Announcing the launch of the Community Listening Project

Our experience with the Sonoma County Survivor Project exhibit and the Essence of Acceptance school program has helped us create the Community Listening Project. This new program invites participation of people throughout the entire community. Diverse and numerous community members take part in the interview process and get out of it as much as they give. Their participation sparks community interest and transforms attitudes. This fosters understanding and incorporation of heretofore unexpressed concerns in the community’s decision making process.

With supportive leadership from Michael Kasper, Executive Director of United Way and Connie Codding, a member of our board and Director of the Codding Foundation, a Steering Committee has been created. This committee represents diverse groups and has a desire to have a real impact on the community.

The 1999 the Community Action Program study identified an unmet need in the community to give voice to members of the community who are under-served and under-heard. Target populations of the Community Listening Project are disenfranchised members of Sonoma County who will be reached through contact organizations that serve their particular population. We are identifying contact organizations by the diverse populations that they serve.

Please email or call for more information or to implement The Survivor Project programming in your community.

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The Essence of Acceptance Exhibit in Petaluma and Redwood City

This year, students from Petaluma high schools’ work included photographs and quotes and was displayed in the Petaluma Library, and work by Sequoia High School students was displayed in the Redwood City, City Hall. The exhibits serve to honor the students and interviewees who participated in the program, and to educate viewers about the need for acceptance of diversity programming in their community.

**Student Responses to Oral History Interviews from the Essence of Acceptance:**

"I used to judge people by the way they look, and the overall stereotype of their heritage and race and religion. If they looked different than me (like skin color) or they have a different religion, or speak another language, then I would judge them, and since I was brought up with racist grandparents, I would consider them lower than me. I just didn’t understand that people are different, and are similar to me in many ways. Now I am open with all people, and give people a chance. I see how people are all different, and are raised differently. Don’t judge people who are different than you by things that don’t affect you. Get to know the people and not their personal choices, especially if it won’t be a burden to you. Respect everyone in your surroundings, because you live in America, and freedom and choice and diversity is what our country is made of, and it’s a privilege to be here."

*Rayana Knutti, Sonoma Mountain High School*

"It is important to be clear about what human rights belong to each of us because when each individual is clear about what human rights they have, then they also know what rights other people have… because everybody should have the same rights and way to live as the next person."

*Rachelle Caffi, Casa Grande High School*

"He taught us to be grateful for what we have and to never give up hope… my understanding about other people has changed. I try not to think of the negative things, but the positive things. I also try not to judge people."

*Kate Medina, Sequoia High School*

"I learned to appreciate life a lot more because I didn’t experience half as much as he did and he lives life to the fullest every day… I think if anything I’m more confused about people now because how can he after been through so much be so happy yet your everyday person is so bitter? I’m lost!"

*Chrissy Morris, Sequoia High School*

"People… would benefit from [participating in oral histories] because it is a first-hand account of a major historical event. Soon that generation and story will be gone."

*Katie Medina, Sequoia High School*

"If everyone were educated on matters such as this, then it would occur less often."

*Nicoli Asher Matthies, Sequoia High School*
I've never been one who enjoyed roller coaster rides but I'm learning to accept the thrills…. Our organization is hanging on tightly to the bars as we experience the fast downward roll of the economy.

Last year we had three solid grants to help implement our Essence of Acceptance program in a number of schools. This year, the request and need from schools for the program has increased but the granting sources have become ever more difficult to secure.

The "up" is that this program is acquiring more respect and credibility throughout the Bay Area and California. Jim Leddy, Les Adler and I were in Sacramento two times over the summer meeting with members of the California Department of Education, including Curriculum Director, Sue Stickel. She immediately understood that we have created a comprehensive curriculum that fulfills the mandate of Assembly Bill 2003. The "down" is the frustration of funding.

Another "up" is our newest community program, the Community Listening Project, is soaring in terms of creating innovative methodologies for dealing with intractable community misunderstandings (see article on page 1).

What are ways to avoid these "downs"? A flat financial ride would be fine with our Board!! I learned recently that nationally 83% of non-profit funding comes from individual donors. Frankly, I was surprised! Our budget has been much too dependent upon grants. So, in the coming year, our goal is to reach out to a wider supportive audience. Your ongoing contributions are what will enable us to get off the roller coaster.

As a small donor to multiple organizations myself, I often wonder how much of my contribution actually gets to the programs I’m supporting. I can assure you, when you support The Survivor Project and its programs every penny is well spent. And you’re supporting "sweat equity" as well! So, to those of you who have been our friends, thank you very much. If you haven’t participated as a friend yet, please do. We need you!

