

Community Mediation Center of Rhode Island

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Summer 2007 Newsletter ■ Notes from the Carriage House

The Director's Corner

It is with an odd mixture of regret and excitement that I write my first "Director's Corner" piece – regret, because former Executive Director Kelly Thompson is no longer with the Center, and excitement because I have the honor having been selected to succeed her in leading and shaping the work we do at CMCRI.

Kelly is relocating to the greater New York City area along with her husband, her two stepchildren, and her brand new son Milo. I know that I speak on behalf of all of the staff and Board when I say her loud and delighted laugh, her vision, and her expertise in the field will be sorely missed, and that we wish her all the best in her new ventures. Former Program Associate Victoria Moreno-Jackson has been promoted to Program Director, where she will continue to lend her professionalism and thoroughness in overseeing the Center's court and community programs.

In other CMCRI news, Andrew Cook, our current Americorps VISTA volunteer, continues to work collaboratively with the Providence Police to increase police referrals to mediation. He attends the weekly Chief of Police meetings, goes on ride-alongs with District 2 officers, and performs outreaches in the community to increase the knowledge, use, and understanding of mediation. We have recently hired a second Americorps VISTA volunteer who will begin her one-year tenure with us this September, building on what Andrew has begun, and we are currently conducting a search for a Program Associate to take over Victoria's former position. Through collaboration with Crossroads Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless we applied for and were awarded funding that will enable us to continue to offer rental assistance as a component of our landlord/tenant mediations. Further below in the section entitled "Mediation Matters" is a story that highlights the impact of augmenting our Eviction Prevention Program with rental assistance monies to prevent homelessness. Through these and other efforts, I am pleased to report that referrals to the Center have *tripled* over the past 24 months.

None of this could be accomplished without the assistance of our generous funders, our dedicated volunteers and our Board members. I would like in particular to thank Kate Kilguss, who in June stepped down as Board President (but in typical Kate fashion, has

opted to continue on as Board Secretary). CMCRI has benefited enormously from Kate's generosity, endless energy, and wise advice. She has donated countless hours of her time in service to the Center, and we simply cannot thank her enough! I would also like to extend my warmest thanks to Providence Police Captain Steve Melaragno, who has taken over as CMCRI's new Board President. Steve's knowledge of the community, his dedication to social justice, and his thoughtful counsel have been an invaluable resource to Mediation Center staff. We are ever grateful for his help.

We are additionally grateful to our major funders and donors – the Rhode Island Supreme Court; Senate President Montalbano; Senators Rhoda Perry and Maryellen Goodwin; Representative Gordon Fox; Lisa Churchville and Alex Carlin; The Rhode Island Bar Foundation; National Service Corp.; and USDA for supporting the Mediation Center and believing in our mission.

On behalf of the CMCRI staff I wish everyone a happy and safe summer!

Abbie Jones-Herriott
CMCRI Director

CMCRI CALENDAR: Upcoming Events, Meetings & Workshops

■ The 2007 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 lunchtime slot (12:30 – 2:00 PM) to a breakfast slot (8:00 – 9:30 AM). The 2007 Meeting schedule will therefore be as follows:

- Tuesday, July 31st: 8:30 – 10:30 AM.

Agenda: 2 hour training on the Principles of Non-Violence by the Institute for the Study and Practice of Non-Violence trainers

- Tuesday, September 25th: 8 – 9:30 AM

Tentatively scheduled agenda: Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Parties

- Tuesday, November 27th: 8 – 9:30 AM

Agenda yet to be determined

CMCRI will provide breakfast 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 32 Hour Basic Mediation Skills Training is tentatively scheduled for late October/early November 2007. The cost of the training is \$500; a limited number of full and partial scholarships are available. If you are interested in being trained, please call us and ask to be placed on our wait list to reserve a space. We will disseminate the schedule by e-mail as soon as it is finalized.

CMCRI News

CMCRI is hiring a new Program Associate for our Eviction Prevention program, to start in September of 2007, and is accepting resumes until July 27th. Interested parties should submit resumes by fax or postal mail to Abigail Jones-Herriott, Executive Director. • Our new VISTA Member, longtime community activist Bella Noka will be

joining us in September. • Thanks to our fabulous pro-bono website designer, UMass Dartmouth Professor Laura Franz, CMCRI hopes to have its new and improved website up and running this Fall. Check out www.CMCRI.org in a couple of months for our new look! • CMCRI held its most recent Mediator Breakfast on Wednesday, June 27th. We saw many faces that we had not seen in a while, as well as some new ones. There was much discussion about pooling resources and ways to come together as professionals to make our community a better place. Look for future conversations on those topics. • Our next Mediator Breakfast will be held on Tuesday, July 31st from 8:30am - 10:30am. The topic is the Principles of Non-Violence. The trainers for this meeting will be Joe Brummer and Pamela Steager from the Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence. Space is limited to 16 participants, and we're filling up fast. Please RSVP if you are interested in attending.

