

common ground

a place to settle differences

2010 ANNUAL REPORT AND NEWSLETTER

From the Executive Director - Dateline: December 2010

Thank you, volunteers, for the hard work and dedication you have given Common Ground this year, and year's passed. December signals the end of another year, and the beginning of a new one. Looking back, I am very pleased to share with you that it's been a rather busy time. Besides coordinating a move to a new Hudson space, we mediated over 200 cases and provided 16 workshops dealing with conflict resolution and parent education. Only four cases were no-shows. One hundred eighty-seven cases dealt with parenting issues, 14 were small claims disputes, seven housing disputes and seven PINS diversion interventions. Other types were scattered among Lemon Law arbitration, youth mediation and minor criminal disputes. On an average, each case took no less than two hours, which translated to approximately 400 volunteer mediator hours. Needless to say, we were able to accomplish this because of our dedicated staff and your

commitment to mediation. What brings people to mediation? Usually, it's a judicial referral, but that's only the beginning; it's the working together of staff, volunteers, referral sources and other dispute resolution centers that ensures quality of service. When we receive an inquiry or a referral, staff carefully interviews everyone involved and sets up the mediation session. A few mediators have assisted in mentoring newly-trained volunteers during these sessions, and most of you, as part of your commitment to excellence, have completed your re-certification requirements by participating in in-service workshops or trainings. A few topics we covered this year have been: *It's Okay to not get an Agreement* with volunteer David Louis; *Round Tables* with staff; *NVC and Mediation* with Roberta Wall; *Chart Writing Techniques* with Rebecca Koch from the Office of ADRCIP; *Agreement Writing* with Dawn Wallant; *Getting Past Impasse* with volunteer Frank Men-



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derson and *The Art of not Taking it Personally* with volunteer Christiana Wall.

We've seen a steady and increasing number of parents participating in Common Ground's parent education and awareness program, *Forever Parents*. Beginning as a pilot program in 2001 to help parents and children cope during the aftermath of separation and divorce, we struggled with small class sizes and infrequent

referrals necessitating workshop cancellations. These six-hour workshops are offered bi-monthly during the spring, fall and winter, and most recently, we've experienced an increase in class size, with up to eighteen registrations per class. Funding is provided, in part, through the United Way, County Youth Bureaus and Columbia County DSS. Sharifa Perry has been the certified Presenter for these workshops over the past two years.

Although sometimes a challenge, Common Ground is always willing to work with each school's budgetary restraints to provide conflict resolution workshops for youth. For the past two consecutive years, we've provided peer mediation at Coxsackie-Athens Elementary School, and provided a smattering of conflict resolution workshops to schools throughout the region.

It truly has been a rewarding and eventful year!

Resources Assisting our Mission

NYS Office of ADR and Court Improvement

Columbia County Youth Bureau

Greene County Youth Bureau

The United Way

NYS DRA

NYS Commission on Quality of Care and Advocacy

Individual Donations

Private Foundations

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The Board of Directors

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Purpose Drives Practice: An Introduction to Transformative Mediation

What do you know about Transformative Mediation? Have you experienced this orientation?

Common Ground is pleased to announce that it will sponsor an introduction to Transformative Mediation, "Purpose Drives Practice," facilitated by Judy Saul, on March 10 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm and on March 11, from 8:00 am to 12 pm. According to the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation, "In the transformative view, conflict is primarily about human interaction rather than "violations of rights" or "conflicts of interest". In this model, the mediator's goal is helping the parties to: identify the opportunities for empowerment and recognition shifts as they arise in the parties' own conversation; choose whether and how to act upon these opportunities; and thus change their interaction from destructive to constructive, as they explore specific disputed issues. Success is measured, in transformative mediation, not by settlement but by party shifts toward strength, responsiveness and constructive interaction. Effective practice is focused on supporting empowerment and recognition shifts, by allowing and encouraging party deliberation and decision-making, and inter-party perspective taking, in various ways." (Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation, 2009.)

Many feel this approach is just good mediation—helping to clarify the parties' issues through reflection and observation through their interactions, and empowering them to make choices that mutually suit their needs.

Transformative mediation seeks not only to address the immediate issue, but to help improve the parties' relationship for the future. Conflict is not perceived as a problem—it is the parties' interaction that gets in the way of resolving the issue.

Why should you take advantage of this workshop? Appropriate for any mediator at any level of practice, it will help you to examine your goals as a mediator and to develop a better mediator focus. Whether you decide to embrace this practice on all levels, or take away from it what you can, it will certainly be a powerful and meaningful learning experience.

We are very happy to have Judy Saul facilitate this workshop. One of the most highly regarded trainers and mediators in the field, Ms. Saul is a Certified Transformative Mediator, and is a Fellow and Board member of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation. She is also certified as a mediation trainer by the New York State Unified Court System in basic and advanced mediation, has trained nationally for the Institute and for the United States Postal Service's REDRESS Program as well as internationally in Indonesia, Germany, Norway, England, New Zealand and Australia.

A portion of this workshop has been funded through a grant from the New York State Office of ADR and Court Improvement. Registration materials will follow early in 2011. (Please note: First preference will be given to Common Ground volunteers, but we are receiving many requests from other DRC's, so please reserve your space EARLY!)



