



# Dispute Resolution Center Newsletter

## August 2017

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**“Domestic Violence and Other Issues Impacting Families Today” Conference** by Tom Pullyblank, DRC Case Manager

On July 14, I joined several other Catholic Charities staff members and volunteers at the Cobleskill-Richmondville High School for the “Domestic Violence and Other Issues Impacting Families Today” conference, which was sponsored by the Schoharie County Domestic Violence Task Force. The conference as a whole was very well planned and executed. The presenters were knowledgeable and engaging. There was a lot of information presented, a lot to still digest. Rather than giving a summary of each of the conference's presentations, I'd like to offer my thoughts on a few places where domestic violence (DV) and dispute resolution intersect.

Most conflicts that involve domestic violence do not make it to the mediation table. When a case-manager receives a request for mediation, she asks a series of screening questions, including a series on domestic violence. One valuable takeaway from the conference was a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how to identify the more subtle signs of domestic violence. Why are domestic violence cases screened out? Because almost all of them fail to meet the DRC self-determination standard, part of which reads, "self-determination means that parties are free to make *voluntary and uncoerced*" decisions. Almost by definition, a victim of domestic violence is not free from coercion and, if the violence has been inflicted long term, may not be free to make voluntary decisions. A referral to a domestic violence advocate is in order when a case is

screened out as inappropriate for mediation. A domestic violence advocate can help a victim begin to reconstruct the ability to live life in freedom and without coercion.

Sadly, that the poison fruit of domestic violence is often not so easily detected by answers to a set of screening questions. This is especially true in cases where one or both parties have suffered through traumatic experiences of violence that have subsequently shaped their lives. Learning about these adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, was, for me, the most eye-opening part of the conference. I don't have the expertise to explain ACEs properly, nor have I digested the information enough to clearly summarize what I learned at the conference. All I can say is that the ACEs workshop led by Siri Young introduced me to a new vocabulary that I am not yet equipped to use, but that I know is an essential tool for understanding the roots of the conflicts we encounter at the mediation table.

Overall, the conference was a day well-spent. An awareness of the pervasiveness and the prevalence of domestic violence is something every mediator should be aware of. A deeper understanding of how domestic violence shapes people's lives, even when it is not being committed in the immediate context of the conflict, is an important tool in a mediator's toolbox. I look forward to receiving more training on domestic violence issues in the future.



### From the Program Director

Greetings Mediators!

As we are entering into August, I cannot get over how quickly the summer has passed me by. Life being so busy, the days seem to blend one into another. As I reflect on the summer thus far, I know that I have done some nice things in addition to work, and I have a few more things to look forward to before closing out the summer. Once school starts, life gets crazier and more stressed and there is still work. I try to think about this when working with our clients as they present to us sometimes panicked or in a crisis about needing an agreement before the start of a new school year or wanting to get through their divorce so that they can move or buy a new home. I also think of the client on the other side of that situation, who isn't ready to move at all or who feels like their world is ending. As mediators, we see the entire spectrum of emotions and situations. Family situations are often heart wrenching, but can feel the most fulfilling when they are able to make some kind of movement through mediation. I know it is not because of anything I have done, but I feel honored to have been able to witness it. Those small steps, the slight movement or huge shifts that we see are, in my opinion, why we love it.

Life is hard a lot of the time, sometimes much harder than others. We do not get to change that for anyone but we may help them find their way to weather those hard times. We often do this with two clients or more at a time. What if we could also offer this, in some way, to those who seek our help but are unable to get it because the other party is not interested or willing to come to the table? Would we not do that? It is called "Conflict Coaching." I would love to see it available along with our other list of services. I am looking into the possibility of offering Conflict Coaching as our Advanced Mediation Training this year. More to come on this soon. We are also close to scheduling a Divorce Mediation Training for the fall.

Christy Houck

Hello, DRC Mediators! An online survey will be sent out asking for your input on scheduling the Divorce Mediation Training. More information on the Divorce Mediation training will be coming soon!

