

talk works times

Fall 2010

Serving Chemung, Schuyler and Tompkins Counties



Center stage at the block party

CDRC Celebrates Youth with Ground Breaking Block Party

CDRC led a coalition of partners to reach out to community youth and help connect young people with area resources. “We kept hearing from the youth we serve that they felt they had few options and little support,” said CDRC Case Coordinator Troy Council. So Troy and his coworkers at CDRC worked with community partners to establish a new grassroots organization that would demonstrate real support for area youth and help young people make constructive choices.

Appropriately dubbed *We The People of P.E.A.C.E.* (Positive Education Always Corrects Errors), the coalition thought reaching out by way of a major youth-centered event would make for a good start – and they were right. Calling this first event A Block Party for Youth, community leaders, entertainers, and scores of young people gathered on Saturday, October 9th from 11 am to 4 pm at Ernie Davis Community Park in Elmira to celebrate youth’s potential, share inspiring stories, and learn about resources in the region that serve young people.

Mayor John Tonello, Judge Stephen Forrest, New York State Assemblyman Tom O’ Mara and Randy Reid were among the community leaders who came out to support the event and speak to the crowd. The day focused on the positive change that youth can make for themselves and their community. Nate, Ebony, and Mike – three young people from the community – spoke with passion and humor about their own life experiences of positive change. Print and television news media covered the event as well.

Many agencies had booths offering information and opportunities for youth ages 16-22, including: the Community Dispute Resolution Center, A Partnership for Youth (Catholic Charities), Corning Community College, Elmira City School District, Empower Federal Credit Union, Southern Tier Aids Program, Trinity, Workforce New York and the YWCA.



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**They say you can’t buy peace.
But this holiday season, you can GIVE peace.**

Stop by the CDRC booth at the Ithaca Alternative Gift Fair at Dewitt Park on Saturday, December 4 from 10-6. Visit www.ithacaaltgiftfair.org for more info.





CDRC's newest mediators

Learning to Mediate: A Life Lesson in Service

18 volunteers and two staff members joined CDRC's latest mediation training in October and November, led by master instructor (and founder/former CDRC director) Judy Saul. Session I focused on the principles of transformative conflict theory, the mediator's role as an intervener in conflict, skills for responding supportively and opportunities to practice those skills. Coaches provided feedback during small group role plays.

The training finished with Session II, which focused on information related to Parenting Plan mediations, CDRC's relationship with Family Court, co-mediation, and state ethical standards. Additional role-play practice allowed the volunteers to refine their skills. Near the end of the training, each volunteer was videotaped mediating a role-play session. Judge David Brockway also spoke in detail with the group about his vision of mediation's valuable role and how it helps him in Family Court.

Next the mediators-in-training will continue their journey toward full certification as apprentices – another stage in what for many marks the beginning of a decades-long relationship with CDRC defined by selfless service.



Unsung Heroes

Our volunteer mediators are what define us as a community mediator center. At CDRC we offer mediation to the community for no cost to the parties. Behind the scene there is a group of 56 mediators with a deep understanding of the role conflict has in our lives. By their commitment to the practice and dedication to serving others they support CDRC in carrying out its vital mission.

In May 2010 we held our annual volunteer recognition events – one in Ithaca and one in Elmira. We honored all of our mediators with special gifts. Mediators with 10 years of service – Ray Gozzi, Adrienne Russell and Sharon Beckworth – were honored with an additional gift.

Mediators need to mediate six mediations a year and attend six hours of professional development training to maintain their mediator status. Many mediators at CDRC choose to exceed these standards. So once again, we send our appreciation to all of our community mediators. They make CDRC the special, effective mediation leader that it is.



Warming up for the awards ceremony with good food and great company



Hidden Valley 4-H Camp

CDRC Goes to Camp

CDRC has facilitated conflict education trainings with camp staff and counselors for the last four to five years in Tompkins County and the last two years in Schuyler County.

