

# Notes from the Carriage House House Fall 2008

## THE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

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As the economic picture becomes gloomier and non-profits prepare to hunker down and weather budget cuts, I am pleased to report that the Community Mediation Center has fared extremely well. We once again received generous funding from the Rhode Island Supreme Court to continue running our Small Claims Court Mediation Program. All of our loyal sponsoring Senators and Representatives - Senators Moltalano, Goodwin, Perry, Metts, and Representative Fox - once again saw that we received funding through legislative grants. We were delighted to learn earlier this month that the Rhode Island Foundation would again fund year two of our new Juvenile Restorative Justice Project. Our private donors, including our wonderful Board of Directors, have stepped up to the plate as well. Last month we found ourselves the grateful recipients of a large donation from the

Rhode Island Council of Family Mediators, made in honor of the late Kathy Birt. Kathy was a mentor, a visionary, a teacher, a friend to so many, and a woman instrumental in promoting the concept of peaceful conflict resolution in Rhode Island. Funds from these and many other sources ensure continued success for the Mediation Center in these difficult times when, perhaps more than ever, our services are desperately needed.

In other Center news, this fall CMCRI convened a committee to discuss implementing continuing educational requirements for our mediators in the absence of state requirements beyond the 30 hours of training needed to invoke confidentiality. We hope to circulate a draft of the new policy to our volunteer body for comments late this fall. Many thanks to committee members Nan Starr, Susan Pracht, Michele Gousie Geremia, Erika Kruse, and Victoria Moreno-Jackson

as well as a special thanks to Holly Hitchcock, who agreed to chair the committee.

Finally, congratulations to Program Associate Elmis Navarro, who just celebrated her one-year anniversary with the Center. Elmis mediates in the courts, assists with designing and running trainings, and works under the Eviction Prevention Program. The success of the Eviction Prevention Program, highlighted below, would not have been possible without Elmis' hard work, dedication and endless compassion.

Cheers, and Happy Fall!

Abigail Jones-Herriott

## *Measuring Success: The Eviction Prevention Program*

CMCRI's Landlord-Tenant Eviction Prevention Program, which combines mediation, case management and rental assistance to avert eviction, is a comprehensive approach to preventing homelessness. Through collaboration with Crossroads Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, for the second consecutive year Rhode Island Housing awarded CMCRI \$16,666.66 in Road Home rental assistance funds to augment our landlord/tenant mediations, one hundred percent of which goes towards rental assistance to prevent homelessness. This past July, CMCRI was awarded an additional \$6,666.66 in Road Home Funds, bringing the total amount of available rental assistance to \$23,333.32. This increase, the result of advocacy on the part of CMCRI and its collaborating partners, was a sig-

nificant victory at a time when Rhode Island Housing's budget was being drastically slashed. The increase in funding represents recognition of the unique and critical role CMCRI's Eviction Prevention Program plays in preventing homelessness.

A key component to this program is determining the long-range effectiveness of the mediation process in homelessness prevention. As a result, CMCRI staff performs follow-up interviews with both landlords and tenants at three and six-month intervals following a mediation session in which rental assistance funds were disbursed. While this method can be difficult given that the tenant population seeking assistance from CMCRI often have disconnected phones, out of the 28 rental assistance mediations that took place between July 2007 and July

2008, CMCRI staff was able to track down both of the parties in 27 of them. Of those 27 cases, 25 (or 92.5%) families had maintained their housing at the three-month follow-up. For the two cases in which housing was not maintained at the three-month follow-up, both landlords nonetheless reported overwhelming satisfaction with the process.

Of the 25 cases in which housing was maintained at the three-month mark, the second follow-ups took place between six months and one year following the mediation session. In those 25 cases, 24 (88.8%) either successfully maintained the tenancy, or successfully completed their agreement and moved on to new housing without being evicted. In the one case in which the housing was not maintained, it was due to the landlord being foreclosed upon, and not because the tenant was evicted or failed to adhere to the agreement. Overall, in 85% of the rental assistance cases mediated, housing was maintained at the one-year mark. By any measure the above statistics represent an enormous success. This program is particularly relevant as

heating, food, utility and fuel costs continue to soar, and more and more Rhode Islanders are finding themselves one paycheck from disaster.

