

Annual Report 2011

July 5th, 2012



Introduction

Mediation Matters manages dispute resolution cases throughout the five counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Warren, and Washington. Cases arise in a number of different areas and require different services. Some of the work done is education based: sharing information about mediation; discussing how it might fit within a specific situation; or exploring the feasibility of scheduling mediation between the interested parties. We provide information and offer the opportunities available through our program. In other situations, a full mediation is conducted where the parties are taken through the entire process and explore whether a written agreement is necessary for their purposes. All types of services delivered are valuable to the community and 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 include but are not limited to parties such as: landlord/tenant, contractor, employment, client/agency, vendor/patron, roommates, creditors/borrowers, and doctor/patient. Individuals work together to build creative

solutions to the matters between them. Such arrangements could be a payment plan for a debt owed, services rendered to accommodate an unmet need, or a better understanding for a plan to live or work together in the future. Though many of these cases originate in small claims court, a court case filed is not required before mediation services can be offered. Anyone can contact either of the offices to seek mediation services.

Parenting Matters

Parenting matters largely involve: developing a schedule for time with the child(ren), defining where the child(ren) will live, and/or creating a plan for making decisions for the child(ren)'s future. Sessions can involve a full review of a year-long schedule including every detail or can address a discreet need such as a holiday or summer plans. Cases sometimes involve extended family and plans for time with the children. Who attends mediation is up to the parties involved. Anyone can contact the offices to determine whether their case is appropriate for mediation and to determine who would be needed to conduct an effective mediation session.

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.

Other Matters

Other types of matters that Mediation Matters handles include such things as: special education mediation where guardians and school officials meet to discuss any matter 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; Lemon Law arbitration dealing with new or used cars that are malfunctioning; elder cases involving a senior individual and others with whom they have decisions to make; or complex group facilitation work among multiple parties working together on strategies for the future or overcoming an obstacle.

Disposition

Mediation is a process that allows for creative options that may not be appropriate to develop in the other forums from which the cases arise. Given that level of flexibility we are careful not to place a significant emphasis on whether a case reaches a formal written agreement. There may be significant progress made toward a better plan for the future but the participants may not be ready for a written agreement or feel as though one is not necessary. That said, in a majority of cases, the parties do reach plans and decide to put those into a written agreement.

Mediators

Over the past year, our incredible roster of mediators have donated well over a thousand hours just mediating. During that time they offered time and space for others to have meaningful conversations. That calculation does not include the hundreds of 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 has many plans. Building on partnerships already begun we hope to build an even stronger foundation to move forward into the future. We hope to support those participating in mediation in new, more extensive ways by providing a structure through our collaborative efforts that will more fully support the families and others using mediation. There is much to do but with the leadership and dedication of the Board, staff, mediators, and partners we know the future is bright.

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