MISSION STATEMENT

MHCR aims to bring leading reconciliation experts and scholars together to both research reconciliation practices and develop the impact of ongoing and future reconciliation processes. MHCR gives special focus to supporting and enabling grassroots communities within conflict zones, connecting them with national and international efforts. Specifically, MHCR studies and promotes insider reconciliation facilitated by locals who are able to adapt reconciliation techniques to the region’s cultural context and utilize their status as trusted members of the local community to create an environment of mutual trust and understanding. Together, we aim to lead collaborations of research and practice that will enable transformative reconciliation around the world.

WHAT WE DO

- Accompany reconciliation practitioners to help design and implement truth and reconciliation processes.
- Research reconciliation processes and practice.
- Train insider reconcilers and field-based practitioners.
- Facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration that supports ongoing reconciliation processes and process design.
- Engage with grassroots communities in reconciliation.
- Mentor students to become the next leading scholars and practitioners in reconciliation.

HONORING MARY HOCH

The Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation works to honor the legacy of Mary Hoch, who embodied peacebuilding and reconciliation throughout all aspects of her life. All of Mary’s children—Julia, Ross, and Bill—speak to their mother’s innate ability to reach out to others even when it wasn’t easy, offer support, and identify common ground. Julia even remembers the powerful conversations her mother would host at their home over a meal between people of varied faith traditions so they could connect, even over strong differences about the ‘hard questions of faith’. With this powerful spirit, Mary’s husband, James Hoch, founded MHCR in her honor to further her ambition for reconciliation on a wide, global scale.

You can learn more about Mary Hoch and the founding of MHCR at mhcr.gmu.edu

“IT has been wonderful to watch the team at MHCR grow and develop new ideas and new ways of reaching peacemakers and reconcilers, developing real usable knowledge in an area that is difficult to capture the knowledge of practitioners so they can support each other and learn from each other. I am personally thankful for the work the students and faculty are doing, and Mary would be so proud of this too”

- James Hoch
Vice-Chair, MHCR Advisory Board

Mary Hoch, our Center’s namesake
DIRECTOR'S LETTER

NEW THEORY OF INSIDER RECONCILERS HELPS TO REFOCUS PEACE PROCESSES

In the field of conflict resolution and peace mediation, the focus has been given to the third-party mediation and mediator that has stood in between parties to help resolve conflicts. While international peace prizes and attention have underscored this attraction, those living amidst the conflicts have often been forgotten.

Amidst current global tensions, most of the current peace processes are stuck or ineffective. This does not mean that people suffering from the conflicts aren’t continuously seeking ways to end the violence and rebuild relationships. Unfortunately, most international financial support for peace efforts does not recognize or reach these local actors. Funding instruments are often so complicated and administratively demanding that local actors and organizations can’t access them, adding to the paralysis of peace processes.

The Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation (MHCR) has already spearheaded research on Insider Reconcilers for a couple of years, aiming to shift attention from third-party mediators to parties within conflict. We recognize that the best knowledge of how to resolve conflicts is within the conflicting actors and communities themselves, and ownership of the process and resolutions need to remain within these communities to make peace sustainable. Within these communities, actors seek to divert efforts from violence to ceasing aggression and reestablishing relationships. However, these actors are often vulnerable and subject to persecution within their own groups.

MHCR wants to contribute to this research baseline for improved theory on Insider Reconcilers building on John Paul Lederach’s concept of Insider Mediators and Insider Partials. The particular focus of the research also includes the resilience and wellbeing of these Insider Reconcilers. Associate Director Nicholas Sherwood has been working on his dissertation on this topic, and MHCR will launch a training course at Carter School on the subject during 2023 as well.

In 2022, MHCR became a student-centered and led academic center, enabling Carter School students to work directly with the world’s leading peacebuilders and reconcilers, contributing to improving this field through their research and practice. It has also been beneficial for these students to collaborate with the newly founded, Think Peace Learning and Support Hub, established to provide operational support for ongoing truth and reconciliation processes. In a relatively short time, MHCR has been shaping the field of reconciliation and peacebuilding, and I owe much gratitude to our wonderful and dedicated students and the Carter School for offering such an agile platform.

Thank you to all our supporters and partners!

Antti Pentikäinen
Director, Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation
Research Professor, Carter School

A STUDENT-LED CENTER

Since transitioning into a partnering role with the Mary Hoch Foundation and Think Peace Learning and Support Hub, MHCR has become overwhelmingly student-led and organized, operating under the mentorship and support of our Director, Antti Pentikäinen. From undergraduate students to doctoral students, the Center is driven by individuals who are interested in making the world better. Our team of part-time students has been given the opportunity to lead impactful initiatives supporting reconcilers both domestically and abroad. The team accomplished an incredible amount in the last year, including several individualized research projects, several hands-on opportunities for practice, and the direct support of international peacebuilding workshops.

Because of this organizational structure, the MHCR staff experience is unique in a multitude of ways. To start, MHCR is an operational NGO, even on a smaller scale. This allows students to experience working in the career field. This experience allows not only the application of the coursework to their roles but also the application of practical lessons to their studies. This structure also gives students greater independence and responsibilities as the research being done is necessary for the peacebuilding field, all while operating as an egalitarian workplace.

MHCR is purposeful in catering the experiences to the individual based on their future professional goals. This is incorporated not only in job titles mirroring work at larger organizations but also in a refined mentorship model with strength-based leadership. With all of this in mind, MHCR is a place where professional development is emphasized. Employees have many opportunities to build meaningful relationships with other peacebuilders and scholars who are also passionate about the work, building meaningful relationships. There are countless opportunities for early-career scholars and peacebuilders to hone their skills, making MHCR alumni stand out when they move into the next stage of their careers.

Permanently remote work has also allowed employees to travel to conduct fieldwork and contribute to ongoing research. Our team operates out of several places in the United States and abroad. Despite the obvious challenges of a global team, MHCR has remained a cohesive and supportive team.

The success of all these aspects of MHCR are the benefit of a work culture that protects and nourishes the well-being of its employees. By incorporating individual and team check-ins periodically and prioritizing mental health, our team is working in our organization and then beyond to cultivate sustainable peacebuilding work to create a standard of health for peacebuilders and scholars.

The staff of students at MHCR is passionate about peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes, and is committed to supporting others doing this work both domestically and internationally. The unique professional and personal development initiatives at the center have allowed our students to pursue their own interests through individual research projects, and connections with peacebuilders doing work they are pursuing in their studies. This year, our undergraduate students pursued research projects they designed and executed. Three of our students worked while studying abroad, connecting their studies abroad to the work they do at the center, and our Ph.D. candidates receive support and the opportunity to connect their interests to the work of the center.

At MHCR, we are extremely proud of the environment we have created to allow students to excel and explore their own interests as young scholars and practitioners. We believe their experiences at MHCR can be instrumental in their transition to the field.
A NEW PHASE IN THE JOURNEY: INTRODUCING THE MARY HOCH FOUNDATION AND THINK PEACE LEARNING AND SUPPORT HUB

In the autumn of 2021, the Mary Hoch Foundation (MHF) and Think Peace Learning and Support Hub were created to expand the scope and impact of the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation (MHC). As non-academic affiliated partner organizations, they have an increased capacity to support ongoing reconciliation initiatives, both in the United States and abroad, and meet current needs for healing and transformation. MHF serves as a leader of these three entities and supports both the Think Peace Hub and MHC in their complementary workflows.