CMCRI's Landlord-Tenant Eviction Prevention Program is generously funded by the Rhode Island Bar Foundation and by a Representative Gordon Fox-sponsored Legislative grant.

**To learn more about this program, or to make a referral, please contact Elmis Navarro at [enavarro@cmcri.org](mailto:enavarro@cmcri.org), or at 273-9999.**



## *CMCRI Looking for Nominees for Frank J. Williams Award*

Each year at CMCRI's annual "A Special Kind of Justice" fundraiser, held in late January, the Center selects two recipients to honor with the Frank J. Williams Award for Excellence in Promoting Mediation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution. This year for the first time the Center is soliciting nominations for this award from the general public. Those wishing to nominate someone are encouraged to think local and to be creative - a nominee could be an individual in either his or her professional or personal capacity; a lawyer who has been particularly supportive of mediation; a school; an agency, or an entity. Nominees need not be mediators, or even conflict resolution professionals, as long as their efforts promote the cause of peaceful conflict resolution. If you would like to nominate someone for this award, please fax CMCRI at 273-7311 with the following information: your name and contact information; the nominee's name and contact information; and why you have selected this individual. Nominations are due by 5:00 PM on Monday, November 17, 2008.

## *CMCRI Celebrates Conflict Resolution Day*

"Conflict Resolution Day," which falls on the third Thursday in October, was observed in Rhode Island this year on October sixteenth. To commemorate the event, CMCRI collaborated with Bruce Kogan and the Mediation Clinic at the Roger Williams University School of Law to co-host an event. This year, attendees viewed the inspiring and award-winning documentary film, "*Divided We Fall: Americans in the Aftermath*," by Sharat Raju and Valerie Kaur. In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, college student Valerie Kaur and her cousin Sonny traveled across America to discover and document stories of racism and violence related by victims of hate crimes who were predominantly of the Sikh community. Valerie and her cousin also sought through this journey to illuminate from these stories the power of forgiveness. Her journey became *Divided We Fall*. Since September of 2006 the film has been on an international tour during which the filmmakers have been invited to 150 screenings in 90 cities across the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and India. Attendees

included not only CMCRI staff and volunteers, but individuals from the Rhode Island Department of the Treasury Victim Compensation Fund, the Roger Williams Law School, Brown University, CCAP, immigration attorneys and the Human Rights Commission.

After the screening, attendees were invited to participate in a group discussion facilitated by CMCRI staff members Pamela Humphreys and Elmis Navarro. The discussion flowed easily and focused on the themes of race, identity and community. At the heart of the discussion was the question of how those in the conflict resolution community can be agents of change by using their skills to bring about positive results from the myriad conflicts that inevitably arise in our daily lives, families, government and schools. We look forward to next year's event and reaching an even greater audience to commemorate this day.

## ACR in Austin

### By Nan Starr

### Guest Columnist

Nan is a long time court and community volunteer with CMCRI and received her Master's in Mediation and Applied Conflict Studies in June 2008 from Woodbury College.



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he 8th Annual Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) Conference, titled **“Aspirations, Possibilities, and Realities: Expanding Principles, Practice and Research in a Changing World”** provided over 1000 conflict resolution practitioners from around the country, and the world, a good excuse to spend four energized late September days together in Austin, Texas. Sandwiched between an illuminating keynote presentation by The Honorable Lee H. Hamilton titled “Iraq; Where Do We Go From Here?” and a closing presentation by Reverend Mpho A. Tutu, daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was a smorgasbord of nearly 200 workshops, plenary sessions, pre-conference institutes, panel discussions and Texas-style special events.

My appetite for insight into the implementation of restorative justice practices was satiated by several workshops with a restorative focus. Community Mediation Maryland presented what turned out to be one of my favorite sessions titled “Breaking Into Jail: Bringing Mediation Into Prisons for Pre-Release Mediations for Inmates and Families.”

As is usually the case, there were too many enticing sessions to choose from, and a shortage of down time to explore Austin. So, joined by a couple of colleagues, I capped the four-day conference off with a fifth day, enjoying a stealth outergate experience at Austin City Limits music festival, a couple hours of volunteering at Obama headquarters, and a sci-fi view of the world-famous Congress Street Bridge Bat Emergence at dusk.