CMCRI Welcomes 12 New Mediators

In March 2007 CMCRI held its most recent Basic Mediation Training for 12 people at the in-town YMCA on Broad Street. We had participants from many different agencies and professions, including YMCA staff, staff from the Rhode Island Commission on Human Rights and from the Family Life Center, a lawyer, conflict resolution professionals, and several others. This training was led by Ruth Kohorn Rosenberg, and we are grateful to Ruth for sharing her skill, experience, and wonderful teaching skills with a second group of budding mediators. We were impressed again by the enthusiasm and diversity of experience that this group brought to the mediation training; factors that make each training a unique, valuable and exciting experience for trainers and trainees alike. We are pleased that a number of our newly-trained mediators have already made their way onto our small claims court calendar and have become regulars for our court and community mediations. CMCRI would like to extend a hearty welcome and thank everyone who participated in this training and helped to make it a success.

Spotlight on New Volunteer Susan Pracht

In March of 2007, CMCRI was fortunate to add Susan Chase Pracht of the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights to its roster of trained mediators. Susan is a Rhode Island native who describes herself as having been interested in civil rights and peacemaking since the age of 9. Currently she works as an investigator for the RI Commission for Human Rights, primarily handling employment and public accommodations discrimination cases, and doing outreach regarding employment and fair housing laws.

Susan says she became interested in being trained as a mediator after CMCRI staff conducted a conflict resolution workshop for Human Rights Commission staff. "Mediation enlivened me!" she reports, and "the idea people can make their own decisions and help craft their own outcomes is very *empowering* and an aspect I really liked." When asked how she believes mediation will be helpful to her in her work, she responded, "I think that discrimination is such an emotional issue – nobody wants to be accused of being discriminatory nor does anyone want to be discriminated against! It is so emotional for them that it really touches their core. Sometimes people have unrealistic expectations, and the reality-testing piece of mediation is very helpful and beneficial in that respect. I think discrimination cases are good for mediation so both sides can sit down together and try to learn the other's point of view."

Since being trained this past spring, Susan has been building her skills by mediating for CMCRI in Providence's Small Claims court. We feel fortunate to have her on board and look forward to working with Susan in the future.

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 spring.

Sylvia and Dan called CMCRI in desperation. They had fallen several months behind on rent, their landlord had taken them to court on an eviction complaint, and they had agreed to make a partial payment by a specific date to prevent the eviction. That date had passed, they did not have the money to pay the landlord, and the landlord had threatened to call the sheriff to remove the couple and their belongings. CMCRI approved the couple, neither of who was working due to a lay-off and complications from surgery, for rental assistance in the amount of the partial payment owed to the landlord. CMCRI staff was then able to convince the landlord to come to the Center the following day to engage in a mediation session to discuss the remainder of rent owed and to negotiate a payment plan for the balance. The parties had initially shared an excellent relationship, which deteriorated as tensions arose around the rent issue. Following the mediation, the landlord wrote CMCRI a thank you note, and the tenants commented in a written evaluation, "with the help of your mediators we were able to talk to our landlord, come to a better understanding with her, and repair the relationship. We were also given a second chance to keep our apartment, start fresh with her, and come to an agreement on paying the back rent." In a follow-up interview conducted by CMCRI staff two months after the mediation, all the parties report that the tenants remain current on their rent, have maintained the payment plan, and continue to believe that the mediation process was enormously helpful both in preventing the eviction and in preserving the relationship.

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.

Congratulations!

- to CMCRI's former Executive Director Kelly Thompson and her husband Anthony DeLuca, who in April welcomed their healthy and beautiful son Milo John DeLuca

- to volunteer mediator Ruth Kohorn Rosenberg, who accepted a position as Mediation Coordinator/Trainer at MIT's Office of Student and Community Standards

■ to volunteer mediators Kate Marckworth, who graduated from Brown University this spring; Pete Jones, who graduated from Roger Williams Law School this spring; and Molly Wallace, who successfully defended her graduate prospectus at Brown University this spring

Wish List

Like most non-profits, CMCRI exists only due to the generosity of funders, supporters, Board Members and volunteers. If you would like to donate any of the items listed below, please contact us!

■ Electric tea kettle

Also, did you know that the Eastside Marketplace in Providence donates 1% of your saved receipts back to the Community Mediation Center? **Please save your Eastside Marketplace receipts and either mail or drop them by the Mediation Center.** If just 10 of our supporters turn in receipts it can really add up! Thank you!

CMCRI STAFF
Abigail Jones-Herriott, Executive Director
Victoria Moreno-Jackson, Program Director
Andrew Cook, VISTA Community Mediation Advocate