Reuben Siskin, Camp Manager/Director at Hidden Valley 4-H Camp, shares his reasons for working with CDRC, “Hidden Valley 4-H camp has been working with CDRC for the last two summers to train our Counselor in Training (CIT) campers. CDRC has trained our CIT’s in conflict resolution which is a skill needed as a counselor at camp. The first group of CIT’s valued CDRC’s program so much that I invited CDRC back to train my entire staff in addition to our CIT’s. The training by CDRC has given my staff at Hidden Valley 4-H Camp much needed skills in handling conflicts in the camp setting.”

Conflict education trainings for camp staff involve participants formulating an understanding of conflict based on a reflection of their own personal experience. Through interactive activities, discussion and reflection, camp staff explore the potential conflict scenarios for themselves or their campers in a camp setting. CDRC trainers also teach camp staff CDRC’s insightful perspective on conflict, as well as core principals of transformative conflict theory. Camp staff also has the opportunity to learn skills for responding supportively when someone is in conflict. They are provided opportunities to practice and apply their skills in a safe learning environment created by CDRC’s expert trainers.

Suzie Scholough, 4-H Urban Outreach Program Coordinator at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County, summed up her experience: “We have been continually impressed with the skills of Tammy [Baker, Mediation Program Director] and other CDRC trainers through the past several years, which is why we keep asking them back as part of our summer staff training. The information they provide is very relevant and crucial for strengthening communication and teambuilding among our summer staff, and offers tools to help ensure their success. Every year our counselors and junior counselors say how much they enjoyed the training.”



J.R. Clairborne

Introducing CDRC’s Newest Team Member

J.R. Clairborne joined the staff of CDRC in June as Community Liaison. His community involvement spans various boards of directors, advisory boards, and committees of local organizations. He currently sits on the Board of Directors for the United Way of Tompkins County. J.R. also serves on the City of Ithaca’s Common Council, representing the Second Ward. J. R. has given his time and talents to support different causes including the American Red Cross Red, Multicultural Resource Center, Greater Ithaca Activities Center, and the former Ithaca Rape Crisis Center. J. R.’s past experience includes service in the U.S. Navy, working for the Ithaca Journal as a criminal justice reporter and assistant local editor, and working for the Office of Marketing Communications at Ithaca College.





Michael Hartney

Everyone in the CDRC community joins in congratulating Father Harney for this honor, and everyone is delighted to have people of his caliber and selflessness committed to the organization's lofty vision.

In the course of fulfilling CDRC's mission prerogative to renew our commitment to diversity and inclusion, Gina's work has been excellent.



Gina Tinker-Williams

CDRC Board Member Michael Hartney Honored for Community Service

The Schuyler County Council of Churches awarded the Lou Sands Memorial Christian Service Award in 2010 to The Reverend Michael Hartney, a member of the CDRC Board of Directors.

The late Lou Sands was a resident of Odessa, New York, and was an extremely active member of the Schuyler County community in pursuit of justice and dignity for the poor and needy.

In recognizing Father Hartney the Council of Churches noted his service in Schuyler County to the Schuyler Outreach Food Pantry, the Schuyler Hospital Chaplaincy Committee, the Schuyler County Youth Board, the Human Services Committee of the Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Develop-

ment Board, the newly-formed Habitat for Humanity in Schuyler County, and the Schuyler County Committee on Underage Drinking.

He serves as the Rector of the Episcopal Parishes of Schuyler County: Saint James' Church in Watkins Glen, Saint John's Church in Catharine, and Saint Paul's Mission in Montour Falls.

At CDRC Father Hartney serves on the Finance Committee and recently has taken the training to become a volunteer mediator in Schuyler County. Everyone in the CDRC community joins in congratulating Father Harney for this honor, and everyone is delighted to have people of his caliber and selflessness committed to the organization's lofty vision.



CDRC Staff Member Honored for Work in Diversity

Gina Tinker-Williams, CDRC Senior Program Coordinator and Volunteer Coordinator, was honored at the Chemung County Human Relations 28th annual breakfast held on November 9th at the Elmira Holiday Inn. The Commission presented Gina with the Way award to recognize her work with CDRC.

