



## ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

### Introduction

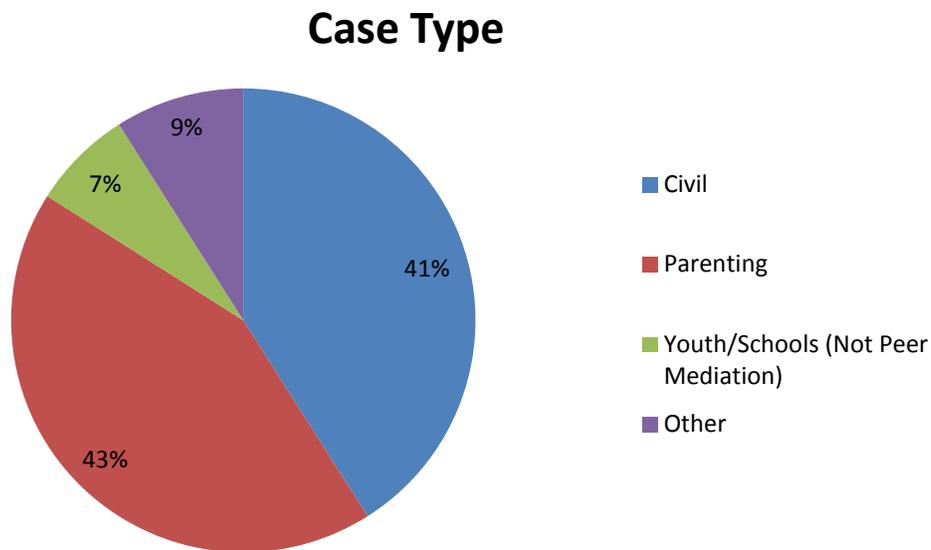
The past years have seen much growth and change at Mediation Matters internally and with our partners. One administrative change was our adjustment to our Fiscal Year. We chose to move from a calendar year to one that matches the New York State Fiscal Year (April 1 – March 31). Beyond administrative changes we have also adjusted programmatically; we responded to the needs of our community and adjusted programming accordingly. As we saw schools looking for alternative discipline techniques we shared our work with peer mediation and restorative practices. When we deepened our partnerships with those serving the Veteran community we knew that we could add our services to their work to serve that population as well. And the list goes on. Expanding our reach to serve our communities is our primary goal. We will look for ways to expand our reach and meet the needs of as many of those as we can in the spirit of 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.*

### Increased Communication

Mediation Matters is reaching more of the community through our outreach and efforts in print media. We have updated our logo, our brochures, our website, and our social media presence. Our efforts are designed to raise awareness and to help everyone in our community feel connected to the Center so they are more likely to accept the services offered.

### Referral Types

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



### Civil Matters

Civil Matters are most often those filed with Small Claims Courts in our jurisdiction, though that is not a requirement 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. Cases not referred from court come 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.

## **Family Matters**

### 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. They could be referred from a Family Court in any of our 6 counties, or the adults may come to the Center on their own to work out plans. In some of our counties, the families may also discuss child support arrangements. The goal of mediation is to allow those who know the children best 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.

### Veterans

We know that the cycle of deployment and return home has challenges for those who are separated from their families for service in the military. We received a small grant to expand our work for this community. We deepened partnerships with other organizations serving the veterans population and have spent time learning from them so that our mediators have the cultural competencies to meet the unique needs of veterans and active military in a respectful manner. Roles and the identity of each member of the family often evolve as the person in the military spends time away and then returns. We host the conversations they need to have to understand one another's perspectives.

## **Youth & Schools**

### 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 considering a pre-PINS petition.

### Schools

Mediation Matters has managed a peer mediation program in Schenectady School District since we assumed the contract for that county's community mediation program. We are now working with additional districts across our six counties to help them implement peer mediation programs within their schools. We are also working with schools to facilitate Restorative Practice programs as alternatives to traditional discipline. These have been offered from Elementary School through High School. Research demonstrates that punitive discipline does not yield hoped for outcomes such as changed behavior, understanding and empathy for others, and a reduction in repeating behavior. Restorative approaches provide ways for

students to be helped to think critically about what they have done, to develop empathy for others, and gives an opportunity for students to take an active role in repairing harm they caused to others. These approaches invite students to see their own choices rather than blaming others, and empowers them to choose how to respond and grow from mistakes.

### **Other**

Other types of cases that are handled within Mediation Matters involve workplaces, arbitrations for the lemon law car program from the Attorney General's office, agricultural cases, and other unique types of cases that arise within the community.

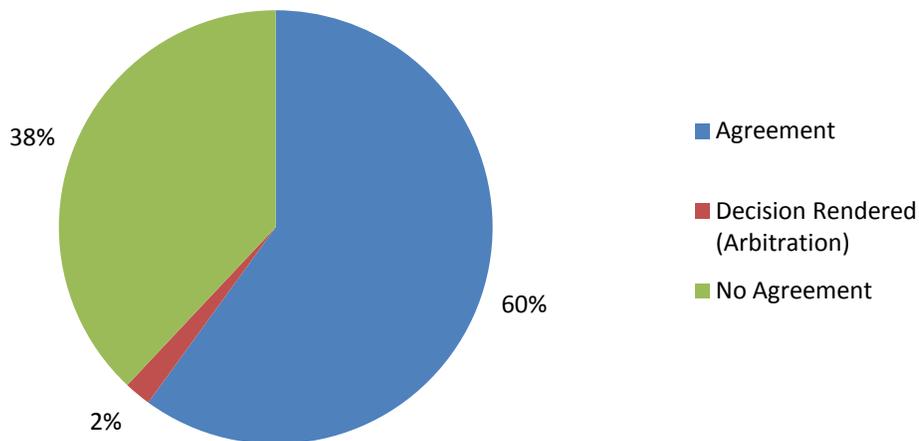
### Seniors

One specific area on which we are focusing is our work with seniors. Families with an aging member face many challenges. Often, discussions within the family happen only after things have reached a crisis point. We seek to empower the families to address their issues prior to that time so that they can plan. We help adult children talk with their parents about the care they will receive as they age or siblings to make decisions about how to manage the estate after a loved-one passes. This can transform how the family faces these important decisions. Our goal is to empower the members of these families to find constructive ways to handle the conflict or make plans for the future of their families.

### **Disposition**

Mediation is a unique process that is different than any other dispute resolution process 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. 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.

## Disposition



### Conflict Coaching

Mediation Matters knows that not everyone is ready to participate in a full mediation or facilitation session so we explored a complimentary process to help in those situations. Conflict coaching is an opportunity for individuals to work one-on-one with a trained conflict coach. Through this process the individual explores their emotions, power, and identity felt within a conflict situation. They imagine their preferred relationship with the other person and explore how they can make that happen for themselves. Just as with our other processes, the coach does not provide the answers or advice but rather uses questions and reflections to help the individual develop a strategy for him/herself. This process is currently being pilot tested throughout our Center.

### Mediators

Approximately 85% of our cases are mediated by our talented roster of professional volunteer mediators. Mediators go through an extensive training program to become a certified Mediation Matters mediator. We 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 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 1,000 hours 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 to 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.

## **Conclusion**

Mediation Matters has grown. Our focus remains on our core programming to keep our foundation strong and we plan growth at a sustainable rate to ensure the quality of our programs remains high. Our revenue is increasingly diverse and our programs reach more of the members of our community. We have supporters throughout our six counties and our partnerships grow every day. The board, staff, and volunteers are honored to continue to serve the members of our community in this way.

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