Book Review by April Rando

**The Emotional Toolkit: 7 Power-Skills to Nail Your Bad Feelings** by Darlene Minnini, Ph.D., M.P.H. (St. Martin's Press, 2005)

I have been doing a lot of self-reflecting on my responses to stressful situations. I would like to think of myself as a logical, even-keeled person, but sometimes I will get really upset about something and not know how to respond. As a mediator, it is a bit embarrassing to admit that occasionally I have difficulty articulating my feelings in appropriate ways. I realized that I needed better coping skills, and was lucky to find "The Emotional Toolkit" at my local library.

"The Emotional Toolkit" is a practical guide to improving emotional intelligence, that is, the ability to identify and manage your emotions to make better choices in one's life. "The Emotional Toolkit" explains how our emotions impact our physical well-being and our thought processes. Feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger, and happiness— the "gateway emotions"— affect the mind and body in different ways. Internal questioning can help identify the underlying meaning behind the emotion.

Sometimes, however, we get trapped in negative "self-talk". Our early life experiences shape the way we view ourselves, our relationships, and our communication styles. Our negative experiences become reinforced over time and can distort our perception of ourselves. When that happens, it can affect the way we react to stressful events and other conflicts. The good news is that we have the ability to learn coping skills to calm our minds and bodies, and develop better problem solving skills.

How does the "Emotional Toolkit" work? There are seven tools that can be used whenever you experience sadness, anger, and anxiety.

*("The Emotional Toolkit"- Continues on page 5)*

**“Creating Safe & Equitable Spaces for Immigrant Communities to Address Concerns,”** (Summary of a webinar hosted by the National Association for Community Mediation on July 13, 2017, by April Rando)

The National Association for Community Mediation and JAMS sponsored a study to explore how restorative practices can help disenfranchised groups engage with their communities. The study focused on the concerns of immigrant communities in Santa Ana, California, and New Bedford, Massachusetts. A series of listening sessions were organized by the Orange County Human Relations Center and the New Bedford Face-to-Face Mediation Center to identify concerns and conflicts within immigrant communities, identify existing resources, and explore how mediation centers can support conflict resolution within minority communities.

The City of Santa Ana has a significant Latino immigrant community, where ninety percent (90%) of the population speak only Spanish. The majority of the immigrants come from Mexico and reside in a four-block apartment complex in the Cedar-Evergreen Neighborhood. The families tend to be large with six or more people living together. The immigration status of these families is often mixed, that is, some members may have Lawful Permanent Resident status, while others may be undocumented. Approximately forty percent (40%) of the residents in this neighborhood are under the age of 20, and eighty percent (80%) of the households would be considered working class or poor. In the City of New Bedford, immigrants from Guatemala and Cape Verde form the largest groups. The languages spoken in the community are Spanish and Portuguese.

A series of listening sessions were held to identify the needs of the immigrant communities in both of these cities, and to learn how these needs were impacting their communities. Immigrants with limited English language skills felt unwelcome and disrespected by the larger community. There was a perception among the larger community that immigrants were lazy, took jobs away from Americans, and were not paying taxes. Economic insecurity due to limited employment opportunities or exploitative working conditions also weighed heavily on many families.

Most immigrants were fearful and mistrustful of law enforcement. The fear of deportation prevented many immigrants from contacting law enforcement in emergency situations, such as domestic violence. The Guatemalan community, in particular, felt that they

were targeted by police. Memories of a raid that happened ten years ago on the Michael Bianco factory by federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and the local police remain strong today. Residents in the Cedar-Evergreen Neighborhood stated that they felt unsafe due to gangs and drug-related activity. This created a sense of isolation, helplessness, and distress. Many families chose to stay indoors or avoid certain neighborhoods.

Families reported that they felt their children were stigmatized at school for being poor, and that their children were often taunted and bullied by other students. Many children expressed that they were afraid to go to school because they feared their parents would be deported while they were away.

