into their communities.

What Comes Next?

Although the work of River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding is rooted in the local community, its potential is nothing short of global.

In the spring of 2016, the first Community Peacebuilding Immersion Training will take place at a retreat center near Gainesville, Florida. The training is designed for a group of people who want to improve their peacebuilding skills and learn about the peacebuilding model and how to bring it to their communities. This two-week residential immersion will provide the knowledge, skills, and support for inspiring and implementing a center for peacebuilding within participants' home communities. The first week of training will be held May 6–14, 2016. Week Two will be offered in October 2016. The time between the two training sessions is intended to allow participants to begin developing community relationships to

support their center. Participants and their centers will receive on-going coaching and mentoring following both sessions.

A new documentary film that was co-produced in 2014 by RPCP and Be MORE Heroic will soon be released. Be MORE Heroic is an organization that inspires individuals and communities to take positive and courageous action and produces media designed to empower people of all ages to become ambassadors for social change. Based on a leadership experience for 17 young adults, the film documents the week-long camping expedition in the mountains of Big Bear, California.

During the expedition, the participants were given opportunities for adventure, deep reflection, experiential learning, leadership development and art-based workshops. Workshops were aimed at helping them find purpose; build resilience; and strengthen their emotional intelligence and their relationship, communication, and conflict resolution skills.

“In some ways, RPCP methodology harkens back to a very ancient human tribal tradition,” says Jeffrey. “Just as in the past, the whole tribe would come together to resolve an issue, what is being facilitated is an entire community—the Department of Juvenile Justice, the public schools, law enforcement, the faith communities, the business community, the university—coming together to find solutions that will lead to a balanced, healthy, whole community.”

RPCP is honored to be an early partner with the Resilience Charter School, which will be opening in the fall of 2016

in Gainesville, Florida. The mission of Resilience Charter is “to cultivate a dynamic learning community for grades 6–12 based on innovation, social justice, and environmental stewardship. We will engage students through authentic relationships and project-based learning, empowering them to think critically, persevere with grit, design creative solutions, and act with mindfulness and compassion.”

With ongoing successful programs and new initiatives such as Community Peacebuilding Immersion Training, the documentary film, and the partnership with the charter school—and by publicizing its work—the RPCP Founders and Board of Directors anticipate that their efforts in Gainesville will be used as a model for creating the conditions for many new local cultures of peace.

“I see hubs of peacebuilding scattered throughout the world,” says Jeffrey, “that will help anchor, infuse and embed within existing systems innovative approaches to creating safe, vibrant communities. To achieve sustainable peaceful communities, we need to tap the resources that already exist. After all, no one knows their own community better than the members themselves. What we want to do is to empower people to be and create the change they want to see, where they live.”





Heart Phoenix and Dot Maver

Heart Phoenix's work, service and activism has spanned over five decades as an educator, activist and champion for environmental, social justice, and animal rights and she is a founder of The Peace Alliance. Heart is founding President of the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding in honor of her son.

Dot Maver is an educator and peacebuilder whose keynote is inspiring cooperation on behalf of the common good. She serves on the board of Kosmos Associates and was founding President and is a Trustee of the National Peace Academy and was the founding Executive Director and is a Board member of the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding.

Kosmos is dedicated to Global Transformation in Harmony with all Life.



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Awards



Heart Phoenix, RPCP's Board Chair, received the Inspire Award in 2014 for her work with RPCP.



The Silk Road Club recognized RPCP in 2013 for their peacework in the Gainesville Community.

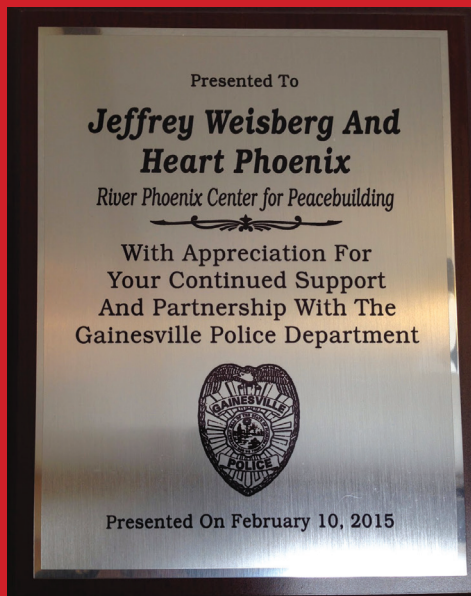


Heart Phoenix was recognized by Governor Scott and the State of Florida for her volunteerism and service with the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding. She was nominated by the Department of Juvenile Justice in recognition of RPCP's programming with at-risk youth.

Awards



2015 River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding—“for enriching the lives of individuals, families and communities by providing and promoting the best practices and principles of peacebuilding and global sustainability. Their commitment to implement practices that end bullying in our County is of special model.” Heart Phoenix, RPCP Board President received the award.



The Gainesville Police Department recognized their partnership with RPCP and the peacebuilding work of Jeffrey Weisberg and Heart Phoenix. Our continued partnership includes Police Youth Dialogues, Community Dialogues, and addressing the School to Prison Pipeline.