The Way award, named after the long-time former Commission Executive Director, Ernest

Hemingway, Jr., is awarded annually to an individual who makes a substantial contribution to promoting diverse social, cultural, and ethnic perspectives.

In the course of fulfilling CDRC's mission prerogative to renew our commitment to diversity and inclusion, Gina's work has been excellent. The entire CDRC community is proud to have her on the team and sends her our hardest congratulations.



Mediation as Medicine for Ailing Democracy

in the wake of the 2010 election cycle, many people all over the nation – whether sensing disappointment or vindication – share one feeling in common: relief that the election is done.

The story of the last election had as much to do with its process as its product. Even by the often merciless standards of modern American electoral politics, this was a frightfully contentious election cycle, brimming with

reflections



Jeff Lydon,
Executive Director

ugly conflict and lacking the authentic dialogue that defines the underpinnings of functional democratic process.

Angry rhetoric from all quarters eclipsed honest debate and obscured issues. Such vitriol has become the norm in the reader comment sections following online articles about local issues as well, where anonymous cyber opponents are attacked without mercy.

That is the nature of conflict when reduced to purely adversarial terms. The prospects for recognizing another's humanity, becoming clearer about an opponent's position and expressing one's own feelings with persuasive focus all diminish in the throes of escalating conflict.

Mediation at CDRC restores one's capacity to listen and empowers one to speak with a kind of clarity that can help disputing parties break through the cycle of conflict and achieve new understanding.

The Center's mediation practice injects interventions into conversation that allows the parties to take the discussion wherever they want, and yet mediation facilitates a process of increasing understanding. Much like political opponents, parties may or may not reach resolution, but the character of their interaction transforms, creating the conditions for real progress and an end to the chaos of unmitigated conflict.

When I see mediation at work at CDRC, it gives me hope that we still have the potential as a society to work out differences with intelligence, respect and integrity. When I imagine our politics imbued with the principles of our mediation practice, I can envision a political process that's meaningful and even inspiring.

After the last election cycle, many of us could probably use that kind of inspiration.



mediator spotlight

Sandy Rhodes and Adrienne Russell: Pillars of Strength at CDRC



Sandy Rhodes and Adrienne Russell

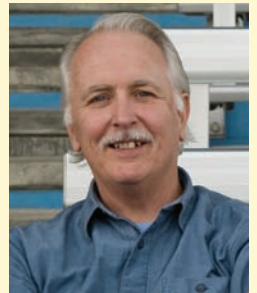
Sandy has been mediating in Schuyler County with CDRC since 1998. Already steeped in the culture of mediation at her previous post with the Neighborhood Justice Project (which subsequently folded), she joined the CDRC mediator pool with the seasoning of serious experience. Having effectively mediated scores of cases, Sandy's chief focus has involved family mediation and issues involving parenting and custody. She says, "When the process works, it works well. People end up beginning to see the other point of view and are much better able to compromise and do what's best for the child instead of getting even." Many, many families have benefited from her wisdom and commitment. Since 2000 when Adrienne Russell started working

with CDRC, she's mediated in each of the three counties where we provide services – Chemung, Schuyler and Tompkins. Adrienne's dedication and versatility has translated into advanced training, allowing her to mediate in a wide variety of specialized program areas, including: permanency, elder care and special education. Adrienne had also volunteered as a youth mentor and Family Talk mediator. Her enthusiasm for the work is infectious, as Adrienne recently commented in regard to her work as a mediator at CDRC, "There are incredible things you can learn and do."



Never Forgotten

This past year, we lost a strong agency supporter and a committed volunteer in the passing of Bob Eolin. On May 17, 2010 Schuyler County CDRC mediator Bob Eolin passed away after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Bob shared so many gifts that enriched our lives and our community. Our hearts go out to his loved ones. We will never forget him.



the art of mediation

The Transformative Framework In Action

The transformative framework was first articulated by Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger in *The Promise of Mediation* in 1994. Since then, transformative theory and practice has grown and is used in mediation, facilitation, and conflict management training all over the world.