For those of you new to the conflict resolution conference circuit, check out this year's Annual NEACR Conference (New England arm of the ACR), coming up on December 11-12 in Shrewsbury, MA (<http://www.neacr.org>). This would be a good warm-up for next year's Annual ACR Conference (<http://www.acrnet.org/conferences>) which will be on October 7-10 in Atlanta, Georgia!

*“The Association for Conflict Resolution is a professional organization dedicated to enhancing the practice and public understanding of conflict resolution”*

## Calendar

- ⇒ **October/November 2008** - CMCRI's 34 Hour Basic Mediation Skills Training - Our Fall Basic Mediation Skills Training begins on Tuesday, October 28th and will run for 3 weeks. This training is full, but if you know anyone who is interested in getting trained as a mediator, please have them email Victoria Moreno-Jackson at [vmoreno-jackson@cmcri.org](mailto:vmoreno-jackson@cmcri.org) to be put on the wait-list for our Spring 2009 training.
- ⇒ **Wednesday, October 29th** - 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM - "Making Peace on eBay: Resolving Disputes in the World's Largest Marketplace" - This meeting is being hosted by the Project on Negotiation in Cambridge, MA and will be held at Harvard Law School, Pound Hall, John Chipman Gray Room, 2nd Floor. If you are interested in attending this meeting, please RSVP to Lisa Witzler: [lwitzler@law.harvard.edu](mailto:lwitzler@law.harvard.edu)
- ⇒ **Friday, November 21st** - 8:00 AM - RI Mediators Association - At the November meeting Christine Ariel will speak on "Maintaining Neutrality /Checking our Biases." For more information or to RSVP, please email Michele Gousie Geremia at [exec@rimediators.org](mailto:exec@rimediators.org).

**The 2008 Bi-Monthly Mediators Meetings:** These meetings are held on the last Tuesday of alternating months. By popular vote our mediators have asked that the meeting time be changed from a breakfast slot (8:00 - 9:30 AM) to an afternoon slot (4:30 - 6:00 PM). The 2009 Bi-Monthly Mediator Meeting Schedule will be sent out later this year. CMCRI provides snacks and beverages at these meetings. E-mail reminders will go out beforehand announcing agendas and topics to be discussed. As always, please let us know if there are topics you would like to see discussed or areas you would like to learn more about during these meetings. The remaining 2008 meeting is described below.

- ⇒ ■ **Tuesday, November 25th** - 4:30 - 6:00 PM: Mediating Educational Issues with Educators and Parents - Mediation is being used more frequently for resolving disputes between parents and educators, and one of these options is mediation. Kevin Nerney, Esq. from Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project will speak about how mediation is used in these situations and the regulations relating to mediating these cases. CMCRI will be assisting with educational mediations when the members of the regular education mediator panel are unavailable. We expect to do a handful of these mediations each year. Participation in these mediations will be limited to experienced mediators or mediators that have experience working with schools / school districts. If you wish to be eligible to mediate these cases, you must attend this meeting as well as at least 2 hours of related training that will be scheduled at various times in the coming year. Thanks to Joan Gelch and to Rita Michaelson, two of the educational mediator panelists, who were instrumental in opening this exciting opportunity to CMCRI.
- ⇒ ■ **December 11th and 12th** - New England Association For Conflict Resolution (NEACR) 2008 Annual Conference - This Conference will feature networking opportunities, lectures, and interactive trainings. The conference will be held at Hoagland-Pincus Conference Center, UMass Worcester Campus in Shrewsbury, MA. For more information or to register, please see the NEACR website: <http://www.neacr.org/index.cfm>.
- ⇒ ■ **January 29, 2008** - 5:30 - 7:30 PM - SAVE THE DATE for CMCRI's "A Special Kind of Justice" Annual Fund-raiser - This event will be again be held at the Rhode Island Supreme Court. If you are interested in sponsoring the event or placing an ad in our ad book, please email Abigail Jones-Herriott at [ajones-herriott@cmcri.org](mailto:ajones-herriott@cmcri.org), but please be patient when awaiting a response as she is still on maternity leave!



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