
Adrienne Keith



Adrienne Keith volunteers as a BNMP phone conciliator. She completed her basic mediation training at the Snohomish Dispute Resolution Center. Adrienne is an attorney, and has practiced law in Washington for approximately three years. It was her interest in mediation (and other "alternative" approaches to dispute resolution) that prompted her to go to law school. She attended law school at the University of Wisconsin and credits the school's "law in action" philosophy with giving her a practical perspective of how the law actually works in people's lives.

Adrienne is active in the legal community, including the King County Alternative Dispute Resolution section and the Washington State Bar Association Young Lawyers' Division. In her free time, Adrienne enjoys running, reading, and getting out in the mountains. She is excited to be involved with the BNMP!



City of Bellevue Department of Planning and Community Development
P.O. Box 90012 Bellevue, WA 98009-9012



425-452-4091

Update January—February 2007

IS THE CO-MEDIATION MODEL WORKING?

By Rina Goodman and Mark Kuciemba

At its best, co-mediation is the harmonious working of two complementary mediators who offer a diversity of skills, experience and personality. . . Effective co-mediators think and act as a unit, with the focus on the parties, not on themselves. – David Richbell

On Thursday, November 30th, at the invitation of the Washington Mediation Association, approximately 20 mediators from the Seattle area met to discuss the topic, "Is the Co-Mediation Model Working?" As we began introductions, the first mediators introducing themselves acknowledged the degree to which they enjoy mediating on their own because of the degree of stylistic and tactical freedom solo mediation allows. Nods, smiles, and concurring voices followed.

What does this tell us about co-mediation? Working with a co-mediator can present a number of difficulties. Matching inexperienced mediators with mentor mediators may be a practical way of insuring quality while training new mediators, but many mentor mediators do not know how much leeway to allow the apprentice mediator or how to provide constructive feedback. Further, even when they are peers, co-mediators may not get along with each other. They may feel and behave competitively, damaging their credibility with their clients. Or their mediation styles and perspectives may contrast so greatly that a unified strategy or vision is difficult, if not impossible, for them to pursue. According to several mediators at the table, co-mediation is like a "dance," "love affair," or "first date." How do you know when it will *not* work?

So why is the co-mediation model so popular? Why is it used almost exclusively by public

sector organizations (e.g., the Federal Executive Board, Inter-Local, Dispute Resolution Centers) that provide mediation services and in increasing numbers among private mediators?

Exploring the advantages of co-mediation

One mediator commented that co-mediation has the potential to enhance the quality of service beyond what we can provide as solo mediators. As others spoke up, specific benefits of co-mediating were revealed:

- *Balance.* Co-mediation creates an opportunity for providing balance within the process. A directive mediation style can be softened by the more reflective or facilitative style of his or her co-mediator. A process-oriented mediation style can be blended by a more problem-solving approach.
- *Diversity.* Co-mediators' insights and expertise are enhanced when they are able to represent the parties' diverse characteristics, such as gender, religion, race, age and nationality. This diversity also creates a more balanced team.
- *Variety:* Two mediators offer variety in tone of voice, pacing, and presence.
- *Active listening:* As one mediator engages with the parties, the other can act as an extra set of eyes & ears, observing verbal and non-verbal communications.
- *Mediator stamina.* Co-mediators can share the burdens of mediating and ease one another's stress of being "on" without relief.
- *Mediator experience.* Parties may benefit from having a co-mediation team whose professional backgrounds complement each other. A mediation team consisting of a family lawyer and psy-

chologist, for example, brings to the table a greater breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding of family conflict issues than a mediator working on his/her own might provide. Similarly, the mediation process itself can be enhanced when one mediator has substantive expertise and the other has process expertise. Co-mediators can also provide the parties with additional perspectives.

- **Trust and rapport.** Like the parties, mediators are people with their own personal quirks and personas. Parties do not always experience the same ability to connect to a given mediator. A co-mediation team, on the other hand, provides another opportunity for parties to relate – and for the mediators to develop trust and rapport with the parties.
- **Safety net.** When one mediator attempts a risky strategy, the other mediator is available to come to the rescue should the strategy be unsuccessful.
- **Efficiency.** Co-mediators can divide tasks. Each co-mediator can hold a separate caucus with each party to maintain momentum & eliminate long waiting periods.
- **Training.** Co-mediation is also an effective way to **train** new mediators. Teamed up with an experienced mentor mediator, a new mediator is able to hone his or her skills while getting real-life experience. And the more experienced co-mediator provides a safety net in the event that problems arise.
- **Modeling.** When brought together even haphazardly, our differences can serve as a gift, offering us the opportunity to model effective communication, cooperation, and interaction.

