

Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island

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Winter 2008 Newsletter ■ Notes from the Carriage House

The Director's Corner

2007 will be remembered as a year of change and growth for the Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island. We said goodbye to our former director, transitioned to a new director, doubled the size of our permanent staff by welcoming on board new staffers Elmis Navarro and Meri Kaufman, replaced and updated our technology, and continued to identify and create new community partnerships and referral sources. At the end of 2007, we were delighted to learn we had been awarded a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to create a Juvenile Restorative Justice Project, under which juvenile first time offenders aged 8 – 14 will have the opportunity to meet face-to-face with their victims in a structured setting outside of the court process.

Outreach efforts on the part of the staff have paid off and referrals continue to pour into the Center. During the first half of the year, CMCRI received referrals for 62 housing cases under our Eviction Prevention Program. In the second 6 months of 2007, we received 112 housing cases - nearly double that amount! During 2007, CMCRI staff and dedicated volunteer mediators mediated or assisted in resolving through informal conflict resolution methods well over 400 cases.

None of this would be possible without the support of our dedicated volunteer mediators, our hardworking and active Board of Directors, or our funders and donors. A big thank you, in particular, goes out to CMCRI's Executive Committee members Captain Steve Melaragno, John Finnerty, Loraine Della Porta and Kate Kilguss. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our funders - the USDA; the Rhode Island Supreme Court; Representative Gordon Fox; Senator Maryellen Goodwin; Senator Harold Metts; Senate President Joseph Montalbano; Senator Rhoda Perry; the Rhode Island Bar Association; and our latest funder, the Rhode Island Foundation.

I hope you will join us for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and jazz at our upcoming fundraiser on January 24th at the Rhode Island Supreme Court, where we will have the pleasure of honoring Senator Rhoda Perry and the Roger Williams University School of Law Mediation Clinic with the Frank J. Williams Excellence in Promoting Mediation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution Award.

I anticipate continued growth and new opportunities for CMCRI in 2008. Happy New Year!

Abbie Jones-Herriott, Director

CMCRI CALENDAR: Upcoming Events, Meetings & Workshops

■ CMCRI's annual fundraiser "A Special Kind of Justice" will be held on January 24th, 2008 from 5:30 to 8:00 PM at the Rhode Island Supreme Court building on 250 Benefit Street. We will be presenting the Chief Justice Frank J. Williams Award for Excellence in Promoting Mediation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution to Senator Rhoda Perry and to the Roger Williams School of Law Mediation Clinic. Tickets are \$45.00 each. We hope you'll join us for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, jazz, and this opportunity to honor our supporters. If you are interested in sponsoring us at our fundraiser or placing an advertisement in our program, we would love to hear from you!

■ The 2008 Bi-Monthly Mediators Meeting will continue to take place 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 2008 Meeting dates are:

- Tuesday, January 29th
- Tuesday, March 25th
- Tuesday, May 27th
- Tuesday, July 29th
- Tuesday, September 30th
- Tuesday, November 25th

CMCRI will provide 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.

■ CMCRI will be offering its bi-annual 34 hour **Basic Mediation Skills training this March** – stay tuned for announcements about the schedule. If you would like to be on our wait list to reserve a slot for this training, or to receive notification of the schedule via e-mail, please contact CMCRI at 273-9999 for more information.

■ CMCRI will also be offering a three-day **Victim-Offender Mediation training in April**, for all mediators wishing to assist with our Juvenile Restorative Justice Project mediation cases. This training will be open to the public, although a certain number of spaces will be reserved for CMCRI mediators. There will be a cost associated with this training, with a discount for CMCRI volunteers. An e-mail with more details will be distributed in the near future. Please feel free to call for more information, or to be on our waiting list to ensure a space in the training.

CMCRI News

Making a Difference

From July 2007, until the present, CMCRI has had the privilege of being a part of the Road Home program. CMCRI collaborated with Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless and Crossroads on the Road Home grant from Rhode Island Housing, and together, the agencies were awarded \$25,000 to use to prevent homelessness. CMCRI has been using its share of the funds for rental assistance in conjunction with the mediation process. CMCRI brings the landlord and the tenant together to talk about any issues regarding the tenancy. In certain cases, CMCRI has approved up to one month's rent to be distributed to the landlord in order to help a tenant that has fallen behind in rent, but can otherwise afford the apartment.

The statistics from the first 6 months are staggering. By distributing \$7656.50, we have prevented 32 people from losing their housing. Statistically, that means it only cost \$239.27 per person to keep them in their homes. With the mediation aspect of the process, we are repairing the landlord tenant relationship so that they have the tools for an ongoing relationship where they can communicate with one another more productively in the future. Due to our outreach efforts and our ability to provide rental assistance, our landlord tenant case numbers have skyrocketed. We would love to be able to provide this service to more people, and you can help us by donating funds specifically to the Eviction Prevention program. If you mark your contribution for the Eviction Program, 100% of your funds will be used to help prevent homelessness. If you are interested in donating to this program, please contact us!

Fund for Community Progress Workplace Campaign 2008

As many of you know, CMCRI is a member of the Fund for Community Progress. The Fund is a coalition of 28 local grassroots organizations with a focus on social change that have banded together to give Rhode Islanders another option for workplace giving.

Through The Fund, more than 95 corporate, government, educational, health care and nonprofit workplaces now offer their employees the opportunity to expand their philanthropy to agencies working to transform struggling communities in this state. If you opt to give directly to a specific agency through the Fund, 100% of your dollar will go directly to that agency. If you are interested in having CMCRI staff come to your workplace to talk about offering giving opportunities through The Fund, please call the center at 273-9999.