"The future of mediation is a matter of general and serious concern, because it implicates the future of an emerging relational vision of society as a whole. If the vision cannot be expressed in a concrete context such as mediation, it remains mere theory. Just as that vision contemplates an inte-

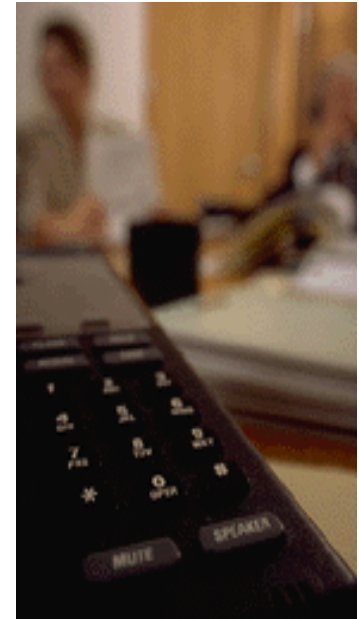
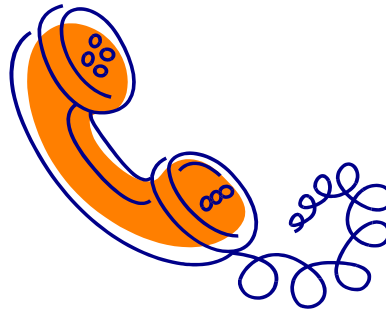
gration of individual freedom and social conscience, mediation offers a potential means to integrate the concern for right and justice and the concern for caring and interconnection. In short, mediation presents a powerful opportunity to express and realize a higher vision of human life." (*The*

Promise of Mediation, Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment and Recognition, RA Bush and JP Folger, Josey-Bass, Inc. Publishers, 1994.)

Don't Forget to Check the Machine!

Staff makes every attempt to contact you in the event of a cancellation. In an ideal world, they will always be successful, and, parties will always provide ample notice! But, as you all know, this the world isn't perfect, so as mediators, we see problems as opportunities to make things better! We've designated an office line for callers after normal business hours. Please call the main telephone number (518 943 0523), and push

extension 105 to check for last minute cancellations. George or Jessica will provide you with a password with each mediation notice to dial in.



You can retrieve after-hours mediation cancellations by calling 943-0523, Ext. 105.

Peace & Nonviolence—

I believe that the basic nature of beings is gentle and compassionate. It is therefore in our interest to encourage that nature, to make it live within us, to leave room for it to develop. If on the contrary we use violence, it is as if we voluntarily obstruct the positive side of human nature and

prevent its evolution.

-His Holiness The Dalai Lama

These are fine words to keep close by now and with the New Year ahead!

Second Chance Renters

The neediest residents do not have access to tenant's rights organizations, or free legal (civil) legal assistance because they lack transportation necessary to travel to Albany, or long-distance phone service for counseling. Fortunately, this population may receive emergency services in times of crises, but, sadly, this help is often too late. However, and equally important, the area lacks a comprehensive, inte-

grated rehabilitation program, to address or help rehabilitate the tenant-consumer.

As a mediation center, we come in far too late, when the tenant is facing eviction for a variety of causes, many of which could have prevented had he or she had ready-access to adequate information and/or skills to address the problems before they escalated to the point of eviction.

In September, Common Ground, through a grant from the NYS Dispute Resolution under contract with Interest on Lawyer' Accounts, facilitated a three hour workshop with volunteer panelists to address homelessness and to help prevent individuals at risk of losing their homes.

Volunteer panelists included mediator David Louis, The United Tenants of Albany, Catskill Mountain Housing, volunteer mediator Doug Coleman, Esq., Columbia County Human Rights Division and Community Action and Frank Cuthbert, landlord and businessman. The Greene County Department of Social Services provided transportation to the workshop which was held at the Greene County Emergency Services Center in Cairo, NY.

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And

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We're on the Web!
www.commongroundinc.org

Since its beginning in the early 1980's, under the auspices of Columbia Opportunities Inc., Common Ground Dispute Resolution, Inc., has provided continuous, high quality dispute resolution and mediation services to the community. Our Mission is to:

"Provide the citizens of Columbia and Greene counties with an efficient and self-directed process for resolution of personal, civil and criminal disputes experienced as part of everyday living." The agency's goals are: (1) to serve the community as a resource in resolving disputes; (2) to train, develop and maintain a panel of certified volunteer mediators; (3) to assist in the resolution of civil, appropriate criminal, family and restitution issues; and (4) to provide opportunities for individuals to learn effective problem-solving skills.

Mediation— It is a better way.

Volunteer Mediators of Common Ground

John Armstrong

Diane Aznoe

Jacqueline Brillling

Douglas Coleman

Howard Engelskirchen

Peter Frank

Camille Freedner

Alison Gerson

Bob Green

Carrie Haddad

Russ Immarigeon

Barbara Kott

Karleen Karlson

Katherine Levitan

David Louis

Patricia MacKay

Gail McManus

Frank Mendelson

Beverly Mesick

Debra Moskowitz

Tom Myers

Stuart Ober

Angella Pace

Lee Palmeteer

Peter Perrone

Sharifa Perry

Richard Reynolds

Denise Rutledge

Debra Smith

Nancy Ursprung

Inez Vermaas-Zyglia

Ronald Vero

Christiana Wall

Harold Weaver

More Help is Always Needed!

In these times, raising dollars for program has become more difficult, with cuts experienced from every funder. Please consider making a donation to Common Ground this year. Donations to specific programs will be honored. *Thank you!*

Name: _____

Address: _____

Fund Categories (Please circle):

General Operating Fund **Scholarship Fund:** (training scholarships for youth, adults, peer mediation, mediators)

PINS Mediation: (to help support training and parent-child mediation)

Forever Parents Workshops (assisting parents and children in the aftermath of separation and/or divorce)

Family Mediation (custody/parenting mediation)