Is the co-mediation model working?

All of us seemed to be in agreement that, in its ideal form, co-mediation's advantages are sufficiently greater than those of mediating on one's own, and that our focus should be on how to make the model function as it was intended. Several mediators spoke of the need for more training and protocol with respect to how co-mediations are organized and conducted.



Tips for Co-Mediating

Working closely with anyone can be challenging and co-mediation is no different. Here are a few tips for a successful co-mediation:

1. **Arrive early.** Allow yourselves time enough to become familiar with the setting, meet the observer, and take a break before the parties arrive.
2. **Communicate before the mediation.** Contact each other beforehand to discuss your style and strengths.
 - What is your preferred mediation style?
 - How often and when do you like to caucus?
 - How will you divide the mediators' Opening Statement?
 - How will you communicate during the mediation if you want to change strategies or caucus?
 - What is the best seating arrangement?
 - How should you handle balance of power problems and complex issues?
3. **Throughout the mediation:** Adopt the principle of non-competition between mediators.
 - One person should not dominate the mediation, rather the lead should shift back and forth between co's.
 - Use the word "we" often so that the parties will see that you are a team.
 - Consult with your co-mediator before making and announcing many important decisions.
 - Empower your co-mediator. Treat your co-mediator with respect and consideration. This is a golden opportunity to **model empowerment, respect and sharing** to the parties.
 - Be flexible.
 - Have a sense of humor.
 - Be open, honest, and vulnerable with each other.
4. **Allow time to de-brief.** Figure on at least 30 minutes following the mediation to discuss the mediation. Include the observer in your de-brief. Start with what went well, before discussing what you would do differently next time, and end on a positive note. **Keep an open mind.** Even if we have been mediating for years, there is always something new to learn. Each mediation has within it the seed for the next question, or skill, to work on. Ask each other for feedback and support.

Want to see a more comprehensive co-mediation checklist? The Federal Executive Board is compiling one based on input from several mediators. The final Checklist is expected to be released on 1/17 and can be found in the Forms section of their website at: <http://www.seattlefeb.us/mediation.html>.

Parent—Teen Update

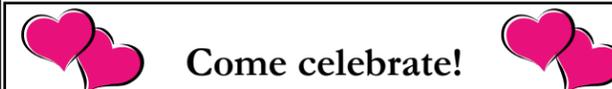
By
Cathy Goldman

With all this crazy weather, we still had mediations taking place. Thanks to all mediators and observers who "hung in there" when we had to reschedule. As the New Year approaches, I hope to schedule more presentations and training sessions. I welcome all suggestions. If you know of any group of teens or parents who may be interested in learning more about "effective communication" please let me know.



In January, let's gather on Wednesday January 10th at 6pm at Bellevue City Hall. We will practice our mediation skills and have a "post holiday" celebration. Please wrap a present under \$10.00 or bring something from your holiday stock that you want to give away. We will play a fun game with the wrapped gifts.

I hope you all had a good holiday season.
Happy New Year!



Come celebrate!

Volunteer Recognition Party

Tuesday, February 13th, 5:30 PM

Winter's House, RSVP 452-4091

Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators

BNMP In-Services / Trainings

Conciliation Training

Jan. 20 & 27 Saturday 8:30-5:30
City Hall, room 1E –120
Call Cheryl for details @ 425-452-5222.

Mediation Training

April 18, 21, 22, 25, 28, 29
Call Cheryl for details @ 425-452-5222

Parent-Teen In-service

Mediation Practice Skills.
January 10th at 6:00 PM in room 1E-120

Next In-Service

Community Associations
In March... Stay tuned for details

Book Group

Beyond Reason by Fischer and Shapiro
January 17th in Room 1E-119

King County Dispute Resolution

- Conflict Resolution Skills for the Workplace, April 19 & 20.
- Dealing with Difficult Situations with Tenants, April 10
- Advanced Skills for Effective Communication, May 15

Call Sue Ann Allen for details: 206-443-9603 (ext 106)

2007 NW Dispute Resolution Conf.

University of Washington School of Law
May 4th and 5th. Save the dates. More information to follow.

Program Staff:

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Parent-Teen Coordinator:	Cathy Goldman	-	452-4091
Peer Mediation Coordinator:	Laurie Slater	-	455-1625

City of Bellevue website: <http://www.bellevuewa.gov>
(Look for the Mediation Program under "Neighborhood Information")