Community Listening Project seeks to:

- Bring people together from diverse cultural backgrounds to come to know one another as neighbors.
- Create a transformational shift in attitude toward "others".
- Respectfully confront difficult community issues.
- Create a new paradigm to generate new solutions to problems.

You can participate in several ways. We’re looking for Workshop Leaders, Interviewers and Interviewees. Interviewers will attend a Workshop and learn the basics of a journalistic/oral history style interview. These will be held at cultural community sites in many locations, dates and times. Using a special recording device, the Interviewers will conduct interview with 3-5 people from 3-5 diverse groups. In addition to general questions, there will be some specific questions that everyone will be asked such as: On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the highest) how would you rate acceptance of diversity in our community? What would have to be different to get this up to a 9 or 10?

Each month 4-6 posters will be created from photographs and excerpts from statements of participating individuals. These will be displayed widely in public spaces (banks, buses, shopping areas, libraries, etc.). Statements will be in English and second language where appropriate. In addition, the photographs, recordings, and excerpts from the interviews will be used by other media such as television, radio and newspapers.
Each of our board members brings something unique to our organization. Meg's deep thoughtfulness and commitment to creating a healthy world is a gift to The Survivor Project. Meg grew up in the 1940's and 50's in a small town of about 10,000 people in southwest Ohio. Her parents divorced when she was going into eighth grade, and her mother moved a half an hour away to Yellow Springs, the most unusual town in Ohio due to the presence of Antioch College, a politically progressive college with a community unlike any other.

Historically, Yellow Springs was a unique Ohio community. It had been a stop on the Underground Railroad, so there were a lot of well established black families in town. Her class was the first class that wasn’t segregated, so there was interracial dating. Meg’s African American neighbor was the head of personnel for the biggest company in Yellow Springs. This was unheard of in most small towns in 1955.

Growing up in a progressive community completely influenced Meg’s life. In the 1960s she went to the south to help with voter registration during the time of the March on Washington. Her sense of injustice was so great she was inspired to make a life-long commitment to change. Her immediate response was to go into city planning during the era of model cities and the war on poverty. She studied at Bryn Mawr and did graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania.

Then the 60s turned into the 70s and Meg relocated to California. She worked with non-profits doing city planning and health related work. In 1975 she began practicing at the San Francisco Zen Center. She spent approximately ten years in the Zen Center community, met and married Marc Alexander, and had their daughter Jeanine.

As one of The Survivor Project’s newest board members, Lisa Hardin brings her kind nature and amazing event planning and business skills to the organization. Lisa’s family has been in Sonoma County for over 50 years. As a child growing up in Sonoma County, Lisa Hardin was inspired by the work-ethic and success of her family-run business. Her grandfather started the family business, Industrial Carting a garbage company, in the late 1940's. This first hand knowledge of working for family taught Lisa a real sense of the business world, and after graduating with a degree in Business Administration from Sacramento State, working for the family business felt like a logical next step.

The company has evolved primarily into Global Materials Recovery Service, a recycling company. Lisa is the business manager, which means she wears many hats, and is incredibly busy and committed. The business employs about 50 people, and is a seven-day a week, 14 hour-day operation for Lisa and her family. It hasn’t been easy, as small businesses have to compete with wealthy conglomerates and multi-nationals.

Lisa believes that recycling is a very important component of preserving our environment. Since our resources are limited, recycling can preserve these resources as long as possible. While California state government has mandated that cities and counties recycle, Sonoma County has valued recycling for a long period of time.

Lisa was compelled to join The Survivor Project board by its mission to promote understanding and acceptance through education, oral history, and the arts. She has always believed that schools are the most appropriate place to teach acceptance of diversity, since she has seen first hand how kids can be really misinformed. She is a very dedicated
there. When her husband decided to leave (he was then President of the Zen Center) and go to dental school at UCSF, Meg managed a residential facility for families with children who were being treated for cancer at UCSF called The Koret Family House. When Marc finished dental school, he took over a small practice in Healdsburg, where they have since lived.

Meg was recently ordained as a Buddhist minister and currently works with the Chaplaincy Services in Sonoma County. She is also does weekly volunteering at the Zen Hospice Project, a residential hospice in San Francisco.

Meg always had a deep interest in Buddhism. "The first time I sat in meditation it felt like drinking water – a very basic activity." One of the things that appeals to Meg about Buddhism is its non-exclusivity. She had grown up in a Protestant tradition, where exclusivity was always a problem for her. Americans from all religious backgrounds participate in the Zen Center Community. Meg feels it provides a neutral ground for an interfaith community, and is socially inclusive.