Building upon MHC Research Affiliate Colette Rausch's Think Peace Podcast (examining the role of brain science in peacemaking), the Think Peace Learning and Support Hub will be convening a global community of practice in partnership with Humanity United. This community of practice will focus on the integration of neuroscience and peacemaking knowledge with practice. “We have seen longings for truth amidst polarization and division. The Think Peace Hub is launched to help to plan these processes and share learning with others,” says Antti Pentikäinen, one of the Conveners of Think Peace and Director of the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation.

Two regional learning hubs—one gathered by David Ragland in the United States and the other in the Horn of Africa by Tetsa Namachaja Wanjala—will come from the basis of expanding community of practice. These two initial hubs will gather local practitioners to share experiences, learn from each other, and access needed resources to improve their work. These hubs aim to provide the best possible assistance for truth-telling and healing, benefiting from previous experiences and recent scientific discoveries, such as neuroscience and peacebuilding. With over two decades of experience supporting local truth commissions, Eduardo Gonzalez emphasized how "we believe that continuous learning from other experiences is necessary and helpful to ensure that truth-telling and healing efforts achieve anticipated impact.” These hubs offer crucial opportunities for peer learning to maximize the positive impact of truth and reconciliation initiatives.

The desire and need for such hubs have been articulated by those leading or planning commissions. For instance, the Vice Chair of the Iowa City Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amel Ali stated, “It is very important to us to be reaching out to other groups who are already doing the work. Having a community that trusts, loves, and celebrates is what I imagine.” This community of practice is a core component of Think Peace’s workstream, specifically through the US Truth and Reconciliation Hub, alongside the International Reconciliation, Peacebuilding, and Truth Telling Hub, and a Transitional Justice Course.

These initiatives continue alongside the existing work of the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation, which supports insider reconcilers, conducting reconciliation research, and working to disseminate information to advance reconciliation practice. Partnering these organizations offers a unique opportunity to champion reflexive practice through insights gleaned through research, consultations with practitioners, and new scholarship. MHCRC Associate Director and Carter School Ph.D. Candidate Nick Sherwood says of this partnership:

“By bridging MHC, MHF, and Think Peace, students at George Mason and the Carter School will be able to interface with global leaders of reconciliation practice. This means MHCRC’s ongoing research projects will gain an additional theoretical and practical edge. MHCRC and our staff will double down on creating knowledge related to reconciliation, peacebuilding, and the psychological components of such, then this knowledge will inform MHC’s work, and their work will bolster our research. I’m really excited for this new phase of MHC, and our staff is already looking forward to the synergies that will come from this partnership.”

While now separate entities, the value of student involvement and growth is still prioritized in these new structures outside of an academic environment. James Hoch, Chairman of the Mary Hoch Foundation, views the Think Peace Hub as a natural next step after helping to launch the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation.

“The research is compelling on how effective truth and healing processes can become when you help actors to learn from each other and see how integrating brain and behavior science increases impact. Mary Hoch Foundation wanted to make sure operational work can grow organically outside academia while continuing to benefit from the research at MHCRC and involve students.”

Reflecting on the relationship between Think Peace and MHCRC, Antti Pentikäinen, shared, “Think Peace is being built based on the research and bold outreach that MHCRC did to support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and healing in the United States. We hope the hub can continue to expand and sustain that work which includes support for local truth commissions in the U.S. and internationally. It would be ideal that MHCRC, its research and GMU student involvement, would remain an integral part of these efforts.”

Thus some of the ways this collaboration has been realized is through the integration of MHCRC’s Insider Reconciler Fellows into the global community of practice, student research support contributing to the mapping of truth initiatives around the US, and two GMU students—Jena Kitchen and Cameron Cassar—directly hired to become part of the Think Peace team. This unique collaboration is one of the many things that makes the Mary Hoch Foundation special and uniquely equipped to sustain support for ongoing work.

Moving forward, the Mary Hoch Foundation, Think Peace Learning and Support Hub, and the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation have the capacity to cultivate strong peer-support networks amongst peacebuilders and change-makers, provide tailored support to reconciliation initiatives, offer opportunities for the growth and mentorship of new peacebuilders, and innovate peacebuilding practice through critical research.

A NEW PHASE IN THE JOURNEY:

MARY HOCH CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION | 2022
GLOBAL PRACTICE

THE HORN OF AFRICA

HDI SUPPORTING INSIDER RECONCILERS

THE CUTTING EDGE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND PEACEBUILDING

UNITED STATES

MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHOPS WITH THE PARACHUTE PEOPLE

MYANMAR

PEACE CERTIFICATION CLASSES

FINLAND

FIELDWORK IN WITH SAMI

HELSINKI DEACONESS INSTITUTE SUPPORTS MHCR’S WORK WITH INSIDER RECONCILERS

Beginning in 2020, MHCR has contributed to two major practice and research grants, supported by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (similar to the US State Department). These grant projects focused in the Horn of Africa working “to advance the state of reconciliation by enhancing the effectiveness of multi-track, inclusive and locally led reconciliation efforts.” Other implementation partners include the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Ministry (FELM), the Al Amana Centre, Inclusive Peace, Shalom Centre for Counseling and Development, and Mandaeeq Mental Health Across Borders. MHCR’s portion of these projects sought to bolster awareness of reconciliation within the international community, particularly in the Horn of Africa, interview insider reconcilers conducting this work in their own communities, and provide policy recommendations to support insiders at the organizational and institutional levels. In doing so, three key achievements included: (1) hosting peer-exchanges and tailored support to local peacebuilders, (2) collecting lessons learned and sharing insights, and (3) contributing to a virtual learning platform on reconciliation.

First, MHCR hosted peer exchange workshops with practitioners to offer spaces for collective learning and peer-support across conflict contexts. For example, Nicholas Sherwood and Colette Rausch hosted “Finding Peace Among Peacebuilders” in June 2021 to discuss the wellbeing of peacebuilding practitioners in their work. Another key peer-exchange was “The Nexus of Dialogue, Reconciliation & Psychosocial Support in the Horn of Africa” held in November 2021 in conjunction with other #Reconciliation partners and the US Institute of Peace; this event allowed for sharing lessons learned and identifying common needs and opportunities for collaboration. Additionally, Antti Pentikäinen led accompaniment support for several insider reconcilers in the Horn, including MHCR’s Insider Reconciler Fellows: Betty Bigombe, Rowda Olad, and Tecla Namachanja Wanja. This assistance included financial support where possible, connecting individuals with networks and resources, and 1:1 meetings helping with conflict assessment, civil society capacity building, and other consultation. Ms. Bigombe’s current work focuses on supporting the South Sudanese reconciliation process as well as continued peace efforts in Uganda. Ms. Olad is leading women’s advocacy groups and engaging with political actors to help navigate the Somali political crisis in addition to leading Maandeeq Mental Health, an organization dedicated to providing tailored mental health and psychosocial services, training.
and awareness within Somalia. Dr. Namanchana Wanjala leads the Shalom Centre for Counselling and Development which works to create spaces for healing, reconciliation, and transformation, as well as foster sustainable livelihoods. She has led social healing efforts in Kenya and advocated for peace throughout times of political turmoil within the country. In November 2021, MHCPR hosted Dr. Namanchana Wanjala in both Washington D.C. and New York to create awareness of her work and listen to lessons learned.

Contributing to the aim of collecting insights and sharing lessons and best practices, MHCPR has continued the insider reconciliation project to interview insider reconcilers and learn from their experiences. MHCPR has also hosted meetings of leading reconciliation and peacebuilding experts to discuss insider reconciliation approaches and develop improved support mechanisms. Using insights from both of these efforts, MHCPR staff members are developing a policy brief on insider reconciliation to highlight their important work, identify new and improve existing avenues for support, and uplift insider reconcilers within the peacebuilding community.