During the listening sessions, residents were asked what their vision was for addressing their concerns. The immigrant communities expressed that they wanted more educational opportunities to develop their communication skills and improve their English language skills. They wanted to make their neighborhoods safer and engage with the larger community to build trust and respect. They asked for more linguistic support in the schools and with other service providers. In New Bedford, residents requested that law enforcement have a bilingual, female officer available to assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Mediation centers share the goal of creating empowered communities. To do this, they must identify the values shared by the community, create safe spaces where everyone’s voice can be heard, and provide opportunities for inclusive decision making and action planning. Restorative practices, such as dialogue circles and peer mediation, help foster community building and trust among different groups. Finally, mediation centers can help immigrants with limited English language skills by having bilingual mediators readily available to enable equal participation in the dispute resolution process.

*Access to the NAFCM webinar can be found on YouTube: “Creating Safe & Equitable Spaces for Immigrant Communities”, July 13, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5peI6OV3HrM&feature=youtu.be>*



## The A.T.I. DISPATCH

April—June 2017

*The purpose of this report is to provide more detailed information to the Alternatives to Incarceration Advisory Board regarding the number of community service hours ordered and completed per quarter. It will also report on the number of successful and unsuccessful completions and give the reasons why. Included in this report will be the referral sources, the defendant's charges and the worksites where the defendant has been assigned. My hope is that this report will be useful to all who serve on the A.T.I. Advisory Board. Thank you for all your support in making this program successful in our county.*

Ameen Aswad  
A.T.I. Chair

### Demographics

In the fourth quarter of the 2016-2017 A.T.I. contract, the program received:

- ◆ 13 referrals from the court resulting in 676 hours of court ordered community service.
- ◆ 1 referral from Probation resulting in 20 hours a week until employed.
- ◆ 777 hours of community service were completed.
- ◆ 9 successful completions.
- ◆ 10 unsuccessful completions for the various reasons:
  - 2 were unsuccessful completions from the Otsego County Adult Treatment Court.
  - 6 were unsuccessful completions from Oneonta City Court
  - 2 were administratively discharged by the Oneonta City Court.
- ◆ 3 total pending cases from this quarter.

*Without community service, we would not have a strong quality of life. It's important to the person who serves as well as the recipient. It's the way in which we ourselves grow and develop.*

*Dr. Dorothy Height, Civil Rights Activist (1912-2010)*

### Referral Sources

- ◆ 7 from Treatment Court
- ◆ 6 from Oneonta City Court
- ◆ 1 Probation

### College Students

- ◆ 9 from SUNY Oneonta
- ◆ 2 from Hartwick College
- ◆ 1 from University of Albany
- ◆ 6 students coming in August

### Worksites Assigned

- ◆ Blendos Health & Longevity Movement
- ◆ Catholic Charities
- ◆ Nader Towers
- ◆ Salvation Army Store
- ◆ SPCA

### Charges

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Grand Larceny 4th                  | 1 Criminal Poss. Forged Inst. 2nd.     |
| 1 Youthful Offender                  | 1 Poss. Sexual Performance by Child    |
| 1 Petit Larceny                      | 1 Criminal Poss. Controlled Sub. 1st . |
| 1 DWI                                | 1 Criminal Poss. Controlled Sub. 3rd   |
| 3 Disorderly Conduct                 | 1 Criminal Poss. Controlled Sub. 5th.  |
| 1 Criminal Sale Controlled Sub. 3rd. |  |
| 1 Criminal Sale Controlled Sub. 5th. |  |



## Save the Date!

### Empire Farm Days

August 8-10, 2017

**Rodman Lott & Son Farm, Seneca Falls, NY**  
**Tuesday & Wednesday, 9:00 AM-5:00 PM**  
**Thursday, 9:00 AM- 4:00 PM**

*NYSAMP is celebrating 15 years. Come for the fun, see old friends, meet new colleagues, catch exhibits/ demos, try for a door prize and check out the remarkable industry of agriculture! For more information, go to: [www.empirefarmdays.com](http://www.empirefarmdays.com)*

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**OURS**




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### Cornell Cooperative Extension/ Schoharie-Otsego Family Farm Day

Saturday, August 12, 2017, 10:00 AM-4:00 PM

Discover so much of what our local agriculture has to offer! Thirty-five farms across two counties invite you to discover their brand of farming.



Everyone is invited to write articles that would be of interest to mediators. If you have something you would like to share for the newsletter, please email your article by Friday, August 18th to April Rando at [arando@charitiesccdo.org](mailto:arando@charitiesccdo.org). Thank you!

