

Public Conversations Project  
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**Flint's Unheard Story**  
***Determination, dialogue shape revival***

Flint area residents are using new tools for dialogue to have difficult conversations about key issues and to find constructive ways to address the community's challenges.

In March 2005, the Ruth Mott Foundation hired nonprofit Public Conversations Project (PCP) to provide trainings to help local community groups collaborate in the revitalization of Flint. Since then, the Public Conversations Project has provided workshops to the community on three occasions, with a fourth visit planned this month.

"Our whole mission is to help make Flint a community that is vibrant, has pride in itself, and is hopeful," says Foundation Executive Director Steve Wilson, "and I think that productive public conversation is an essential part of community vitality."

Among the forty Flint residents trained are local political figures, nonprofit leaders, youths, and artists, all of whom are active in the community. Two years after the first of three trainings, alumni are applying their dialogue skills to a wide variety of settings, with conversations ranging from public art to affirmative action to school reform.

Recently, several training participants adapted the organization's dialogue practices to respond to a controversy in Flint, Michigan about "sagging"—a style popular among many young people in which pants are worn low on the hips. Young people co-designed and co-facilitated a recent dialogue, which was attended by about seventy people.

"PCP really brought the strength of having a new and productive way of shifting conversations that were previously stuck," says Wilson.

Flint has seen its share of challenges, yet committed community members find dialogue is a useful tool for collaboration. As Flint continues to grapple with many circumstances beyond its control, dialogue is creating spaces for new voices to join a conversation about Flint's future. These new conversations can bridge generations, neighborhoods, and views. Dialogues offer a glimpse of how even when they disagree on issues, people can build genuine relationships and start to envision a shared future.

"Both urban and rural cities struggling with economic challenges need to know that with the right tools they can address their conflicts—and they can do so in a way that achieves goals and also builds connection and trust among community members," said Public Conversations Project President, Cherry Muse. "Flint is not alone in its difficulties, nor in its ability to overcome them; there are many more cities for whom dialogue can transform deep and divisive struggles."

*The Public Conversations Project is a Boston-based nonprofit that uses dialogue to improve relationships and understanding among groups and individuals on opposing sides of divisive public issues. These*

*conversations usually result in diminished polarization and hostility, increased trust and respect, and can lead to collaborative action. Since 1989, the Public Conversations Project has worked in the US and around the world, providing workshops, customized trainings, consultations, and conference design, and facilitating dialogues on a wide range of contentious issues. For more information, please visit [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org).*

*The Ruth Mott Foundation is a Flint-based family foundation whose mission is to advocate, stimulate, and support community vitality. The Foundation makes grants in the areas of Arts and Culture, Beautification and Health Promotion, and operates Applewood Estate, the historic home of Charles Stewart and Ruth Rawlings Mott. For more information, please visit [www.ruthmottfoundation.org](http://www.ruthmottfoundation.org).*

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