Furthermore, MHCPR has been collaborating with Inclusive Peace to co-create materials and a comprehensive of these learning's to share more widely through a virtual learning hub website open to scholars, practitioners, students, and the general public. Potential materials for this website include profiles on insider reconcilers' understanding and experiences of reconciliation within their unique contexts. While the grant period has finished, MHCPR is continuing to work on the development of this online platform and completion of other deliverables.

Considering the success of this project and the need for this work, MHCPR is now working to support Think Peace Learning and Support Hub with their Peace and Trust in Communities grant which partners with insider reconcilers in the Horn of Africa to cultivate the creation of a peer network and offer capacity building to empower their work in reconciliation, mental health, and psychosocial support throughout the region. Specifically the MHCPR side, this grant program is supporting the continuation of the Insider Reconcilers’ study so that the Transformation and Reconciliation Lab team can continue to interview participants, analyze data, and disseminate findings in both research and practitioner communities. MHCPR is also collaborating with other implementing partners, like Maandeep Mental Health and Dr. Namanchana Wanjala, to host regional gatherings in the Horn of Africa on comparative reconciliation experiences and mental health and psychosocial support. Nicholas Sherwood is also helping Ms. Olad with her research on the impacts of trauma on Somali security forces and her development of a contextualized mental health guidebook for the region. Several of these initiatives culminated in the Co-Creation Workshop on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Peacebuilding, held in Kenya at the beginning of November 2022. MHCPR’s Associate Director, Nicholas Sherwood, and Program Officer, Hannah Adamson, attended this event to learn more about the nuances of working in the region, connect with leading practitioners, and support network building and the development of country-action plans. It was evident that this event convened key actors to create opportunities for peer-learning and peer-support as practitioners shared their efforts and coordinated their efforts to maximize positive impact throughout the region. As the first in-person gathering for many of the team members and practitioners involved, this event provided a powerful space for connection and is surely only the beginning of collaboration.

Ultimately the #Reconciliation project opened opportunities for dedicated support of insider reconcilers and wellbeing support mechanisms which is now being continued through the Think Peace “Peace and Trust” program. This work will continue to 2025, and beyond, through this new project as MHCPR champions insider reconciliation as a key to sustainable and effective conflict transformation.
THE CUTTING EDGE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND PEACEBUILDING:
A SHORT LESSON ON INNOVATION

For two weeks, I conducted fieldwork in Nairobi and Diani Beach, Kenya, as part of MHCRI’s ongoing grant projects with the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A group of us (including MHCRI Director Antti Pentikäinen and Programs Officer Hannah Adamson) met with colleagues and collaborators also on these grants to plan and implement a three-day Co-Creation Workshop on Integrating Mental Health/Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding throughout the Horn of Africa. This was also an opportunity to deepen my dissertation research through participant observation and through interviews (more on my dissertation research later). Below are some of my reflections from the trip, as both a researcher and practitioner whose work spans global mental health and the psychology of peacebuilding practitioners.

Leaving my home of Athens, Georgia, for this trip, I had a full suitcase, charged laptop, and exactly zero (0) expectations of how this would all play out. My previous fieldwork experiences were fairly limited (though I know I’ve meant to be a fieldwork kind of guy). Under Antti’s supervision, I facilitated trauma healing and resilient-building workshops in Muscat, Oman a few years ago. I also did similar working and hosted mental health panels at Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival with my nonprofit. What I love most about the field is the constant, low-grade (sometimes high-grade!) excitement. In one of my psychology courses, I tested off the charts for having a “sensation seeking personality”, and I believe international fieldwork to be one of the healthiest and most productive contexts for this personality syndrome. In short, I love being fast-paced, unpredictable, and fairly chaotic work environments. I love having your wits, and sometimes your wits alone, to navigate complex and nuanced situations. Add another layer of language differences and the pressing need for cultural competency, and I am in a professional heaven of sorts.

Of course, like all fieldwork experiences, “the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry” (thank you, Robert Burns), and so did the Kenya adventure. Upon landing in Nairobi, making it to my Airbnb, and getting up for work the next day, I showed up to our office (a wonderful cafe called ‘Kesh Kesh’, owned by one of my peace partners and her husband) and was informed many of the logistics required to transport approximately 40 peacebuilders to our workshop... simply had not happened. The workshop was to begin in four days, and folks did not have plane tickets, itineraries, or lodging arrangements figured out. And so - we worked. Up at 6 in the morning, at the cafe at 9, worked through the day till the cafe closed, then went to other bars or restaurants where we could hop on the wifi. Yes, this was quite stressful, and we had some bumps in the road trying to pull together all the moving pieces. And also, I was having the time of my life.

Through sheer grit and perhaps divine intervention, we managed to get our participants safely to Diani Beach for the Co-Creation Workshop. On Day 1 of the conference, I will admit, I was nervous! Here are 40+ so peacebuilders from around the world (mostly the Horn of Africa) who lived and breathed conflict zones. I was rubbing shoulders with participants who had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, who led national-level reconciliation commissions, who had saved the lives of hundreds perhaps thousands of civilians. And here Nick was, with his little notebook and tropical shirt, trying not to fanboy too hard over my newfound colleagues and friends...

STORY BY: NICHOLAS R. SHERWOOD

Over the next three days, we talked, danced, sang, debated, cried, and healed. The central task for all of us was to figure out how individual mental health promotion can and should fit into collective peacebuilding and reconciliation frameworks - using what was happening in the Horn of Africa as a case study. My contribution was through the mental health, evidence-based scholarship that I had been collecting and analyzing since I was 18 years old (and no, I’m not going to tell you how old I am now!). Other participants were therapists, social workers, researchers, governmental officials, intelligence officers - a true motley crew. This configuration of participants, I think, was a key predictor of our success (and I would say without missing a beat that the Co-Creation Workshop was a roaring success).

What do I mean by this? Well, most academic conferences boast the same “featured players” every year, giving their talks on their research projects to other academics who then publish their journal articles and books and... and what? These are mostly rooms full of PhDs who had been professors for most of their post-grad lives. Some of the ‘regular’ conference attendees are fabulous people, of course. They may have been practitioners in the past or are deeply connected to practice. The good ones ensure their research makes it to the general public and doesn’t stay sequestered in the ivory tower. Our Workshop, in short, did not have that problem. Participants were deeply, personally, and profoundly connected to the mental health dynamics within their communities. Participants had a vested interest in these outcomes, and they, their families, and their communities had no shield against the weight of violence. For some participants, figuring out the mental health question was a question of life, and contentment, and death, and suffering.

How can peacebuilders bring greater attention to mental health during their work? How can large-scale peacebuilding institutions, like the United Nations and other international governing bodies, better integrate the cutting edge of mental health practice into inclusive peace processes, international development, and humanitarian aid? What role does mental health promotion play in keeping communities happy, healthy, safe and sustainable? These questions haunted our discussions, and I feel extremely energized to see how the topics we discuss can make their way...
into scholarly research, policy decisions, and the peacebuilding ethos as a whole.

I believe there are moments in our lives (well, many of our lives) where we lie at the true core of innovation. Companies like Apple, Google, and Amazon try to understand what innovation is, how to bottle it up, and use the formula to shape products and larger markets. "Innovation" can often feel like a buzzword. Then you walk into rooms like the one we were in throughout the Co-Creation Workshop, and you can feel innovation sitting there with you. I felt then, just as I feel now, that the people brought together in Kenya acted (not all the time, but most of the time) as a symbiotic whole trying to move the needle on terraforming the peacebuilding field. The new landscape we co-imagined was one where peacebuilders were cared for. Where social healing was centered in all discussions of reducing, managing, and preventing violent conflict. For three days, we were the cutting edge of the field.

