

Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island

FEBRUARY 2009

Director's Corner

Happy 2009!

Over the past several weeks I have completed a number of grant applications which asked me to describe the agency's major accomplishments. As it turned out this was rather a satisfying task, since I found that having the opportunity to look at the big picture and celebrate our successes, particularly as a new year unfolds, was helpful for me in reaffirming the impact and the importance of our work

Since 1996 the Center has grown from a Board-run agency with no paid staff into a regionally-recognized dispute resolution center with five staff and over 50 active, trained volunteers. While once it was not unusual to receive less than 5 referrals per month, the current monthly average ranges from 30 – 40. In 2008 CMCRI staff processed referrals in nearly 400 separate incidents in which community members sought to resolve conflicts through mediation, facilitated 23 community meetings, and offered 18 customized workshops or trainings - ranging from a three-day victim/offender mediation training, to a three-hour workshop for Rhode Island College students. In addition to the Center's varied community work, this past year CMCRI staff and volunteers mediated 325 small claims court cases with a settlement rate of 76%.

From a program standpoint, two of the Center's most significant accomplishments involve the creation of two distinct and exciting projects – the Juvenile Restorative Justice Project (JRJP), and the cash component of the Landlord/Tenant Eviction Prevention Program. The JRJP began as a pilot program in 2007 when CMCRI received a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to start a youth-focused victim-offender mediation program grounded in the concepts of restorative justice. The “restorative justice” movement asserts that when a crime occurs, the victim, the community, and the offender all are harmed. Where retributive justice seeks to assign blame and mete out punishment, restorative justice practices focus on healing and repairing the damage done to all, while ensuring offender accountability. Under this project CMCRI works with youthful first-time offenders to encourage them, through the mediation process, to understand the import of their actions upon the victim and upon the larger community.

The second major program accomplishment involves securing rental assistance monies to augment the Center's Landlord/Tenant Eviction Prevention Program. Although the program had been in existence since 2003 it did not reach its full potential until the spring of 2007 when CMCRI received a significant grant from Rhode Island Housing to augment landlord/tenant mediations in which tenants faced eviction. In 2009 that grant award was substantially increased. This program is particularly relevant as evictions for failure to pay rent are on the rise, as the state-wide economic picture worsens, as benefits programs receive cuts while unemployment rates soar, and as the number of Rhode Islanders living in poverty increases.

In this issue:

Director's Corner	1
Frank J. Williams Award	2
Spotlight Holly Hitchcock	4
Upcoming Events	5

These are difficult times in which to be leading a non-profit agency. Like most small non-profits, CMCRI constantly struggles with resource challenges, including attracting qualified, dynamic new Board members, securing new sponsors for annual fundraisers, encouraging private donors to give, fulfilling the mission to ensure that the public knows who we are, retaining qualified staff given low salaries. and, most recently, scrambling to mitigate the effect of budget cuts on our various programs.

But these are exciting, hopeful times as well, when our nation has an elected leader who recognizes the importance of peaceful conflict resolution and of the search for common ground between competing viewpoints. As the director of an agency dedicated to peaceful conflict resolution, it is heartening to see a shift away from policies that are divisive and destructive and towards that which is collaborative and creative. How affirming to hear a Presidential acceptance speech that asks us to *"find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort."*

What would happen if we all made that our New Year's resolution?

Wishing you all the happiest and healthiest of New Years,
Abbie Jones-Herriott

CMCRI Honors 2009 Recipients of the Frank J. Williams Award



Chief Justice
Williams (Ret.)

On January 29th, CMCRI held its annual fundraiser, "A Special Kind of Justice" at the Rhode Island Supreme Court. Despite the icy conditions and freezing temperatures, over one hundred people turned out to listen to jazz, sip cocktails, and nibble hors d'oeuvres while recognizing the impact of mediation on our community. At the event CMCRI presented Judge Robert Pirraglia and volunteer mediator and trainer Patricia Taubin with the Frank J. Williams Award for Excellence in Promoting Mediation and Conflict Resolution. The award is designed to salute individuals who have had a significant impact in the area of peaceful conflict resolution in Rhode Island and is named for the now-retired Chief Justice Williams, a long-time promoter of CMCRI and an advocate for the increased use of mediation throughout the court system.

Judge Pirraglia has been a Rhode Island District Court judge since 1984. He has written extensively on the role of the judge and court and media relations, has planned and implemented three Presidential Showcase programs at ABA Annual Meetings dealing with the relationship between the courts, the community and the media, and has been teaching throughout the United States for 10 years on various subjects. Judge Pirraglia also hosts a weekly cable television program called "The Judges' Roundtable" and serves as a member of the ABA House of Delegates, the Association's policy making body, representing The Judicial Division's Specialized Court Judges. When not out of state teaching and lecturing, Judge Pirraglia serves as an appellate case mediator for the Rhode Island Supreme Court, where he consistently achieves high settlement rates and receives enthusiastic evaluations from participants. Judge Pirraglia is a strong advocate of the mediation process and its importance in ensuring self determination for parties in conflict.

