



ANNUAL REPORT 2014

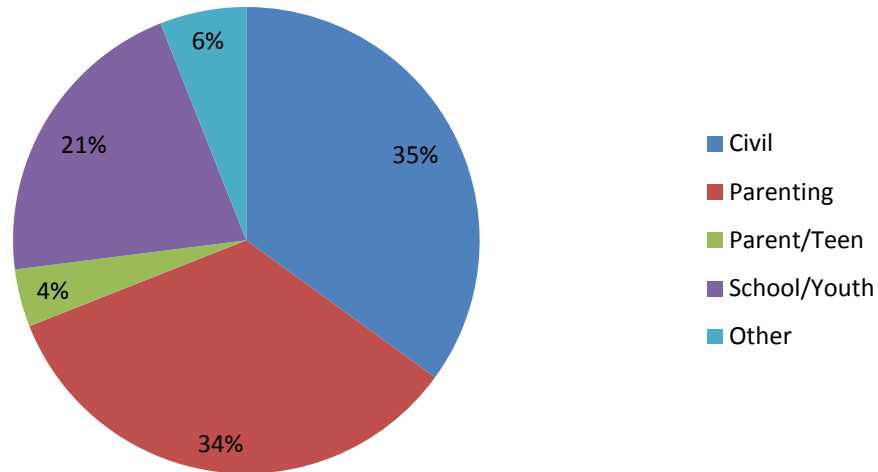
Introduction

Mediation Matters is proud of our accomplishments in 2014. We were able to deepen our impact in the six counties we serve. We explored and began the design for programs to meet new targeted populations such as veterans returning from deployment, youth, and elders/seniors within our communities. This year found us continuing to strengthen our core programs while simultaneously looking to diversification. As we continue to evolve we find ways to further deepen our commitment to the community through our reflection on our mission: *In recognition of the value of a peaceful community **Mediation Matters** provides the skills and processes that help people handle conflict in a constructive way.*

Referral Types

Cases arise from a number of different subject matters. Our largest two caseload areas continue to be civil matters, largely referred from small claims courts, and parenting matters referred from individuals or the family courts.

Case Type



Civil Matters

Civil Matters are most often those filed with Small Claims Courts in our jurisdiction, though parties do not need to have a case filed to have access to mediation. These cases involve any community matter such as neighbors; landlord/tenant; commercial claims; contractors; businesses; debt collection; and so forth. Some of our cases not referred from court are referred from law enforcement, previous clients, private agencies, or partners throughout the 6 counties we serve. Though many involve issues around money, not all mediations of this type involve monetary settlements.

Parenting Matters

These situations involve the significant adults in the lives of children: parents, grandparents, extended family, care-givers, who are working out plans for the care of those children. This could be referred from a Family Court in any of our 6 counties, or the adults can come to the Center on their own to work out plans. In some of our counties, the families can also discuss child support arrangements. The goal of mediation is to allow those who know the children best and will have to live with their decisions, to be responsible for those decisions. In mediation, the children's guardians can discuss their own needs, the needs of the child, and what arrangements can best support a positive future for them all.

Parent/Teen Matters

Parent/Teen matters involve families where there is a communication issue between a parent/guardian and a teen or pre-teen in the family. This can involve discussions about anything of concern to the family and the teen. From curfew and school performance to communication and the ability to spend productive time together, families have seen transformational changes in their lives after sitting down in this setting and talking. This process gives the family a break from the chaos and allows the space and time for a new way to have a conversation. Mediation is best used at the earliest sign of an issue between the family members. Some matters are referred by probation but parents/guardians are welcome to call prior to that being necessary.

Other Matters

Mediation Matters also offers a number of different services for the workplace. Groups have had us facilitate sessions on how best to create and maintain a high functioning team. Individuals have sought assistance with issues with co-workers or managers. All of the cases are handled by mediators with specialized training with the goal to support the individuals within the workplace. Mediation Matters also manages contract programs for the Capital Region. These programs are the New York State Education Department funded special education mediation program where guardians and school officials meet to discuss matters impacting the school experience of a special needs student; agricultural mediation where a producer meets with neighbors, vendors, or others impacted by the farm work; and Lemon Law arbitration dealing with new or used cars that are malfunctioning. We also offer mediation to those that were formerly incarcerated as they reengage with their families and community. Another unique area of mediation is working with those that have aging individuals in the family. Mediators host sessions with the children of these individuals, the seniors themselves, and/or anyone else that needs to be a part of the conversation to make plans for the senior's care as they age.