Meg became involved in The Survivor Project when she and Phyllis met through mutual friends. She expressed interest and support in the project, and has been incredibly generous with her time and the loan of her truck to move The Survivor Project exhibit.

For Meg, the most meaningful part of being a Board Member has been going into the classroom and observing the oral history process and its impact on students. The most dramatic experience was at Los Guilicos, where the kids were actually in detention interviewing a Holocaust survivor. She got a real sense that the idea of human rights was something profound and rather new to the students. For Meg, this demonstrates what is possible with communication and openness. And that is what The Survivor Project does.

Lisa felt a little bit different growing up as a Native American in Sonoma County. It felt very homogenous and "mainstream." She has seen many positive changes since she graduated from Analy High School in the 70's, but feels that policy will need to evolve to meet the needs of the community as the county keeps growing. Inclusion is incredibly important in the evolution of a thriving, healthy community.

As it grows, the county is becoming more and more diverse, and there are many ways Sonoma County residents can and should be encouraged by local government to participate in the community.

Lisa’s vision for the future of The Survivor Project is to see it expand to include educating elected officials about The Survivor Project and its impact on our community in order to promote government involvement and financial support.

Another of Lisa’s many priorities is to be involved in her community. She believes that it is very important to know one’s own community, and to contribute to that community. Being able to help with problems and bring possible solutions to the table is just as important as providing financial support. Lisa was a board member for the Commission on the Status of Women. She is a member of the AB939 local task force for the County of Sonoma (AB939 is a state law regarding compliance with recycling goals), a member of various Chambers of Commerce in Sonoma County, a volunteer for the American Cancer Society and a member of the American Association of University Women.

Lisa believes that it is important for people to be open minded and accepting. "If everyone would look at things in a more open minded, accepting fashion, they would be more empathetic to other people, and the community would be more inclusive."

“If everyone would look at things in a more open minded, accepting fashion, they would be more empathetic to other people, and the community would be much more inclusive.”

-Lisa Hardin
The Survivor Project’s Annual Event

Thanks to outstanding turn-out, amazing volunteers, sponsors, auction item donors, and the support of The Survivor Project community, The Survivor Project’s annual fundraiser was a great success this year!

Guests enjoyed hors d’oeuvres, wine, music and the beautiful setting of the Michel-Schlumberger Wine Estate while bidding on fabulous silent auction items ranging from spa treatments and chocolate decadent goodies to beautiful works of art by Sonoma County artists. Ernie Carpenter generously volunteered his time to lead an entertaining and successful live auction.

Guests also had the opportunity to view the Sonoma County Survivor Project Exhibit and hear stories from participants from the Essence of Acceptance program implemented at Bay Area schools this past year. Many guests were inspired by the work of The Survivor Project, and the students and interviewees who spoke on its behalf. The event served not only as a fundraiser, but also as a means to educate and create relationships with our valued community.

According to the bilingual Sonoma County newspaper La Voz (August 2003), “This yearly event at the Michel-Schlumberger Wine Estate worked to reinforce the mission [of The Survivor Project] by conveying to the community the importance of human diversity and the need to promote cultural understanding through its speakers and photo/history exhibition.”

A Special Thanks to those who made this event a Great Success!

Jacques and Barbara Schlumberger
Ernie Carpenter

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Thank you to Our Major Funders:

Codding Foundation
Community Foundation Sonoma County
PG&E
Peninsula Community Foundation
Santa Rosa Church of Religious Science
Sonoma County Office of Education (contract for a State Department of Education Tolerance Grant)

“My father was a Holocaust survivor and I want to support and contribute what I can. I work with a lot of adolescents and this program Essence of Acceptance sounds wonderful. Thank you for helping to educate our kids in a new and different way about an important subject.”

Ellen Breisacher, MFT

A Special Thank You to All Our Friends and Supporters Who Have Given So Generously from May through October 2003:

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Our Mission
The Survivor Project promotes understanding and acceptance of human diversity through education, oral history, and the arts.

Our Vision
As our communities become increasingly diverse, it is imperative that we find meaningful ways to respect and understand the rich and complex cultures among us.

Our goal is to work to eliminate prejudice and intolerance in order to promote true acceptance of others.

We achieve this by working with communities to develop oral history/arts projects with personal histories of community members who have lost human and/or civil rights.

Each project becomes a catalyst for positive change through introspection and application.

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