Now, a few months later, I feel a tremendous sense of gratitude to be able to participate in those conversations and to have had a fieldwork opportunity that will deeply shape my doctoral dissertation and PhD experience writ large. I end this reflection with a word of advice: Chase the experiences that make you uncomfortable. Get into rooms where you feel humbled and in awe of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and histories of the other people in the room. Perhaps, with a little bit of luck and a lot of resilience, your gifts and commitments will bring you into the space of innovation. While you’re there, take it all in. Breathe deeply, roll up your sleeves, and get to work.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR NICK SHERWOOD CONDUCTS MENTAL HEALTH FIELDWORK AT BONNAROO MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL 2022 WITH THE PARACHUTE PEOPLE

In addition to serving as MHCR’s Associate Director, I also sit on the Board of Directors of The Parachute People, a US-based NGO seeking to create community through play to empower personal wellbeing. The seeds of our work began in the summer of 2014 when one of our founders, Ron Holgado, a nurse based in Columbus, Ohio, brought a gym class-inspired parachute (then called ‘Roohute’) to Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival (located in Manchester, Tennessee, every summer). Ron’s original goal was to create a large-scale, inclusive, and nostalgic activity for Bonnarooians. (If you’ve ever been to a music festival or something similar, you know exactly what I’m talking about!) In the years since, more and more folks in the Columbus region and at local, national, and international festivals and live music events have gravitated to our parachutes.

The Board frequently jokes that we accidentally ‘inspired a movement’; folks around the world recognized our parachutes and activations, and for a couple of years, we weren’t quite sure what to do with this attention community buy-in. Eventually, in the year leading up to the COVID pandemic, our Board of Directors was formally convened. We began explicitly infusing our presence at festivals with a commitment to community-building, mental health promotion, and play. During 2020, right after the pandemic hit, we submitted the necessary paperwork to become a federally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit. That’s when ‘the work’ really began.

While finishing my MA in Anthropology of Peace and Human Rights at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, I funneled my research into grassroots (i.e., anthropological) approaches to resilience-building, conflict resolution, and mental health promotion across cultures. That summer of 2019, right before I matriculated into the Carter School’s Ph.D. program, I was able to facilitate my first mental health workshops with The Parachute People: first at a community gathering in Nashville, TN, then again at Bonnaroo. These were formative experiences for my peacebuilding practice: I realized that I have a deep love for being ‘in the field’ and facilitating large-group workshops to translate the knowledge I’ve learned in the classroom and from the academic literature into tangible skill development for local communities. I realized then that my calling was, indeed, to be a scholar-practitioner, bringing the knife’s edge of scholarly research to support communities enduring distress and conflict.

STORY BY: NICHOLAS R. SHERWOOD

Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation | 2022

Pics taken at the 2022 Co-Creation Workshop, continued From Top to Bottom
1: James Aguero Garsang presenting his art, Jama Igal admiring
2: Dr. Tecla Namachanja Wanjala leading a session
3: A group of participants laughing around a table during a break
4: Charles Cleiner speaking in a session
Left: A session being held outside at the beach resort

The Parachute People holding a session with their namesake, a play parachute, credit to The Parachute People Instagram
Fast forward three years to the summer of 2022. The Parachute People has grown from a motley crew of music fans and health-related professionals into an NGO. We were commissioned by music festivals and live music events to bring our work to their fields and stages, and our work was recognized by journalists and other culture writers/critics. I had a team of facilitators, whom I had trained and mentored since 2019. And we were asked by Bonnaroo to conduct three workshops and one panel – onstage at Bonnaroo. The workshops we facilitated focused on building community resilience during COVID, interpersonal conflict resolution, and mobilizing sources of strength in our lives to build holistic wellbeing. Our panel, featuring musicians and music industry professionals from The Brook and the Bluff and COIN, centered on mental health in the music industry during COVID. According to our final evaluation, The Parachute People’s activities at Bonnaroo reached over 5,000 people (a high percentage considering this year’s attendance of about 40,000 attendees).

A crucial lesson I learned at MHCR and the Carter School is to enact change in our own communities. Peacebuilding, at its best, starts at home. I’ve been going to Bonnaroo since 2013...and I would guess hundreds of concerts since then. My fellow Board Members and I looked around our community. We saw the need for promoting mental health, reducing the stigma against mental illness, and learning practical skills to care for ourselves and our loved ones during challenging times. We have forged friendships and collaborations across the US and discovered our unrelenting commitment to global mental health promotion. Finally, what I am most proud of in our work is finding the courage to experiment (as any good scientist should) with innovative practices to accomplish our organization’s mission.

Since beginning at the Carter School, I have been pleased to see mental health and wellbeing becoming increasingly integrated into peace and conflict studies. Courses such as “Wellbeing and Peacebuilding” (which I was grateful to be able to serve as TA a couple of years back) are being offered to students; Dr. Rothbart’s Transforming the Mind Lab and MHCR’s Psychosocial Support programs are examining research-informed-practice at this intersection as well. In the coming years, I dream every peacebuilding training program, such as the Carter School, will offer their students advanced training in caring for ourselves and our loved ones as we assume the mantle of waging peace. The Parachute People, with our (frankly) eccentric practices, offered me the opportunity to take this commitment into the field. I look forward to co-creating new frontiers in peacebuilding practice with a commitment to mental health and wellbeing at the Carter School and beyond.

Since 2021 MHCR has been collaborating with a leading non-governmental organization in Myanmar to support a peacebuilding and leadership skills development initiative to empower youth in Rakhine state and other regions in Myanmar. This unique peace education certificate program provides youth with a rare opportunity to learn together, to share their stories with each other and to develop requisite skills that will help them to build a future that they envision for a more peaceful and democratic Myanmar. This initiative is co-led and monitored by MHCR affiliate Angelina Mendes. As part of this peace education program students participate in collaborative trainings led by guest lecturers from within and beyond Myanmar who are leading experts in their professional fields. Students receive instruction and training on peacebuilding topics such as mediation, social cohesion, reconciliation, intercultural competence, gender inclusive peacebuilding, trauma awareness and resilience, negotiation, conflict analysis, transitional justice, leadership, and the rule of law. MHCR, as part of the Carter School and George Mason University serves as the official certifying body for this initiative.

This education program is based on a participatory approach fostering leadership, inclusion, diversity, and civic action towards a democratic and inclusive Myanmar. Youth participants in the program are representative of different ethnic, religious, class, gender, regional, and cultural backgrounds. Many participants in the program have been instrumental in their local communities, geographic regions and more broadly during the recent global pandemic and Myanmar’s transition period in promoting efforts towards building more cohesive, safe and democratic communities. As of June 2022, the first training session was completed with twenty-nine graduates. The second training session is currently ongoing and will continue into the end of 2022, and a third session is planned for 2023. Each session aims to provide training for approximately thirty participants with the objective of training a total of approximately ninety youth over the course of the peacebuilding education program.