New Programming

Mediation Matters has explored new programs in a number of different areas. We continue to support our court referred cases and those will forever be the foundation upon which we do all our work. But, as we assess the needs of our community we know that we must do more.

Youth & Schools

Mediation Matters has been managing a peer mediation program in Schenectady Schools since we assumed the contract for that county's community mediation program. Now we are expanding our work within the schools to explore Restorative Justice programs as alternatives to traditional discipline. These have been offered from elementary school through High School. We conducted focus groups with youth to ensure that we are meeting their needs appropriately. We have done workshops at camps; at after-school programs; and wherever

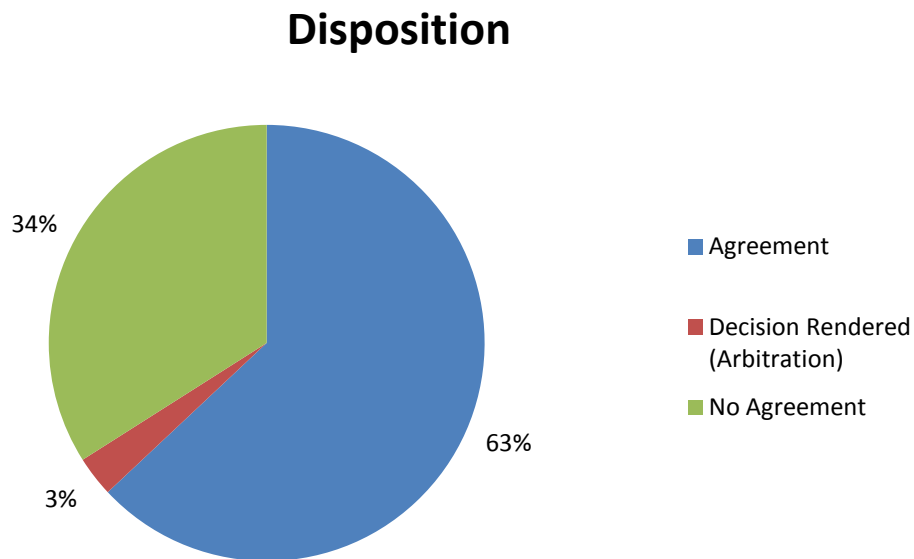
youth are gathered. Our hope is to engage the young people in our communities to encourage these alternative strategies for handling difficult situations.

Veterans

Mediation Matters is part of a national learning community that is developing best practices for Veterans Mediation programs throughout the country. We are excited to be learning from, and collaborating with, professionals in this unique area of mediation. It is our wish that prior to deployment, or upon returning home, these individuals can have the support they need to strengthen the relationships with their families and sustain those relationships through all of the challenges inherent in their service time away.

Disposition

Mediation is a unique process that is different than anything else our clients have used. Mediators do not provide advice or solutions. Because the resolution is entirely within the control of the participants, we do not want to define success or failure based on the agreement rate – some parties are not ready to write an agreement. Merely having a conversation and encouraging alternative approaches is an important process. That said, we do monitor how many cases result in a written document as one element of the analysis of the process. The disposition chart below reflects the disposition of all cases other than peer mediation cases. Those have a higher than average settlement rate given the nature of the cases and we did not want to inflate the agreement percentages for our general community mediation sessions by including those cases.



Mediators

Nearly 90% of our cases are mediated by our talented roster of professional volunteer mediators. They go through an extensive training program to become a certified Mediation Matters mediator. We recently increased the standards required for a mediator to be certified. They must do more cases in a year and attend more hours of continuing education sessions than even the NY State funding office requires. We want to support the mediators by providing sufficient opportunities for them to mediate and continue to study and perfect their craft.

Over the past year, our incredible roster of mediators have donated well over 1,600 hours just mediating cases. During that time they offered time and space for others to have meaningful conversations. That calculation does not include the hours spent traveling to sites, sometimes in remote locations, or sitting in City Court waiting for a case. Nor does it take into account the time spent serving on committees, our Board of Directors' time on board-related functions, or helping out at networking events. It is challenging to quantify the extent to which these individuals have given of themselves. This incredibly generous support has allowed the work of the Center to continue even through our financial ups and downs.

Conclusion

Mediation Matters is thriving. We are engaging new partners, finding new areas for our services, and deepening our education in our field. We will continue to talk with our community to ensure that our services meet their needs and adjust, as necessary. Our focus will remain on our core programming to keep our foundation strong and we will grow at a sustainable rate so that the quality of our programs remains high.

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