

ACCENT

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Human problems require human solutions



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Rosa Rivas had a problem. Her partner in English class just wasn't doing her part in the group project she and Rosa were working on.

Rosa, a junior at Newport Harbor High School in Newport Beach, didn't

complain to her teacher. She didn't complain to her parents. She didn't complain to her friends.

She took the matter into her own hands.

"I could have let the issue go and not done anything," says Rosa, 16. "But I sat down with her and said, 'Let's make your schedule my schedule; let's find a time where we can all meet.'"

It worked. The project was finished, the two remained friends, and conflict was avoided.

This skill that Rosa has isn't innate. Making peace is something she learned work-

ing at her school in the Peer Mediation Program established by the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

We don't resolve conflicts, she clarifies, "We try to help students find a way to resolve the conflict."

The student mediators step in when disagreements, arguments or fistfights flare on campus. They meet with the students involved and help them find a way to work things out.

In the coming months, as the county Board of Supervisors considers whether to eliminate funding for the Orange County Human Relations Commission, Rosa will be watching and waiting. If funding is eliminated, how will other students learn the peacemaking skills she has learned?

A U.S.-born daughter of Salvadoran immigrants, Rosa says the program has changed her outlook. She's always dreamed of being an accountant but now says she would also like to work - or at least volunteer - with people.

"I feel more confidence in

myself, that I can help other people. I love helping others," says Rosa, a Costa Mesa resident and a mediator for two years. "I know the program has helped people and can help a lot more people and can make more peace, at least just a little bit."

For more than three decades, the commission has worked to build understanding among the county's diverse residents, to eliminate prejudice, intolerance and discrimination.