This program helps young people who do not have access to university level education and/or who have been denied access to university education to participate in a peacebuilding training program that is comprehensively developed and tailored for the Myanmar context. It also aims to enhance the role of youth especially from vulnerable communities in promoting peace and social harmony in Rakhine state and other conflict-affected areas in Myanmar and it supports young people towards building a consolidated network of local and insider peace builders in Myanmar. A key objective of this program is to empower youth in Myanmar so that upon successful completion they will have requisite training and qualification to better prepare them for future job opportunities both in Myanmar and further afield. This initiative empowers youth to contribute towards building a future of promoting democracy, justice, freedom, and equality for all in Myanmar.
FIRST FIELDWORK: OBSERVING THE SAMI PEACE PROCESS IN FINLAND

STORY BY: HANNAH J. ADAMSON

Who are the Sami (Also Sámi or Saami)?
The Sami People are the only recognized Indigenous People within the European Union, spanning across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, numbering about 75,000 people. There are approximately 10,000 Sami People in Finland and make up three main groups, each with their own respective languages – North Sami, Inari Sami, and Skolt Sami. Established in 1996, the Sami Parliament serves as an official government body to encompass Sami people and culture into Finnish governance.

Reflections
Throughout the world, Indigenous People have worked hard to survive and overcome legacies of oppression. In Finland, the Sami are actively doing this through their leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sami People. Formed as a collaboration between Sami leaders and members of the Finnish government, this TRC is working to uncover the harm of the past and identify steps toward a just future. MHCR Director, Antti Pentikäinen was instrumental in the creation of this entity and, even since leaving his capacity within the Finnish government, has championed this process through his work at MHCR.

At the end of May, I had the privilege of traveling to Northern Finland to shadow Antti when meeting with community leaders involved with the process and observing current dynamics. During this week-long immersive experience, we visited with Sami healers to learn about healing traditions, community, and political leaders to learn about the status of the process and how to overcome present challenges in the commission, and the Sami Psychosocial Support Unit to learn what mechanisms are being developed to support Sami People. This was my first true field experience in which I was able to watch how Antti engaged with community members, built trust, and offered guidance when appropriate. Considering I do not speak Finnish, I was unable to understand most conversations, however, I read body language and felt the energy of the rooms we were in. Antti would often ask me to share these insights prior to giving a translation of the conversation, which enabled me to further refine my skills and participate in meetings, even if in subtle ways. This kind of mentorship is emblematic of the MHCR team spirit, as leaders create spaces for newer members to share ideas, improve abilities, and contribute meaningfully to the work.

Additionally, observing Antti’s role in this process highlighted his unique balance of trust and critical distance from this conflict. His earlier work in co-creating the TRC helped to foster a network of trust with some community members. However, his removal from the situation since shifting to primarily working outside of Finland allowed for open conversations in which people were comfortable sharing and consulting with him without being concerned about how someone actively involved could act on information. At the same time, while this trust opened communication lines greatly, Antti was still considered an outsider in the sense that he is not Sami, which made key boundaries apparent. This balance of “insideress” and “outsideress” created an interesting dynamic in which Antti could become an effective participant offering encouragement and support to those involved, without actually becoming entangled in the conflict.

Throughout visits with community members and time spent exploring Sami land, I experienced the duality of the beauty of Sami culture and the pain that comes with overcoming generations of violence. It was powerful to hear the determination of Sami people to maintain their different languages, all three of which are endangered with approximately 350 speakers or less, but also challenging to bear witness to the heartache associated with languages having been oppressed and struggling to survive. This pain likely contributes to the challenges faced both in relationships between the Sami and the government and within Sami communities.

During the time of our visit, the TRC was going through a period of crisis in which the Secretary-General resigned and the whole process was brought into question. This fragility likely stemmed from mistrust between parties involved on how to best proceed and ensure that the rights and well-being of the Sami people are put at the forefront of the TRCs mission. While experiencing this challenge, we also met with members of the Sami Psychosocial Support Team who are developing tailored programs and support mechanisms for members of the Sami community experiencing trauma, even and especially those working within the commission.

Despite present challenges in the commission, the perseverance and resilience of the Sami people were apparent. On the last day of my visit, we attended the re-opening of the Siida Sámi Museum, which had revitalized its exhibits, notably with the inclusion of artifacts returned from the National Museum of Finland. This open-house event welcomed everyone from Sami leaders wearing traditional clothing to tourists learning about Sami culture for the first time. There was a sense of celebration in the air, even in the face of ongoing challenges. Leaving Finland, I felt a renewed sense of hope that Sami culture will not only survive but, with adequate support, continue on a positive healing journey.
TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION LAB

UNDERGRADS CONDUCT INDIVIDUALIZED RESEARCH

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RECONCILIATION STUDIES

GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

OAKLEY HILL

BELTINA GJELOSHI

CAMERON CASSAR

INDIVIDUALIZING RESEARCH

TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION LAB

INSIDER RECONCILERS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF LOCAL PRACTITIONERS ENGAGED IN RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

Extending upon John Paul Lederach’s notion of “insider partials”, insider Reconcilers (InRec) are individuals who are members of one or more parties to a conflict context and are supporting reconciliation processes within this context. Based on anecdotal evidence, InRec have unique gifts, insights, and positionalities in the field, which can offer them unique spaces of access to successfully generate and support reconciliation processes after violence has occurred. At the same time, insiders also face threats and pitfalls, including the potential for mistrust from one or more sides to a conflict, lack of support from largescale peacebuilding institutions, and a deficit of other key resources. This study seeks to understand the experiences of InRec during and after their work supporting reconciliation processes.

To accomplish this, our research team has conducted over thirty (30) interviews with InRec, asking these individuals about how they define and think about reconciliation, their history and experiences with reconciliation support, and the impact of this work on their health and wellbeing. In the coming months, our staff seeks to publish findings in this study in scholarly and public-facing venues with the broad purpose of elevating the experiences of insiders and connecting these individuals with resources.

RESEARCH INDIVIDUALIZED

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND COVID-19 RESPONSE COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

The Al Amana Centre is an interfaith organization based in Muscat, Oman. Their organization is working towards fostering peace and reconciliation between various faith affiliations through dialogue. The Al Amana Centre funded this research project to better understand how the COVID pandemic impacted religious leaders, their families, congregations, and communities. After conducting the study through the duration of the pandemic, we have been able to craft a guidebook based on the personal experiences of religious leaders during and after the height of the pandemic. The extended interview period allowed us to ask later participants if things have improved, worsened, or stayed the same since March 2020. This guidebook provides Al Amana Centre with all of our research findings, methodology to conduct and analyze the interviews, as well as a list of recommendations for improving support to religious leaders and their communities.
APPROXIMATING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE: RECONCILIATION EXPERTS DELPHI METHOD STUDY

What are the strengths, weaknesses, and risks of various approaches to reconciliation? And, if there is significant disagreement on this question, what is the content of these disagreements? This study utilizes the Delphi method (i.e., multiple rounds of surveys to a panel of reconciliation experts) to answer these questions.

RECONCILIATION AND THEORIES OF CHANGE META-SYNTHESIS PROJECT

How can the maximum impact of change be realized in peacebuilding through reconciliation processes that are inclusive and transformative? The aim of this study is to consider the theories of change, methods of evaluation, results, and impacts of reconciliatory peacebuilding in order to begin answering this question.

BRIDGING DIVIDES IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO LGBTQ-JUSTICE MOVEMENTS IN THE US

In partnership with Professor Karina Korostelina and Carter School PhD student and RCID Lab Manager Mike Sweigart, MHCR and RCID researchers have been contracted by GMU's Institute for a Sustainable Earth and Business for a Better World Center to contribute to the United Nations' university consortium of sustainable development goals research. This research project will focus on experiences of social divisions, and repairing these divides, within queer and trans activists in Washington, DC, and Athens, GA.
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE

STORY BY: MERISA K. MATTIX

From August 18 to 20, The Carter School at George Mason University, along with the Jena Center for Reconciliation at Friedrich Schiller University, Jena of Germany, and Waseda University of Japan held the third International Association for Reconciliation Studies Conference. This three-day conference brought together scholars in-person in Arlington, Virginia, at the Carter School and in Jena, Germany, and virtually all over the world to discuss innovations in the reconciliation field. The speakers ranged from tenured scholars to Ph.D. students and many practitioners.

