



Newsletter

CONFLICT RESOLUTION CENTER of MONTGOMERY COUNTY

"Strengthening our communities – peace by peace"

Volume 5-2, June 2007

CRCMC Mission Statement: To help individuals, groups and communities in Montgomery County constructively manage conflict by offering collaborative problem solving services such as mediation, facilitation, community conferencing and training.

CRCMC Receives Challenge Grant

The Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County was recently contacted by an anonymous donor who offered a \$5,000 donation if CRCMC can match that amount by July 31, 2007. If you are interested in helping CRCMC meet the challenge, you may send a check to the address on page 4 or go to our website www.crcmc.org, click on "Get Involved," and donate via PayPal. All donations are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Montgomery College advertised the program, registered the students, and provided the venue, while REMEDES contributed trainers Janet Murdock and Jared Ordway (they are also CRCMC volunteers). The course took place from May 1st through 21st. The new mediators – who pledged to volunteer for a year with CRCMC -- are employed by several county agencies and non-profits such as the Primary Care Coalition and the Small Business Development Center and by several private firms serving the Latino community, including Embassy Mortgage and Bancomercio Inc. The new skills learned will serve participants in their daily work in addition to their volunteer activities with CRCMC.

Reflective Listening & Mediation

... He was mad. His veins popped on his neck. The words toppled over each other – anger - pure. Then he had to take a breath and the mediator asked: "So, I understand that your children's education is extremely important to you." He paused, looked at her, took another deep breath and said, "Ya, you got it, education is very important to me". He sat back as the veins on his neck receded slowly and his eyes swiveled from party to party. He faced them for the first time. It was like sunshine after a rainstorm - the power of "reflective listening", a skill vital to neutral third party mediation.

The new mediators are now in the process of observing two mediations before they start co-mediating with experienced mediators. Welcome to CRCMC!

New Class of Spanish Speaking Mediators by Alicia Pfund

CRCMC has added 9 more names to the list of volunteer bilingual mediators. Recently, CRCMC partnered with REMEDES (a network of Spanish speaking mediators) and the Montgomery College Hispanic Business Institute to offer a 40-hour course in basic mediation in Spanish.



First class of Spanish speaking mediators

What is Large Group Facilitation?*

By Wolfgang J. Mergner

Facilitation is a **group process** that allows people to work together to reach a solution. Large Group Facilitation may be needed when (a) a group wants to determine where they need to go and/or (b) to resolve conflicts. Issues may be between group members or conflicts with other groups. Large Group Facilitation can make a world of difference in how well groups work together. By providing non-directive leadership, the facilitator helps the group arrive at decisions. Facilitation assists and guides. It does not control. A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange.

Preparation: Large Group Facilitation requires preparation by the facilitator. Preparation involves an interview with key players; looking for themes, seeking areas of agreement and contention, discovering working styles, and looking for possible hidden agendas. All this should happen before the meeting. This preparation will help to gain a sense of what to expect, and provide an opportunity to let the participants know what to expect. Items to be determined are: Participation: Who should attend? Who is affected by the decisions? The facilitation team has to be assembled and briefed. In collaboration, the goal for the meeting is set and then the process of facilitation can begin.

The Facilitation: After the group selects the rules of contact, the first phase of facilitation starts by clarifying the issues and having a facilitated discussion about the issues. The task for the facilitator, at this stage, is to actively listen, recognizing the feeling behind statements the issues and the implied values. This phase might be loud, feelings might erupt and confrontations played out. Such turmoil is OK. But the participants must have the feeling that they are being heard, and validated, just as in mediation.

Brainstorming: The intensity has ebbed at this phase and people might be more contemplative, open to the question: "What are the possible solutions?" The facilitator will seek to involve all members of the group in a brainstorming strategy, building on each other's ideas. Following the burst of suggestions a list of ideas will be collected that will need to be reviewed, sorted and identified for action. The facilitator guides the group to bring the process to completion.

The benefit of facilitation is: It makes everyone comfortable participating and allows everybody's ideas to be heard. It makes participants feel good about their contributions and allows the group to feel that the ideas and decisions are theirs.

***Reference** (1.) Large Group Facilitation, training workshop by Lorig Charkoudian, November 2003. (2.) Facilitation and Group Consensus Building Workshop, May 10, 2003 by Peter Vaslow and Tom Dunne using Community Tool Box by Gillian Kaye and Bill Berkowitz.

Postscript: If your community, neighborhood, homeowners' association or nonprofit organization is facing a troublesome issue, then you might like to use the service of neutral facilitators to run your next meeting. CRCMC facilitators have been trained to encourage all voices to be heard, yet keep the meeting on track so goals can be accomplished. We request donations of \$100 per hour for each meeting that last an hour or more, but will not turn away any group that cannot afford the rate. Go to the Website www.crcmc.net and click on Facilitation for more information.

The Outreach Committee

By Judi Becker

The Outreach Committee decided to look close to home – at our own volunteers. Recognizing the need to publicize CRCMC and knowing that our best assets were our very own volunteer mediators, facilitators and trainers, the committee set out to find a way to inform and educate our volunteers so that they could be ambassadors to the community at large. A **Volunteer Appreciation Event** was held on April 19, 2007 with over 45 CRCMC volunteers in attendance. Terry Vann gave a brief history of CRCMC and was followed by Tim Stranges who described how the Center functions using the Four Pillars Model – "**Mediation, Community Facilitation, Community Conferencing and Training**". A key part of the evening was the breakout sessions where volunteers were able to get a more in depth understanding of specific areas and find out ways that they could best use their time and talents to strengthen CRCMC.

