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## Teachers learn how to help students get along, thanks to grant honoring airman

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Rose Avenue Elementary teachers spent a day as students Wednesday, learning hands-on ways to help their students work and play together better.

The training was the first phase of **PeaceBuilders**, a violence prevention program being adopted across Modesto City Schools thanks to private donations. In Rose Avenue's case, the donation was a very personal one.

Richard and Kathy Wood gave the school \$2,000 in memory of their son, Airman 1st Class Justin Wood. Justin Wood, who attended Rose Avenue and graduated from Downey High, was one of 19 Americans killed in a June 1996 terrorist attack on Khobar Towers, a U.S. military housing facility in Saudi Arabia.

"We wanted to be able to do something for the school," said Kathy Wood. She saved up to give the school a gift, and **PeaceBuilders** seemed like a good match.

After all, she said, "Justin died fighting for peace."

Richard Wood said: "Today, kids need every chance they can get. If this helps even a few of them out, it's worth it."

The Woods joined in Wednesday's training, which set teachers the task of putting the misty concept of peace into concrete action.

Actions could be as small as a "praise note" for a good deed, as meaningful as a "right that wrong" mediation or as eye-opening as realizing a bully's audience deserves blame, too, explained **PeaceBuilders** trainer Marla Conteh.

"It's easy to be a peace builder when people around you are also sending that positive message. It's more difficult, more challenging, more meaningful when they're not," Conteh said.

Kindergarten teacher Kim Mensonides said a calm and compassionate campus would benefit her young students. "It's their first experience in school, and I want it to be a positive one," she said.

For after-school program leader Christine Hiett, the peace payoff would be immediate.

"By the time we get them, the kids are a little tired of being here all day. We have tons of activities, but we still have to struggle with discipline," she said.

Hiett sees the conflict resolution skills of **PeaceBuilders** as a door to a better life for her charges, as well as a better day.

First-grade teacher Shari Webb said those skills need to spread beyond the schoolyard.

"At home, on TV shows, reality shows they watch — there's no peaceful resolution. People scream at each other to solve an argument," Webb said as murmurs of agreement filled the room.

Conteh agreed, saying the program offers parents training, too. The point is to have whole communities be on the same peaceful page.



NAN AUSTIN/naustin@modbee.com PeaceBuilders trainer Marla Conteh shows a pieces of peace poster made by teachers at Rose Avenue Elementary School in Modesto, Calif., during a training session on Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2012. - Modesto Bee - Nan Austin

What would a more peaceful Rose Avenue school look like?

Teachers volunteered that there would be more smiles, wider friendships, kinder words, cooperation, a sense of belonging.

"Sarcasm gone," declared sixth-grade teacher Lorraine Morgan.

"Lots of parent involvement," said special education aide Cassie Delgado.

"Happy kids. Kids talking together. People reading," said Principal Diane Scott with a smile.

She sees the program as the first step toward a better world. "If we can train kids to be peace builders, maybe there won't be a need for wars," Scott said.

**On the Net: [www.peacebuilders.com](http://www.peacebuilders.com).**

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