During the conference, MHCR staff Merisa Mattix (B.A. and M.S. student) and Oakley Hill (Ph.D. student) presented their individual research on political polarization in the Lake Charles, Louisiana churches and the rhetoric of deconversion in the LDS church, respectively. The MHCR staff also collectively presented on our center’s mentorship and leadership practices. This includes our meeting styles, wellbeing check-ins, prioritizing of wellbeing and health of our employees, and the impact of being a student-led center. This presentation was in hopes of co-learning with other research centers in the conference and bettering practices together.

This was the first research conference presentation for Merisa Mattix (B.A. and M.S. student) and Cameron Cassar (M.S. student) and is a great example of MHCR prioritizing giving its students ample professional development opportunities. The team was also extremely excited to be a part of a growing collaboration between reconciliation scholars, and look forward to witnessing and being involved in the growth of the International Association for Reconciliation Studies.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDY PROGRAM

I received GMU’s Office of Student Scholarship, Creativity Activities and Research’s (OSCAR) Intensive Undergraduate Research Scholarship Program (URSP) award, totaling $6000. I will use this opportunity to pursue a research project on political polarization in the American Christian Church through a case study on congregations in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I conducted this research in two studies; an autoethnographic study of my experiences and semi-structured interviews. For my own reflections, I attended six different church services at several churches and engaged with their congregants. For the larger part of the study, I interviewed congregants at two different churches with views on opposite sides of the political and religious spectrum. After identifying these congregations, I asked each participant a) their definition of political polarization, b) their experiences of polarization, and c) their recommendations for addressing the division through their church and community.

This research interest evolved from personal experiences with the American Evangelical Church and political division within my religious communities. I am interested in researching the dynamics of political division in the church to develop ideas for drawing these congregations, families, and the country back together. At the end of my project, I not only had a better understanding of how different congregations view political polarization, especially from viewpoints I disagree with. From their answers, I can also offer community-sponsored suggestions for religious leaders to create initiatives to address political division within their congregations and in their wider communities. I hope this research can be extrapolated beyond Lake Charles to different communities in the Deep South and possibly other religious communities throughout the United States.

MARY HOCH CENTER FOR RECONCILIATION | 2022

MERISA K. MATTIX
HANNAH J. ADAMSON

Furthering MHCR’s seminal research investigating insider reconcilers, I participated in the URSP during the Summer of 2022. My project had four central goals: 1) to interview three participants for the broader study, 2) to develop insider reconciler profiles to highlight key insights for a website for practitioners and scholars, 3) co-author a policy brief including key findings on how best to support insider reconcilers, and 4) complete auto-ethnographic reflections on my travels around Europe as it relates to reconciliation. This project helped me hone my interviewing skills and practice translating experience into lessons learned. Crafting two participant profiles and the policy brief allowed me to practice data analysis as I pulled out salient aspects of interviews and placed them in broader contexts of what is needed to support insiders and improve reconciliation practice. I am excited to further the policy brief with my colleagues, refine recommendations with new findings, and transition this research into practice.

Finally, viewing my travel experiences with a critical eye allowed me to practice analyzing conflicts in action and reflect on my first field experience in Finland. Through this reflection, I realized the stamina needed for international fieldwork, the need for trust-building when engaging with communities, and above all, the importance of reflexive practice. Cumulatively, this project was instrumental in improving my research skills and learning how to shift lessons and findings into practice and impact.

GRETAROBERTSON

The URSP funding provided me with $1500 to continue the project about the effects on religious leaders and their communities over the summer. The study was conducted by the Al Amana Centre, based in Muscat, Oman, to better understand the trials and tribulations facing religious leaders and their greater community during the height of the COVID pandemic. I was able to complete the literature review, and conduct the final two interviews and their corresponding transcript. The interview questions asked about the challenges and sources of the resilience of each participant, their family, and their community, in addition to what type of resources they would need to emerge out of the pandemic securely. The data collected through the interviews has provided us with key insights into recovering from the pandemic and the types of interventions and adaptations for the next challenge. Following the data analysis, I began constructing a report for the Al Amana Centre, which later became a guidebook. Additionally, with the help of my colleagues, I wrote a mock policy brief for the U.S. Institute of Peace detailing our findings and COVID policy recommendations.

Among completing various project tasks, the program provided me with guidance to understand more about research methodology and reflect on research practice and ethics. Furthermore, I made my first summary presentation to other URSP recipients during the OSCAR Celebration of Student Scholarship.

Deconversion as Conflict highlights the effects of moral-politics on religious belief and conflict within the Latter-day Saint context. The book illustrates that Latter-day Saint Church leaders and many of its Millennial members (and former members) have conflicting moral-political values and root narratives that produce combative moral imperatives and mutually exclusive interests. What one sees as their primary method of overcoming abusive power, the other sees as an abuse of power. Hence, the parties are locked in a discursive trap wherein neither can act on their moral imperatives without producing the other’s grievance.

Believing Millennials abide Church membership while holding distinct moral-political values by devising analytic categories between “the Church” and “the culture” and attributing the Church’s negative impacts exclusively to the latter. However, in a conflict-relationship, each party tends to engage in moves and counter-moves that advance their interests while transforming the relationship; this both intensifies the conflict and changes the parties. Deconversion as Conflict illustrates that what Conversion Studies observes as losses of faith or exits from the religious body are expressions of an escalating conflict of political values. It emphasizes what previous deconversion studies have often left unstudied—the interpersonal and the intergroup influences on belief and belonging. In its final chapter, it proposes needs-based strategies for believers and disbelievers to navigate the Ex-Mormon Exodus and preserve their valued relationships.
THE IMPACT OF ITALIAN RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES ON CHURCH-LED MIGRANT INTEGRATION PRACTICES

As an Albanian immigrant in Italy for over 10 years, I wondered what it meant to be Italian seeing as I never quite truly grew to be treated like one. My lived experiences, often abusive, made it so that a mere Italian passport or fluency in the Italian language was not enough to being Italian. ‘Italianity’, then, also included a set of esthetics (phenotype), shared history and spirituality, set of norms and beliefs I didn’t quite t. I witnessed the harsh realities of immigration nd lived through the violence aimed at many migrants and refugees like myself. Immigration is often the spotlight of heated political debates round the world, and Italy is no exception. The Italian Church is an undeniable magnumnious force fulfilling many of the State’s function in upport of the integration of migrants and refugees alike. Yet, the role of the Church’s impact remains vastly unknown. My dissertation project presents an opportunity to explore some of these life-long inquiries, most importantly, what constitutes successful migrant integration in Italy, as well as surveying the motives of church-led interventions as humanitarian rather than motivated by seeing migrants as equals and future Italians. Using the lens of social identity theory, my question is: how does the meaning of religious and national identities impact church-led practices of migrant integration in Italy? To answer this, I am looking into documents detailing migrant integration and its language strategies, as well as conducting interviews with both Italian members of the Church and migrants in Italy. The interviews will help to elicit the personal constructs of both groups. In this way, I can see how people view their worlds and the people with whom they play different roles. My exploration of this topic also points out other, though not less important, research ambiguities about national identity theory, the literature on race in Italy, and an assessment of church interventions within the context of migrant integration strategies. With this study, I hope to achieve a few things. First, taking into consideration the fierce pro-immigration stance of the Church in Italy and its historical influence on decision-making to offer insights and recommendations for church actors in migrant integration practices. Second, to point out age-old questions about integration by painting a detailed landscape of the Italian case. Third, to tackle gaps in migrant integration needs. These can then support more informed and effective migrant integration efforts. Fourth, to address the limitations and opportunities of applied social identity theory. Last but not least, to explore policy implications and recommendations to strengthen the evidence for policymakers to make more informed decisions in migrant integration. I am deeply grateful to my Committee members for supporting me and this project since the very beginning: Professors Karina Korostelina (Chair), Daniel Rothbart, and Al Fuertes.