CMCRI Welcomes 12 New Mediators

This past November CMCRI held its bi-annual Basic Mediation Skills Training. We were fortunate to have Patricia Taubin as our trainer. Patricia is an experienced community mediator and trainer who has taught conflict resolution workshops, mediation trainings, and the Principles of Non-Violence to all ages in both educational and professional settings. Trainees and CMCRI staff alike were impressed with Patricia's sense of humor, boundless energy, engaging teaching methods and ability to capture and hold the group's attention, even on the rainiest of Saturday mornings. The training brought together participants from many different agencies and professions, including an administrative law judge, several lawyers, a police chief, a Human Rights Commission investigator, and many community advocates. The diverse experiences of this group provided the training with an amazing opportunity to discuss mediation in the context of multiple settings amongst different types of people. We truly appreciated the enthusiasm which the participants brought to this training. As some of you may have noticed, a good number of our newly-trained mediators have already made their way onto our small claims court calendar. CMCRI would like to extend a hearty welcome and thank everyone who participated in this training and helped to make it a success.

Staff Position Open at CMCRI

Job Title: Program Associate/Mediation Advocate under CMCRI's Juvenile Restorative Justice Project

Start Date: Mid March – Early April 2008

Job Description:

The Mediation Advocate is responsible for handling a mediation caseload, which includes fielding calls from interested parties; making referrals where necessary and as appropriate; conducting intake interviews; educating parties about mediation; assessing cases for

appropriateness; preparing parties for the process; scheduling and coordinating mediation sessions; and acting as the staff representative and support person before, during and after a session. The Advocate's caseload will consist primarily of victim/offender matters under CMCRI's new Juvenile Restorative Justice Program, which seeks to reach first time youthful offenders, aged 8 – 14, and engage them in the mediation process as an alternative to the criminal justice system. The Mediation Advocate will also represent CMCRI at community meetings; conduct community outreach and education about the program; develop and further relationships with referral sources; assist staff with trainings and conflict resolution workshops; assist the Executive Director with locating additional funding sources; and mediate as needed. Other duties will involve administrative assistance as needed, aiding with the preparation of grant reports and assisting with CMCRI's bi-annual fundraisers. Occasional nights and weekends will be required. This is a one-year grant-funded position, which will be extended given continued funding.

Job Requirements:

An interest in and demonstrated commitment to issues of social justice, involvement with youth and disadvantaged populations, and an ability to work with diverse populations are required. The ideal candidate will have mediation training and experience; a strong interest in peaceful conflict resolution; some case management experience; the ability to speak well before groups; enthusiasm, initiative, excellent multi-tasking, self-starting and organizational skills. Fluency in Spanish a plus. Candidates of color are encouraged to apply.

To apply: Please send a cover letter and resume either by mail or fax by January 31, 2008 to CMCRI Executive Director Abigail Jones-Herriott. Thank you!

Mediation Matters:

A landlord/tenant mediation success story

People often ask us what we actually *do* at the mediation center, and often comment that the process is hard to imagine without stories to illustrate it. Talking specifics about the work is difficult because of the sensitive nature of many of the cases that come through our doors, as well as our obligation to preserve client privacy and confidentiality. In response to such questions, however, and with the permission of our clients, we have decided to begin publishing a description of a recently-conducted mediation session in each newsletter. Names and other identifying information are changed to protect confidentiality. What follows below is a description of a mediation that took place this fall.

Tonya's Story

Tonya was a young woman who had recently aged out of the DCYF system and was utterly on her own, with no family to assist or offer support when she lost her job and fell behind on rent. She managed to find herself another position within a short time, but was finding it nearly impossible to catch up on the back rent she owed her landlord. Her landlord, having successfully participated in a landlord/tenant mediation in the past, referred Tonya to CMCRI's Eviction Prevention Program. Both parties agreed to mediate as an alternative to Tonya's landlord filing an eviction complaint in court. During the intake process CMCRI staff ascertained that Tonya would be able to maintain the tenancy with her new salary, and worked with her to develop a workable payment plan she could propose to her landlord. Tonya was then approved for a disbursement of rental assistance, to be paid to her landlord towards the back rent owed. During the mediation session the parties negotiated a payment plan that met Tonya's need to pay off

the arrearage in manageable increments and the landlord's need to receive the rent owed. The parties also agreed to contact CMCRI and attempt another mediation in the event that the payment plan needed re-negotiating. Well aware of Tonya's history in state foster care, the landlord privately revealed that it would have been extremely upsetting to have to evict her, and expressed great relief that mediation existed as an alternative. Both parties concluded the mediation session by profusely thanking CMCRI.

CMCRI volunteer mediators are encouraged to write up stories about court or community mediations of interest for submission to the center for publication in the newsletter.

Wish List

As many of you know, the EastSide Marketplace in Providence donates 1% of your saved receipts back to the Community Mediation Center. We have now signed up with Shaw's Supermarket to receive 1% back from all the Shaw's and Star Market receipts we turn in. This money can really add up – just imagine if 20 of our supporters routinely sent grocery receipts to the Center! **Please save your Eastside Marketplace, Shaw's and Star Market receipts and either mail or drop them by the Mediation Center.**

Thank you!

CMCRI STAFF
Abigail Jones-Herriott, Executive Director
Victoria Moreno-Jackson, Program Director
Elmis Navarro, Program Associate
Meri Kaufman, Administrative Assistant
