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## MYIC Receives Multigenerational Communication Training

By Sophie Braccini



Karen Mendonca lists possible questions teens could ask seniors Photo Sophie Braccini

with 'hi, how are you,' we go nowhere." Mendonca suggested using open-ended questions that require more than just a yes or no answer. The teens were quick to toss out suggestions such as, "What is your favorite holiday?" "What do you like best in this environment?" and "How did you celebrate Christmas when you were a child?"

"People at Moraga Royale are very sharp and they have incredible stories to share," said Mendonca, "ask them questions about themselves, their family, a favorite pet, where they come from, or their background." To practice engaging in conversations, Mendonca asked the MYIC members to pair up and role-play. "One will impersonate the visitor and their task will be to engage the other person, the second will play an elderly person, willing to participate, but a bit on the reserved side."

After a few minutes of discussion, Mendonca asked the youth for their comments. "I felt engaged," said Kelly Adachi, a senior at Campolindo who was playing an older person. "It felt a bit awkward to have someone jumping into my life story," added Kuckuk. "Listening is the issue," responded Mendonca, "do not go into the conversation with an agenda, most of the time you do not have anything else to do but listen."

The next exercise was centered on listening skills. The teens took turns being active listeners, trying not to think about anything else but what the other person was saying. Mendonca noted all the positive things students did, such as making eye contact, head nodding, leaning forward and showing facial effects such as smiling, which conveyed their interest. "We tell our own stories from the heart," said Mendonca, "by actively listening, we honor the people we listen to, and it is an incredible gift."

Daniel Granoff, Chair of MYIC and a senior at Campolindo, immediately understood that what they had heard that evening could be used in everyday life. "The training was really interesting," said Granoff, "it is easy to get people to talk just by really listening to them, looking at them, and providing feed back. I practiced it at Campo and just these small changes in my attention led to more interesting interactions." The senior noticed that this was an easy way to make people around him happier. "Active listening took more concentration than I would have thought," added Kuckuk, "it takes making an effort to actively listen to someone. At school now I definitely notice when I start drifting off and I refocus my attention; it is very useful."

This spring MYIC is planning to go back to Moraga Royal and serve meals; meaningful conversation will no doubt ensue.

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