“No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”
- Warsan Shire

OF MARTYRS AND MEN: A COMPARATIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE MURDERS OF GEORGE FLOYD AND KHALED SAID AS TURNING POINTS FOR WIDESPREAD SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

For the final fulfillment of my master’s degree, I was required to write a thesis on a topic of my choosing. I went through many different topics, it changed nearly every other day, mainly because I had so many things that I was passionate about. However, I eventually found something that combined my passions for studying the Middle East and for advancing racial healing in our country with my passion for looking at the impact of trauma on the human psyche.

For the subject of my thesis, I chose to do a comparative psychosocial analysis on the onset of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. I specifically focused on the killings and subsequent martyrdom of Khaled Said, a young Egyptian man who was brutally killed by the Egyptian police, and George Floyd, whose death we are all familiar with. In this thesis, I chose to focus on the deaths of these two men at the hands of the police and examined whether or not their deaths should be looked at as the turning points for mass mobilization in their respective contexts. I looked at the similarities and differences between the two cases but more importantly, I looked at the role that trauma played in providing an impetus for collective action in these social movements. Both groups involved in the two cases had been subjected to oppression and repression at the hands of the state, albeit in different forms. In Egypt, the country was run by a dictator and was a police state that targeted everyday citizens on a regular basis. In the US, we live in a democracy, but black and brown people have been constantly subjected to over-policing and police brutality for multiple generations. I also looked at the aftermaths of these movements to determine whether or not they led to the substantive change that the demonstrators were hoping for. My research found that the deaths of the two men should be viewed as the turning points in their social movements because they were the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” for an already traumatized population that had been yearning for change for years. This intergenerational trauma, combined with the gruesome acts of violence at the hands of the police, culminated in a form of "righteous rage," which the protesters used as motivation for mobilizing against the institutions which perpetuated their harm. These cases had a lot in common with each other, but their connections had not really been explored in other literature. By analyzing and comparing these two cases, which had not previously been linked together, the goal of this research was to inform the analysis of future social movements, potentially predict their outbreak and contribute to the field of conflict analysis and resolution.
My name is Jonathan Jimenez. I am a Guatemalan lawyer and professor of law at a university with experience of 3 years in family litigation. I joined the MHCR in the second week of August 2022 to develop a four-month practicum about reconciliation processes and peacebuilding. I am one of the 103 IREX fellows participating in the Community Solutions Program this year, representing Guatemala.

Guatemala is a developing home of the ancient civilization of the Maya, slightly smaller than the state of Tennessee and located in Central America. It is one of the most violent countries in the world; between 1960 and 1996, over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or forcibly disappeared in a civil war that lasted 36 years.

Guatemala today faces formidable challenges: weak governance, endemic corruption, pervasive poverty, food insecurity, severe violence, citizen insecurity, shrinking space for civil society, lack of respect for human rights, and inequitable access to economic opportunities and social services. Due to these social problems, thousands of Guatemalan families have been forced to flee violence, becoming the 10th largest migrant group in the United States of America.

At the end of 2019, I founded a small law organization called Jimenez & Jimenez established in Chimaltenango. It serves the community, helps families and children access justice, and supports them by giving them free legal orientation. Also provides education about the conciliation and mediation processes as alternative ways to solve conflicts.

My work at MHCR is mapping the involvement and needs of migrants and refugees with Latino backgrounds, as well as mapping truth and reconciliation commissions in Guatemala, Colombia and Libya and analyzing the Latino diaspora. Being here at the center has helped me to develop new skills such as data analysis, strategic planning, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

While at MHCR, I expect to improve my capacity to understand that the peace process requires community actions where conflicting parties come together and agree to solve the conflict and improve the impact of reconciliation through research.

At the end of my practicum at MHCR and after my return to my home country, I will be applying the knowledge granted by the center in order to implement the Community Action Project CAP which consists of the implementation of Parenting Training for Violence Prevention in my natal town of Chimaltenango, where participants will learn about peacebuilding and reconciliation practices by July 2023.
SHINNYO FELLOW AMANDA PEÑA JOINS MHCR

My name is Amanda Peña, and I am the 2022-2023 Shinnyo Fellow through the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution. The Shinnyo Fellowship is awarded to a recent graduate of one of the five participating universities across the United States in partnership with the Shinnyo-en Foundation: George Mason University, UC Berkeley, Chapman University, Stanford, and the University of Seattle. With this fellowship, the fellow has the ability to partner with an organization of their choosing for 10-11 months, receiving a stipend from the university, and will work on an impact project related or unrelated to the work of the organization, all with the help of a mentor of their choosing. I have chosen to partner with MHCR and Think Peace during this time.

The fellowship emphasizes Infinite Paths to Peace, where they encourage fellows to be introspective and reflect on how we can make our communities better by being a “ripple of change.” The goal of the fellowship is for the fellows to find their passions and provides a space where we can learn about the different ways we can explore peacebuilding in our own lives.

Each year, the Shinnyo-en Foundation holds a retreat for the fellows where we travel to San Francisco, California, about a week together. The trip first begins with an orientation for the fellows and our mentors at the Foundation’s headquarters. We were all officially introduced to one another, met some of the Foundation’s board members, and learned more about the Foundation and its mission. During this time, we also shared what peace means to us through the process of making Peace Boxes—a way to make these meanings more tangible. As fellows, we were vulnerable when sharing our “why,” and that moment meant so much because it went to show what brought us together in the first place. I have always believed we each carry part of all the individuals we meet, and to know one’s “why” is even more special because of it.

The following day, we had a facilitation orientation at PARK with the fellows and individuals from another organization, Youth Community Service, that was also participating in the retreat. Each fellow was partnered with a student from the organization, and we were assigned groups for us to lead for the weekend retreat. During this time, we familiarized ourselves with the material and activities we would be guiding. Once we were prepared, we left to go to the Marconi Conference Center and Historic State Park, where the retreat was taking place. The other fellows and I helped set up the conference room and the check-in process for the representatives of the different organizations. Through the activities we did during the retreat, each home group spent the weekend asking each other intimate questions, and it was beautiful to be in a space where this was possible.

I left the retreat feeling energized and excited for what the future holds because of my time with incredible people. All of those individuals at the retreat were doing so much good for their communities, and I was re-inspired to do the same.

I value the work done in both MHCR and Think Peace as it brings together students and experts to further research reconciliation processes. I hope to use my time as the Shinnyo Fellow to learn more about my passions, build a peace builder, and learn about other methods of being a ripple of change.