A Latino Outreach Day was held on April 12, 2007 and CRCMC is currently working with Montgomery College to offer mediation training in Spanish.

Committee members met with the **Legal Aid Bureau, Inc.** and efforts are underway to finalize an agreement

formalizing coordination between the two organizations. Legal Aid has already begun to informally refer clients to CRCMC, and CRCMC continues to refer clients to Legal Aid.

Outreach to the Police Department continues with presentations at Police roll calls. Tim Johnson, of the Community Relations Service of the Department of Justice, met with members of the Outreach Committee and shared his ideas about how we could expand and improve our outreach efforts with local law enforcement. Committee members also met with 30 members of the County's Office of Consumer Affairs to discuss ways we could act in concert.

Portrait of a Mediator: Ramona Buck

By Liz Phillips

Editor's Note: Ramona Buck is a volunteer mediator with CRCMC. She is also a staff member with the Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO).

Q: What brought you into the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) field? After college I taught at Sandy Spring Friends School and though I liked the school, I wasn't satisfied with my ability to be a good teacher. I moved into an administrative position at the school and later, in a non-profit position as Director of Hospice Services of Howard County. Exercises in the book, What Color is Your Parachute? led me to formulate an interest in conflict resolution. I somehow thought I had coined the term but later discovered that the field of conflict resolution already existed! I enrolled in mediation training with the Friends Suburban Project in Philadelphia. Soon, I was mediating cases and co-leading workshops in prisons and churches. I enrolled in George Mason University's newly created Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR), becoming a member of the first class. When I graduated, I accepted a position as Director of the Northern Virginia Mediation Service. Later, I became Director of the ADR program at the Circuit Court for Prince George's County.

Q: What, in your personality or background, led you in that direction? I like structured situations that are supportive and help people progress to a new place. I have always found both people and conflict very interesting and it is clear to me that when people work through conflict, they become closer and have more understanding of each other than they did before.

Q: Mediators are said to be a conflict-averse group of people. Do you think the average person

we work with is conflict-neutral or conflict-addicted? Our society has a tendency to be conflict averse. We talk about the people who we are in conflict with rather than talking to them directly. We ignore problems, hoping they all go away or - we come out fighting and posturing that we are completely right and the other person is just out of line. **Mediation helps people sit down down with conflict itself** in order to interact and work through the discomfort and the bad feelings and, sometimes, to come out on the other side. If we work through conflict well, it becomes a kind of spiritual journey and opening of ourselves to new learning. The mediator provides for hope for the parties. A mediator can give the feeling that maybe we can get through this and find hope again. Rather than seeing mediators as conflict-averse, I see them, on the contrary, as people who are unusually comfortable with conflict.

Q: Explain your current work and how long you have been doing it. I have been Public Policy Director for MACRO (Maryland Mediation & Conflict Resolution Office) for 6 years. We promote the use of conflict resolution in courts, schools, criminal and juvenile justice, communities, business, families, and for state and local government. We consult with groups and individuals in order to do this work and we also have a grant program for pilot projects around the state.

One project, which is beginning this summer, will involve two public policy facilitators from UVA, Frank Dukes and Tanya Denckla Cobb. This is a joint project with the Maryland Municipal League (MML) and the Maryland Associations of Counties (MACO). We also are seeking other partners. We have a contract to hold regional meetings/workshops around the state to highlight collaborative processes for local government agencies. In addition, they will offer training for community and private practitioner mediators in multi party community facilitation.

Q: What do you like most about what you do? I like the opportunity to be involved in many different projects and I appreciate the vision of Rachel Wohl, Executive Director of MACRO, who, with Chief Judge Robert M. Bell, founded MACRO. Most state dispute resolution offices in the U.S. are more narrow in focus than ours, and aren't able to give grants or to have the broad focus that MACRO has.

Q: Where do you think CRCMC is most successful in achieving early intervention? Early intervention

probably occurs most in mediating neighborhood disputes and with the Community Conferencing Initiative. But whenever mediation occurs in the life of a conflict, early or later, if the process is pure, that intervention can be helpful. Even when you mediate at the courthouse on the day of trial, if you stick to your process, the parties can find it helpful.

Q: What do you mean by a pure process? I mean that you don't let others define your process for you. In court, for example, there are always time constraints that could interfere. In addition, at times, some lawyers who have a pre-defined view of what mediation is can try to turn mediation into a settlement conference. Confidentiality can be compromised in some settings. You have to hold true to what your process is, in spite of any pressures to do otherwise.

Q: What would you say are CRCMC's greatest organizational strengths? The committed volunteers and mediators who work with CRCMC have obviously built it with love and care. The founders of the organization are still involved which is a great strength. And, CRCMC has solved the problem of getting case referrals. That is a huge accomplishment. I also am impressed with the level of organization CRCMC demonstrates. As a former director of a Center, I know that when an organization runs well, it is the result of thought, commitment and work.

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Donors – Spring, 2007

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Barry Klein Birthday Recognition: Jesse Etelson Carla Mamana, Timothy Stranges, Linda & Terry Vann, Claudia Conroy.

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