In the transformative view, conflict is primarily about human interaction rather than "violations of rights" or "conflicts of interest". Conflict is part of the basic dynamic of human interaction in which people struggle to balance concern for self with connections to others. When this

balance is upset, human interaction becomes alienated and destructive, simply put there is a crisis in human interaction.

For most people, according to the transformative theory, being caught in this kind of destructive interaction is the most significant negative impact of conflict. However, the transformative framework posits that, despite conflict's natural destabilizing impacts on interaction, people have the capacity to regain their footing and shift back to a restored sense of strength or confidence in self (the empowerment shift) and openness or

Conflict Can Mean Opportunity in the Workplace

CDRC mediates all kinds of conflict. Sometimes the conflict involves family, sometimes neighbors, sometimes small claims action.

One of the most interesting kinds of mediation CDRC does involves the workplace. Conflict in the workplace can be devastating to morale, communication and productivity. When such strife comes to work, it often follows us home and throws us off balance even when the workday is done.

But at CDRC, we understand conflict as an opportunity to achieve clarity, certainly a precondition for resolving conflict in order to restore functionality and good will to an otherwise contentious workplace environment.

Recently, when the senior staff and entry level employees of an area mid-size business contacted us for help, CDRC was ready. Conflict concerning equal treatment, perceived uncooperativeness, compensation, communication channels, and cliques had done real damage to the business. Turnover was high and morale was low.

The parties in conflict came to the mediation table and had the chance to express their views in a forum where the prompting of gentle yet expert mediator interventions helped each party not only express herself with clarity but better understand the other party's perspective.

It was not easy. It rarely is. It takes courage and character to come to that table. But after a while, something happened. Fundamental shifts in the quality of the relationship between the parties started happening one after the other. Each was able to recognize the other and express that recognition. Each became clearer and experienced a sense of empowerment.

The parties left the table with work left to do, but they also left with the understanding necessary to succeed in that work. Asked separately about their experiences, a representative of the senior staff talked about the importance of the change in their interaction, as it seemed all sides came to see their role in the conflict. And one of the newer employees expressed the same sentiment almost verbatim.

It was perhaps the first time they'd agreed about anything in a long time.

Such outcomes are hardly surprising to the staff and mediators of CDRC, because in our quiet, subtle work we see them every day. However, those results never fail to inspire – and to remind us that Talk Works.

transformative moments

responsiveness to the other (the recognition shift). Moreover, these positive moves also feed into each other on all sides, and the interaction can therefore regenerate and assume a constructive, connecting, and humanizing character. The model assumes that this transformation of the interaction itself is what matters most to parties in conflict - even more than resolution on favorable terms.

If mediators do their job, parties are likely to make positive changes in their interactions with each other and, as a result, find acceptable terms of resolution for themselves where such terms genuinely exist. But the possibility is also left open that parties may voluntarily choose, and be satisfied, to leave the mediation with new insights on their choices and new interpersonal understandings but no agreement, or even to take the conflict to a different forum such as litigation. Settlement remains a distinct possibility - one choice available to the parties depending upon

how their own goals and insights develop through the mediation conversation - but is no longer the single outcome privileged by the mediator or the mediator's single measure of a successful mediation.

The transformative framework is based on a relational view of the world: the view that people are autonomous beings who are at the same time fundamentally connected to one another, and who are constantly striving to balance their autonomy with relating to others. A relational orientation is not the same as a relationship orientation. Transforming the quality of people's interaction is not equivalent to establishing positive, harmonious relationships. Achieving recognition does not always mean that people adopt positive views of each other. People can understand each other better and based upon that understanding decide to end relationships, create distance between themselves, or protect themselves from each other.

Thanks to CDRC, Talk Works!

in Chemung, Schuyler and Tompkins Counties

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