Story by: Amanda Peña

MHCR TEAM STUDIES ABROAD

Cameron Cassar, Malta

This year, I was able to study abroad in the beautiful country of Malta for 9.5 months. Malta is a small island in Europe in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, right between Italy and Libya. I had the opportunity to study abroad in Malta due to the Dual Master’s Degree program that the Carter School runs in collaboration with the University of Malta’s Centre for the Study and Practice of Conflict Resolution which allowed me to get two degrees from both universities in one academic year. The course took place at the beautiful Valletta campus, and our cohort was comprised of students from all over the US. We also had students from Canada, France, and, of course, Malta. In the program, we were given the opportunity to learn from some of the brightest minds in the field, with professors coming from all over the world to come and teach us in person. We studied all aspects of conflict and some of the lectures that we covered in the program included: Environmental Conflict, Human Rights and Conflict, Economic Conflict, Identity Conflict, Religious Conflict, and even some soft skills such as Facilitation, Mediation, and Negotiation. This program was the opportunity of a lifetime, not only for the academic aspect but also for the personal aspect. This was my first time really being away from home for an extended period, and I learned so much about myself and made some lifelong memories, such as traveling to other countries in Europe as well as lifelong friendships with my classmates, who were my support system during my time there. All in all, I cannot sing the praises of the program enough, and I am so much better off because of this study abroad opportunity.

Hannah J. Adamson, Spain

During the Spring of 2022, I studied abroad at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid in Spain. Through this experience, I was able to immerse myself in elements of Spanish culture and connect with other international students from various countries. Living in an apartment with all Spanish-speaking roommates provided an opportunity for me to learn some basic Spanish and find creative ways to connect across lingual borders. My day-to-day routine offered exciting avenues to explore different aspects of culture, from noticing clothing norms on my commute to school via the train every day to observing the closing of many shops during the middle of the day for siesta. Through my travels around Spain and time living in Madrid, I observed regional conflicts such as Catalan separatist efforts, issues of increased migration flows, and, notably, the reaction to the invasion of Ukraine. Generally, public protests and demonstrations seemed to be more commonplace in Spain, with entire families participating. For instance, I was able to participate in the International Women’s Day march, which had an air of celebration of all that women have achieved and continuing advocacy for equality. Contrastingly, when standing in a peace demonstration just days after the war began in Ukraine, I was overwhelmed by the heaviness of Puerta del Sol as everyone came together to hold space for the pain and call for peace. In each case, I was inspired by the collective effort to come together for issues of importance and cultivate a culture of activism.

Hannah Adamson’s adventures in Spain featuring a trip to Segovia (top), the Universidad Carlos III of Madrid campus (middle), and view over Toledo (bottom).
**Merisa K. Mattix, Germany**

From January to May of 2022, I had the opportunity to intern abroad in Jena, Germany, with the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies (JCRS) at Friedrich-Schiller University Jena. Working at JCRS allowed me to explore a larger scope of reconciliation literature in research. I was the only American at the Center on a regular basis, the only undergraduate student to have worked there, and the youngest at the Center by far. At JCRS, I was a colleague with many Ph.D. candidates. At the center, I learned as I edited all the Center’s publications in English. This task allowed me to learn about perspectives on reconciliation outside the US and compare them with what I have been learning at the Carter School. While in Germany, I was able to learn not only more about German culture but also from other international students. I participated in several cultural exchange events, including celebrating the Super Bowl with a huge German fan and Persian New Year with Iranian expats. I learned the most about Turkish and Kurdish culture and conflict dynamics, with the majority of my friends being Turkish students studying at the university. I also had a unique opportunity to observe the effects of the war in Ukraine in February, including traveling with refugees fleeing the conflict, consistent discussions on how it may affect Germany, and community efforts to support and house refugees.

**Sharing Our Knowledge: Peace Week and Other Webinars**

From November 2021 - December 2022, MHCR held three (3) internal webinars and hosted events for the Carter School’s Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 Peace Week. These events ranged in topic from the needs of those doing peacebuilding to local and global healing and community support practitioner wellbeing. We first hosted a series of webinars entitled “Healing Divides from Within: Localizing Peacebuilding,” which hosted peacebuilders from the US and globally to talk about local peacebuilding and how peacebuilding is done within multiple cultures. MHCR’s Peace Week Events included a conversation with Rowda Olad and Dr. Tecla Namachanja Wanjala, two of our Insider Reconciler Fellows. Rowda Olad and Tecla Namachanja Wanjala described their work and how mental health can and should be integrated into peacebuilding work. In Fall 2022, our team collaborated with The Parachute People to discuss how wellbeing and resilience can be built through play and investment in the community. Our Associate Director, Nick Sherwood, served on the board of The Parachute People and invited his Board of Directors to share their expertise on the topic. The Center also hosted Tecla at the Carter School to describe the work she and her organization, The Shalom Center for Counseling and Development, are doing in Kenya. Her primary initiative has included community trauma-healing workshops in the Mt. Elgon region.

**Our Team is International**

Below, we have marked all the places our team has worked and researched in 2021 - 2022.
Thank you for your continued support of the Mary Hoch Center for Reconciliation.

Every gift has a positive impact on reconciliation efforts around the world.

We deeply value our partners and their support of our work.
Every donation contributes to the groundbreaking work of this study and is greatly appreciated.

Below, see our funding levels, and examples of how your donation would support us, using our Insider Reconciler Study

**Friend**
- Interviewing 10-15 insider reconcilers
- Transcription of interview data
- Research team wages, including several students

**Supporter**
- Interviewing 15-20 insider reconcilers
- Data analysis utilizing interview transcriptions
- Development of research summaries, supporting reconciliation practice

**Advocate**
- Interviewing 30+ insider reconcilers
- Fund the entire project for 1 year or more
- Publication of research findings
- Envisioning of "Potential Outcomes" to best innovate, support, and improve reconciliation practice

**Partner**
- It’s been an honor to be mentored by experienced colleagues who have made strides in peace reconciliation and working within a group of individuals who will make a significant contribution to the field. The involvement of mentorship at MHCR will continue to make the center a discernible institution in peace studies.
  - Greta Roberson

- We are known for the approach that we take that bridges research, education and practice, that is one of the main tenets of our organization and we excel at that. However, our approach in cultivating a team culture amongst students which embraces wellbeing, growth and connectedness provides us with all the necessary tools to feel empowered in everything we do and that is the hallmark of our organization.
  - Cameron Cassar

- I am humbled to learn through hands-on practice engaging with insiders working to transform their own communities; MHCR has provided a unique opportunity to apply what I am learning in class to real issues, especially through connecting with local actors to understand their experiences and integrate that knowledge into existing peacebuilding frameworks.
  - Hannah J. Adamson

- I’m thankful for my time at MHCR since joining in January 2022. Over these past several months, I had the opportunity to put into practice research and analytical skills in the field of peacebuilding and reconciliation. I hope to continue to grow within MHCR as the premier organization at the nexus of reconciliation, healing, justice and peace work.
  - Betina Gjeloshi

- I am extremely proud of the accomplishments of our team over the last year, especially as we have transitioned into a student-run center. It has been a large responsibility with even greater rewards. In the future, I am excited to continue to see growth in all the members of our team and our impacts on the reconciliation field, championing mental health and wellbeing of peacebuilders.
  - Merisa K. Mattix

The work being done at MHCR is necessary in making waves in the field of peacebuilding. Each student, scholar, practitioner, and expert at the Center contributes to the changes of peace and reconciliation. My hope is for MHCR to continue exploring multifaceted topics and being a ripple of change.
  - Amanda Peña

The past year of MHCR has been a wild ride! In the last year, I’ve focused heavily on developing my leadership and mentorship models (taking cues from the positive psychology and transformational leadership literature) as Associate Director and pivoted my dissertation project to focus on MHCR’s Insider Reconciler research. In the coming years, my biggest dream for MHCR is to continue to be a place of care, boldness, and impeccable ethical and professional standards to train the next generation of reconciliation experts.
  - Nicholas R. Sherwood
The MHCR family is dedicated to “breaking the barriers that separate people...to overcome differences and heal wounds of the past.”

To explore our team's resumes, CVs, and LinkedIn visits mhcr.gmu.edu/people
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