



Making A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE®: ADL's Peer Training Program

To advance its mission to stop hate before it starts, the ADL New England Region's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute launched the Peer Training Program in January 1999, beginning with Boston's Mission High School. Since then, A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute has been sponsoring the program in more than 60 middle and high schools in the New England region, reaching over 50,000 students each year.

Following the riots in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, in 1991, the student-to-student program was introduced in the New York City School System to address the marked increase of bias-related violence and lack of respect for individual differences. Since then, the program has expanded to 13 U.S. cities, including Boston, and 10 European countries, impacting the lives of more than one million students.

To become peer trainers, approximately 30 students per school go through 18 hours of intensive training led by two professional facilitators from A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute. The training provides students with 1) state-of-the-art facilitation techniques that stress the importance of participation and interaction; 2) the creation of a safe environment in which the students identify, examine, and address personal and institutional prejudice and discrimination; 3) activities designed to increase awareness of the value of diversity; and 4) action planning strategies.

Each day of training is held one to two weeks apart to allow the students time to assimilate the material and to review it with the program's school-based coordinator, a member of the faculty or administration who also participates in the training. After the peer trainers have completed the 18 hours of training, they meet weekly during school with the program coordinator on developing workshop agendas and co-facilitating practice workshops. During this workshop planning process, peer trainers and the program coordinator receive ongoing on-site technical assistance from A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute.

Peer trainers then deliver from one- to six-hour workshops to groups of 15 to 30 students in their school as well as other schools. Through identity, language, cultural awareness and action planning activities, these students gain 1) an increased understanding of the causes of prejudice; 2) a fuller appreciation of racial, ethnic, cultural, and other individual differences; and 3) facilitation and conflict resolution skills to respond positively in the face of discrimination.

Student responses to the peer-led workshops have been overwhelmingly positive. Emily Murphy, a peer trainer, says that "the program makes us more aware about the words we use and how people feel. I learned to deal with the conflicts and prejudices that are present in society . . . and how to deal with them in a positive way."

Educators have also given the program tremendous support. Hingham High School Climate Committee Chair, Mary E. O'Connell, notes that "schools can either be communities or institutions . . . But it's a healthier school we're after. We'd like to bring the program directly to students."