

Annual Reports

Annual Report 2012

Introduction

Mediation Matters transforms relationships. Whether it is parents finding a way to parent separately and supporting their children throughout; parents and teens navigating challenging relationships and finding common goals; tenants maintaining housing through working out issues with their landlords; co-workers establishing better working environments; or neighbors resolving issues to create peace within their neighborhood – people talking to one another creates a better society for us all. All types of services delivered to further 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 caseload includes: civil matters largely referred from small claims courts, parenting matters referred from individuals or the family courts, and parent/teen cases referred from county offices such as probation or social services, or other non-profit centers or individuals.

Civil Matters

Civil Matters largely include those referred from City, Town, or Village Courts with small claims actions though a court case is not required before mediation services can be offered. Participants interested in seeking mediation can speak to the court where their case is filed or contact one of the offices directly. We welcome all civil matters into mediation. Landlords and tenants can discuss security deposits or repairs; contractors and clients can discuss the quality of the work or payment for services; banks and borrowers can discuss loan repayment terms; or any other issues that might arise. It is always an option to contact the office to explore whether a matter is appropriate for mediation.

Parenting Matters

Parenting matters largely involve discussions about how the family will care for the children of the family when the family lives in separate households. Matters can involve parents, grandparents, extended family, or any other

guardians for the children. They can be issues filed in family court or people who wish to develop their own solutions prior to engaging the judicial system. The family can discuss detailed plans for schedules down to every holiday; or they can discuss a short term schedule to overcome an immediate issue. Families are welcome to return to mediation as issues or lives change and children grow up. The goal of a parenting plan mediation session is that the family find the right solutions for them that put the children in their lives in the best possible situation for their future.

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 curfew, social activities, relationships, school attendance, drug and alcohol use, communication, responsibilities within the home, privileges within or outside the home and school, extracurricular activities or any issue of importance to any participant in the mediation session. 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 an office prior to that being necessary.

Other Matters

Other types of matters that Mediation Matters handles include such things as: workplace issues where an employee and supervisor or two employees have an issue that they need to overcome. 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. Mediation can be used in any circumstance. Conflict is universal throughout our society and Mediation Matters is working hard to provide opportunities for people to find alternative ways to resolve their concerns.

Disposition

We have heard from many that when participants at least attempt mediation, even when no agreement was reached, their approach to the conflict changes. For the first time they are seeing the issues more clearly and are considering alternative solutions than originally thought possible. It is possible that even without an agreement issues are narrowed and positions are explained. Mediators want to help participants explore creative ways to reach closure

and in a majority of cases that closure is captured in a written agreement. Though we do not measure success or failure based on the agreement rate – we believe that a transformed relationship may not be codified on a piece of paper – we do track those numbers for analysis.

Mediators

Those that provide the vast majority of our direct delivery of services are our volunteer mediators and arbitrators. This talented group of people start by taking a basic training which consists of 30 hours of intensive skills development on how to host a conversation between parties in conflict. Following that basic training they are able to apply for an apprenticeship with the Center during which they observe and then co-mediate cases with a senior mediator. If they wish to do cases beyond the civil matters described above they must take additional advanced training beyond their basic training and continue an apprenticeship in those new subject matter areas. After becoming a full roster member, mediators must continue to take training and mediate cases to remain in good standing.

Over the past year, our incredible roster of mediators have donated over six hundred and fifty 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. 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 significant financial obstacles.

Future

As the year closes and a new year begins, Mediation Matters is excited about the opportunities for 2013. We are strengthening partnerships throughout the counties we serve to create a web of services that will more fully support the families in need. We are building a program to serve formerly incarcerated individuals who are reentering their community and reengaging with their families. And our largest initiative is our regionalization of conflict resolution throughout the Capital Region as we assume the contract for Schenectady County in April 2013. This exciting opportunity will allow us to consolidate all of the services into one Center building on the efficiencies and sharing knowledge and resources to maximize impact in the community. We are confident that 2013 will bring amazing opportunities to engage with our neighbors and offer a process that will have a significant impact on the relationships of those who participate.

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