Patricia Taubin immigrated into the United States from Argentina in 1986, where, while working on her master's degree, she began an internship with a community mediation center in upper Manhattan. There she



Honoree Patricia Taubin and family

mediated thousands of court and community cases, trained others to be mediators, and developed a variety of educational materials.

Patricia also underwent extensive training in violence prevention, as well as trainings on bullying, child abuse, hate crimes, divorce mediation, and prejudice reduction. For her commitment and dedication to her work, she received three separate citations from the State of New York. In 2003, Patricia relocated to Providence,



Joe Brummer

Rhode Island, where she began working as a trainer and consultant for the Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island, focusing on the Center's peer mediation programs, and became



(L-R) Meri Kaufman, Pam Muschiano, Elmis Navarro, Judge Pirraglia, Victoria Moreno-Jackson, Patricia Taubin

involved with a variety of local violence prevention initiatives. Patricia currently does consulting and training work in the areas of intercultural mediation, conflict management, and violence prevention. She trains mediators through the Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island's Basic Mediation Training Course and volunteers her time to mediate both court and community cases through the Center. Her interests include working to equip youth and adults alike with peaceful conflict resolution skills, educating the community on the impact of violence, and restorative justice work.



Chief Justice Williams (Ret.) and Judge Robert Pirraglia

Providence Mayor David Cicciline, a long time CMCRI Advisory Board member and one of the event's sponsors, spoke during the program and thanked the honorees for their commitment to the cause. Justice Williams both attended and spoke at the event, introducing Judge Pirraglia and presenting him with his award. CMCRI volunteer mediator Joe Brummer, a trainer in the field of non violence, non violent communication and conflict resolution and a longtime colleague of Ms. Taubin's, presented her with her award. Past honorees include former Chief Justice Weisberger, Associate Justice, Shea, CMCRI Founder Joan Gelch, Judge Indeglia, Supreme Court ADR Director Erika Kruze, the late Judge Gonella, Senator Rhoda Perry, and the Roger Williams University School of Law Mediation Clinic.



Providence Mayor David Cicciline

Spotlight on Holly Hitchcock

Holly is a new CMCRI Board Member as well as a mediator, and is the Executive Director of the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Commission (MCLE) with the Rhode Island Supreme Court, where she plans programs, communicates with over 6,000 attorneys, and provides guidance to sponsors of legal education for curriculum development. A native Rhode Islander, Holly hails from Barrington, taking a stint in Florida to earn her graduate degree and returning to New England to receive her mediation education and training from the late Kathleen Birt at Roger Williams University. Holly remembers Kathleen Birt as “one of the world’s greatest peacemakers.”

CMCRI: How did you come to be a practitioner and an advocate for mediation?

HH: I became interested in mediation for a variety of reasons. I believe in the process. It offers parties a pathway, not only to resolution but to greater understanding and in many cases the unexpected byproduct of personal growth and healing. Adding mediation skills to my professional repertoire allowed me to utilize my background in education and counseling in an innovative way.

CMCRI: What made you decide to serve on the Board of Directors for CMCRI?

HH: As past President of the RI Council of Family Mediators, I had many opportunities to watch CMCRI grow from its inception. Having strong feelings about our collective obligations to our community I have long been impressed by the passion and effectiveness of everyone associated with CMCRI. The Landlord/tenant program and the restorative justice mediations the Center facilitates make an immediate and enormous impact on people’s quality of life. It is an honor to join the Board to serve the common good that radiates from the hard and constant work of CMCRI.

CMCRI: Does your professional role with the Supreme Court and your work on the Board ever cross paths? If so, how?

HH: It does in that the Court has fully embraced mediation, especially through its civil mediation programs. As well, I accredit mediation training that meets continuing legal education standards. This helps further acquaint lawyers with options for their clients. I hope in a lateral way I am an appropriate liaison among the judiciary, attorneys and mediators.

CMCRI: What do you see as the biggest challenges for mediation in RI?

HH: Public awareness; getting people to think about consensus building as the first line of problem solving. I do however, think that mediation is enjoying a huge surge. As the public, lawyers and judges become more knowledgeable about what mediation actually is and how it fits into the spectrum of choices people have the more common sense it becomes.

CMCRI: In the world of mediation, who inspires you?

HH: I am most inspired by the clients of mediation. They never cease to amaze me with their humanity.

Spotlight on Holly Hitchcock (cont.)

CMCRI: What do you find to be the most challenging part of the mediation process?

