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### Youth empowerment for conflict resolution

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# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*Participants were trained in conflict resolution and invited to share their everyday experiences through photos.*



## About MOPC

The Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) at UMass Boston's John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies is the state office for dispute resolution serving government agencies and citizens of Massachusetts as a neutral forum for conflict resolution and consensus building.

## Participatory Photography: Conflict Through Their Eyes

With murders up 20 percent in Boston by November 2016 compared with the previous year, the need for increased efforts at violence prevention and conflict resolution is clear. Against this backdrop, MOPC launched a 2016 “photovoice” pilot project in partnership with the Boston Centers for Youth and Families and the Community Dispute Settlement Center, funded by the Community Mediation Center Grant Program and the UMass Boston Joseph P. Healey Research Grant Program. The project has involved training at-risk youth in conflict resolution and participatory photography to document scenes from their daily lives. The photos and accompanying commentary have opened up communication and elicited group discussions among youth on the violence in their neighborhoods. Highlights from this photovoice effort appear on the following pages and show the everyday problems and pain faced by at-risk youth.





“For me, I get trapped a lot. Whether it be work, school, relationships, everyone gets trapped and everyone needs help every once in a while, and he was, at that point completely, for himself, useless and needed help. And it just took someone strong enough to open a window, for him to have his freedom back.”

—Photovoice participant



“The reason why [this] court is so amazing is because it’s [located in] two different neighborhoods that had a beef for over 35 years.... The first three or four years, [the kids] were all fighting on the court.... But by the fourth or fifth year, [it] was incredible.... So, what I saw through [this] picture was him looking at the next generation and all those positive memories of violence intervention.”

—Photovoice participant





“Back in the day it was all projects, but due to gentrification, they knocked down half of the projects and built these townhouses up. [It] looks nice. [You] can see the trees, there’s not too much trash on the ground, it’s nice houses and things like that, [but] there’s layers, and this is a story that’s not really being told as much.... The hidden story, the crime, the dangerousness of it all...This is a moment where I actually caught them just on their phones with their heads down, but soon as they got off their phones, all of them [looked] in a direction... to make sure no one comes up from behind the trashcan and starts shooting.”

—Photovoice participant



“I always look up because there’s just more going on. There’s more to see, and sometimes there’s too much going on. So [I] look up to pray. I look up to realize that everything that’s going on around me isn’t it. And in the middle of chaos, there’s always beauty somewhere.... If we did a little more listening and a little more respecting of other people, I think that things would be a lot easier. I picked this picture only because it didn’t show strife. It didn’t show struggle. It didn’t show pain. I think right now I am tired of photographing those types of things. So I would just ask people to open their eyes to life the same way they do to art.”

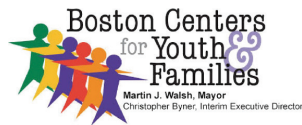
—Photovoice participant



## Our PhotoVoice Partners

### **Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF)**

BCYF is the City of Boston's largest youth and human services agency. Known under its current name since 2001, the organization has grown to manage a total of 36 facilities. BCYF works to interrupt the cycle of youth violence not only through direct peer mentoring but also by offering numerous activities that provide safe alternatives to youths who may otherwise fall through the cracks. Youths can take part in BCYF's sports, fitness, and recreation offerings; arts and education opportunities; camps; and afterschool and summer programs; among other activities.



### **Community Dispute Settlement Center (CDSC)**

Since 1979, CDSC has been working to offer an alternative forum for conflict resolution. A private, nonprofit mediation and training center, the CDSC uses teams of pro-bono mediators, training programs, and community outreach to assist members of the community in understanding and managing conflicts. Last summer, the CDSC, in collaboration with BCYF and MOPC, implemented a series of skill-building workshops to train a "dream team" of at-risk youths and street workers in conflict resolution.



## Impact on Youth Violence

The photovoice project revealed, through participatory photography, the need for and potential impact of youth-focused conflict resolution skill building in Massachusetts. By allowing youth to tell their own stories, the project has provided insight into the underlying causes of violence, showed the obstacles they face in their daily lives to avoid violence, and enabled them to express the strengths they have to transform conflicts.

Building on the success of the photovoice project, MOPC and affiliated community mediation centers are working to establish a statewide youth-focused conflict resolution skill-building program to address youth violence. The goal would be to reach young people in the inner city, schools, and rural communities before they become a "problem group."

MOPC and the centers are seeking public and private financial support for this youth violence-prevention effort in order to continue to work with our community partners like BCYF.

### **Empowering Youth to Solve Peer Disputes**

MOPC has already reached out to schools throughout the state regarding peer mediation as a strategy for de-escalating school-based conflict while training youth as mediators. As indicated by the following statistics, there is great interest among school staff in peer mediation.

#### **Peer Mediation Survey Results**

**100%**

Agree "peer mediation is a good way for students to resolve their conflicts."

– 2014 Great Falls Middle School Staff Peer Mediation Survey

**92%**

Are willing to make referrals to the peer mediation program

– 2016 Great Falls Middle School Staff Peer Mediation Survey

**82%**

Plan to make referrals to the peer mediation program in the future

– 2016 Amesbury Middle School and Innovation High School Staff Survey

## Youth in Action

*High school and middle school students are trained to use mediation skills to solve disputes among their peers.*



Community mediation centers are serving children and at-risk youth in school and community settings.



The Community Mediation Center Grant Program has been funding youth conflict resolution pilot projects since 2014.

## Our Peer Mediation Partners

*A total of \$156,000 has been provided over four years by MOPC for youth conflict resolution work in school and community settings. Increased funding will help MOPC and the centers to train more peer mediators, not only in the inner cities but also in rural areas across Massachusetts.*

### Mediation Services of North Central Massachusetts (MSI)

MSI empowers people to resolve conflicts peacefully through mutual understanding and respect. They provide mediation services and training in problem solving to the courts, schools, and communities of North Central Massachusetts.



### The Mediation & Training Collaborative (TMTC)

TMTC is a comprehensive conflict intervention and training organization that helps individuals, schools, businesses, and community organizations resolve conflict and increase communication across a broad range of disputes.



### North Shore Community Mediation Center (NSCM)

NSCM is an independent nonprofit organization that has provided alternative dispute-resolution and training services to North Shore communities since 1994. NSCM offers free, subsidized, and reasonably priced mediation services to the courts, schools, and community.







**MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE OF PUBLIC COLLABORATION**

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