### *("The Emotional Toolkit" continued)*

- Tool #1: "Thought-shifting"- Thought-shifting is a process where one examines and challenges their negative self-talk, and replaces it with realistic, positive messages.
- Tool #2: Mediation- Mindful meditative practices, like belly breathing, yoga, and Tai Chi, can help quiet the mind and body, and allow one to focus on the present moment.
- Tool #3: Communication- Use "I" statements to begin difficult conversations. Be specific about what you need to make the situation better. Only share your feelings with people you trust.
- Tool #4: Emotional Writing- Writing can help you examine your feelings more deeply, clarify your values and create a plan for moving forward. It is also helpful to write about things that you are grateful for, or simply write about things that make you happy. Write for yourself only.
- Tool #5: Physical Movement- Regular exercise not only keeps you physically healthy, but can help reduce feelings of sadness.
- Tool #6: Connection- Feeling connected to others can help reduce feelings of isolation and sadness.
- Tool #7: Psychotherapy- Therapy can help people examine their thoughts and emotions, and learn new ways of viewing themselves and their options in life.

The author does not recommend that one try to use all of these tools at the same time, or as a substitute for treating clinical anxiety or depression. With patience and practice, however, you can "nail your bad feelings," make better choices, and live a happier, more fulfilling life.



*Each month we feature articles about our staff and volunteer mediators.*



**Tom Pullyblank, DRC Case**

**Manager:** I have been a mediator since May of 2016, first as a volunteer and then, since January of this year, as a case manager in Herkimer County working two days a week. I became interested in

mediation as a way to live out my calling in ministry. I am currently a United Methodist pastor serving in Sidney, NY, but I am in the midst of what I call a "lateral career shift" out of local church ministry and into mediation and other forms of conflict transformation. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

What I like most about mediation is that we work to transform people from parties in conflict to peacemakers. We ourselves don't make peace for people in the throes of conflict. Rather, we provide a process and an environment that allow them to become peacemakers in their own lives. When mediation works and the parties successfully transform conflict into peace, it's a truly magical thing to see. Working in the family court, I currently do custody/visitation mediations. But I plan on becoming trained in divorce mediation and, being a small-scale farmer, I am very interested in agricultural mediation.

In my free time, I write fiction. I read a lot, some fiction but also history and current events. I find doing chores on our small farm very therapeutic. I also enjoy hiking.



**Pat Eaton, Volunteer**

**Mediator:** Many years ago, thirty-one, to be exact, I worked for the NYS Department of Labor and met a co-worker who was a new mediator. He shared how much he loved doing

mediations and thought I would enjoy it as well. At his urging, I took the training, became certified, and have never regretted that decision. I do love the process! Each case is unique. A mediator could never predict or guess the outcome of a case, so each case holds a surprise.

For instance, I once mediated a case between two very hostile women. Sensing the tension at the table, strict grounds rules were employed and, after a while, an agreement was reached. After the papers were signed, they both breathed a sigh of relief. But now, the women were not ready to say good-bye to each other. To my amazement, pictures of their children were shared and plans were made to meet for lunch at a later date! This is what makes me feel so humbly privileged - to be a part of the process of peace-maker, and mediator and, hopefully, affect the lives of others in a positive way.

I am certified for Divorce Mediation, Child Custody and Visitation, Civil Law, and Landlord/Tenant in both Montgomery and Schoharie Counties. In my free time, my husband and I travel - we love Europe! I also play Pickleball, and never miss a good game of poker with friends on a Sunday night. In my downtime, I read, design greeting cards and do decorative painting.

Correction: In the July DRC Newsletter, "Staff Spotlight" section, we printed the name of our Volunteer Mediator incorrectly. Her name is **MaryAnn Dignazio Louison**, *not* Louis. We apologize for the error.

**WANTED: VOLUNTEERS!**  
Do you know someone who might be interested in becoming a volunteer mediator or a volunteer translator? Please contact Christy Houck, DRC Program Director at [chouck@charitiesccdo.org](mailto:chouck@charitiesccdo.org)