HH: The failure of words themselves. Since words and our interpretation of the words we hear make up only 7% of actual communication it is always a struggle to help people find the right words, gestures, tone of voice and personal vulnerability to allow them to really speak and listen to each other.

CMCRI: As a mediator, could you describe a value that you hold most dear and why?

HH: Honesty. Fully disclosed honesty. Without honesty (sometimes honesty in its harshest light) real understanding and settlement satisfaction can't be claimed.

Upcoming Events

- **March/April 2009** – CMCRI's 34-Hour Basic Mediation Skills Training – at CMCRI in Providence, RI - Our Spring **Basic Mediation Skills Training** begins on Tuesday, March 17th and will run for 3 weeks. There is space available in this training, so 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 to register for our Spring 2009 training or be put on the wait list for our Fall training. A limited number of partial scholarships are available, as are discounts for non-profit agencies and organizations enrolling more than one trainee. CMCRI has applied for CEU credits for social workers; past participating attorneys have received 2 CLE ethics credits for BMST.
- **June 12, 2009** – Save the Bay, Providence, RI, 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM - CMCRI is sponsoring “**Communicating Compassionately in a World of Conflict**” based on the work of Marshall Rosenberg and the Center for Nonviolent Communication and led by trainer Joe Brummer. The goal of this 7 hour workshop is to help participants transform conflict in the home, workplace, school and community into connection. The nonviolent communication skills trainees will learn in this workshop will help initiate difficult conversations with ease and confidence; create connections; conduct mutually satisfying negotiations; and resolve conflicts peacefully. **You do not need to be a mediator in order to attend this training**; this training is open to the public! The cost is \$65 for CMCRI volunteers and \$75 for the general public. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. CMCRI has applied for CEU credits for social workers for this training. To register for this training, please call (401) 273-9999 or email Victoria Moreno-Jackson at vmoreno-jackson@cmcri.org.
- **The 2009 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). 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 2009 meeting dates are listed below.

Upcoming Events (cont.)

- **Tuesday, March 31st** – 4:00 - 5:30 PM (**Please note that this meeting starts and ends a half hour earlier than usual!**): Pizza with CMCRI Staff & Brainstorming for Conflict Resolution Day 2009 – Did you know that the 3rd Thursday in October of each year (October 15, 2009) is nationally recognized as Conflict Resolution Day? Come have pizza with CMCRI staff and brainstorm with us about ways to involve the Rhode Island Community in our observation of Conflict Resolution Day 2009!
- **May 26, 2009** - Topic TBD
- **July 28, 2008** - Topic TBD
- **September 29, 2009** - Topic TBD
- **November 24, 2009** - Topic TBD

UPCOMING LOCAL AND REGIONAL EVENTS

- **March 12, 2009** – Rhode Island Mediator’s Association “**Difficult Conversations**” Workshop – Roger Williams University, Providence Campus – The goal of this 2 hour workshop is to enhance the ability of the mediator to provide parties with a productive framework in which to have a difficult conversation. This workshop is for mediators, counselors, attorneys, and other professionals who assist “people in conflict” including family members; RIMA is applying for CEU credits for social workers. The workshop is \$30.00 for members of RIMA, \$45.00 for non-RIMA members, and \$15.00 for students. Parking will be validated, and a light supper will be provided. For more information or to register, call RIMA President Frank Geremia at (401) 253-2458 or visit www.rimediators.org.
- **April 24 - 26, 2009** – Mediation Works Incorporated's "**MWI Divorce Mediation Training Program**" – Boston, MA - A comprehensive twenty-four hour advanced mediation training designed to provide experienced mediators with the knowledge and skills to become effective divorce mediators through demonstrations, presentations, exercises, written materials and role-plays. For more information visit www.mwi.org/training/divorce.htm or call Josh Hoch at 800-348-4888 x23.
- **April 28 & 29, 2009** – **Elder Mediation Training** - Elder mediation helps seniors and their adult children resolve conflicts around issues such as living arrangements, caregiving, financial planning, inheritance/estate disputes, medical decisions, family communication, driving, and guardianship. Optional day 3 on April 30th (offered in response to participant requests) will cover marketing your Elder Mediation Practice and additional Role Play opportunities. For more information or to register, visit www.ElderDecisions.com.

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*We can be found
on the web at:
www.cmcri.org*

Wish List

If you are saving Shaw's receipts for CMCRI, please send them in by Tuesday, February 24th, as Shaws is going electronic and will no longer accept paper receipts after February 28th. We will be sending out additional announcements regarding Shaw's new electronic receipts program. In the meantime, please continue to save and pass on to CMCRI your Eastside Market receipts. Saving your Eastside Marketplace receipts is a painless way in which you can help CMCRI. Please consider asking friends, neighbors, family and co-workers to save and pass on their receipts to you!