



SPEAK YOUR PEACE

The Marshfield Area Community Foundation is sponsoring the *Speak Your Peace* Civility Project in Marshfield. This is a volunteer based effort to raise the level of discussion in our area. Volunteers have been trained to facilitate discussions amongst groups within our community, with the aim of encouraging thoughtful, civil debate on our issues. The basic principles are simple and straightforward and involve the idea that it's often not what is said, but how it is said that initiates conflict. Our facilitators have presented the program to about twenty groups so far. Several local businesses and groups have agreed to adopt a resolution to embrace *Speak Your Peace*. Staab Construction, MACF Board and staff, The Marshfield News Herald, Sunrise Rotary, Marshfield Kiwanis, The Marshfield Student Council, and several individuals.

Those tools are: Pay Attention, Listen, Be Inclusive, Don't Gossip, Show Respect, Seek Common Ground, Repair Damaged Relationships, Use Constructive Language, and Take Responsibility.

I suspect there are skeptics who question the need and or likelihood of success of such a project. I was skeptical myself. However, I have visited and spoken to people in cities close to here who believe it is working in their communities. The Community Foundation in Duluth Superior launched this program in response to what they were seeing in their community. Duluth and Superior are adjacent cities and had been very competitive. Superior erected a billboard that said "Next to Duluth, We're Superior". They also saw a lack of political participation in their community. The same people were holding political seats and elections were going uncontested. The local political process had become nasty and uncivil— locals said it was a "blood sport". Residents were reticent to run for local elected offices, new ideas were not making their way into public discourse, and there was a lack of collaboration between the two sister cities. *Speak Your Peace* was a success in Duluth Superior. The Community Foundation demonstrated that this project has had an impact on education, political participation, and it received national recognition. In 2008 when the paper mills closed in Wisconsin Rapids many of the city council and school board meetings were erupting. The Community Foundation of South Wood County introduced these same 9 tools and this project has changed the way people communicate in Wisconsin Rapids.

MACF is sponsoring the Marshfield Public Policy Forums as a way to help our community communicate. Last week the second forum was held, focusing on public schools and privatization. The News Herald reported that "local residents are trying to find common ground- ensuring children have access to quality k-12 schools."

Coming together to talk about issues, in a civil manner, is a good thing. Wisconsin continues to be divided by current issues; Right-to-Work, school funding, funding of the DNR, gun rights, abortion and many others. As a nation we struggle with these and other issues.

So think about it. Maybe polite, civil discussion is at least partially a skill that can be taught. It might be worth a try, and it just might work. If you are interested to learn more you may visit our website

<http://marshfieldareacommunityfoundation.org/index.php?page=speak-your-peace> or give us a call.

"It's not what you say...It is how you say it."



Amber Kiggins-Leifheit is the Executive Director of the Marshfield Area Community Foundation. Her column appears monthly in the News-Herald. She can be reached at 715-384-9029 or amber@marshfieldareacommunityfoundation.org