

Update

April 2010

Unsung (Super)Heroes: Our Conciliators

By Andrew Kidde



Here at the Bellevue Mediation Program, mediators are pretty visible. “Mediation” is in our name; the public recognizes their job as neutral third parties; and they have completed an extensive training process to earn the status of mediator. We rightly celebrate these excellent volunteers. But, I’d like to draw attention to another group of volunteers who do much

of our most difficult work: our conciliators. They are the ones who field calls from citizens, coach them on how to handle their conflicts, do shuttle telephone mediation, and also convene the mediations. This work requires skill and artistry, and the dedicated volunteers who do this work are providing a huge public service. They deserve more recognition.

Conciliators get calls from people at all stages in a conflict. Some are already embroiled in a fight: a screaming match over the fence, menacing lawyers’ letters fired off... Indeed some callers are truly experts at conflict – pretty much everything is someone else’s fault. The caller is often angry, aggrieved, or bitter as they describe some terrible wrong that needs urgent attention. Coaching such people is hard work, the emotional equivalent of riding a rodeo bull. But our conciliators get quite adept at handling these callers, diffusing their anger and reality checking with them about how desperate the situation is. Also after the conciliators speak with the other neighbors, they often learn that things are a little more complicated than the first caller explained... Our conciliators often manage these situations with skill and sensitivity, and, by diffusing these situations end up preventing some

neighborhood spats from turning into major feuds.

Other callers have not yet really engaged in the conflict – they’re seeking a silver bullet so they don’t have to engage at all. Working with these callers requires a special sensitivity. Imagine, for example, a tenant -- in her apartment the washing machine has broken, the shower leaks, mold



creeps up the bathroom wall. Her landlord has not responded to her request to fix these problems. Listening to this tale, you might think we would suggest early on: “we may be able to help you resolve your conflict with your landlord.” But our conciliators learn that many callers will withdraw in some alarm at hearing this. This tenant was hoping there was a knight in shining armor out there, some government official that would just march in and tell her landlord what he must do. She also doesn’t have the time, energy or inclination to deal with a conflict. Indeed, thinking of this as a conflict seems like a side show: she just wants things fixed!

Our conciliators develop a more nuanced approach to working with these callers. They learn to avoid discussing conflict or mediation right away – and instead use their best questioning and listening skills. The tenant is more than willing to talk... After hear from the tenant a while, the conciliator reflects back: “sounds like you need to have a safe, functioning place to live, and, as a single working mother, you need to find a way to get that that won’t require a lot of time and effort, and, because the rent is pretty reasonable, you really don’t want to damage your rela-

tionship with your landlord.” Now that’s listening!

The conciliator then leads the caller through a discussion of what alternatives they have for dealing with this problem. Sometimes there is an enforcement alternative that can help the caller. If so, the conciliator then needs to help the caller assess the pros and cons of taking an enforcement or negotiated approach. How will the enforcement route affect their relationship? How important is the relationship? How can the caller use her knowledge of the enforcement approach to improve her prospects for a friendly negotiated solution?

In many cases however the conciliator must help the caller realize that there is no silver bullet (often a difficult realization for the caller), and that they do have to decide whether to engage in the conflict. This too is a delicate question of assessing the costs and benefits. Our conciliators do not assume right away that it’s in the caller’s interest to engage -- on the contrary, they will be sympathetic with the caller’s fears about entering into conflict. But, they will also help the caller understand that there are many ways to engage. For example, a caller who has had a good relationship with their neighbor may believe that engaging in conflict means getting into a nasty fight that will damage their relationship. The conciliator can help the caller appreciate how engaging in the conflict can be done in a manner that emphasizes the trust and relationship building aspects of working through differences. But the conciliator knows that deciding to engage is not always the right decision. Sometimes, the prospect of settlement is slim, and avoidance or accommodation is best way to manage the relationship. The conciliator also knows that the quality of that discussion is very important. A caller who has had weighed the pros and cons of engagement will be in a better position to “let go” of the dispute.

Conciliators do many other things too. With callers who plan to engage in the conflict directly, conciliators help them rehearse what they are going to say. This is an invaluable service. Everyone needs to rehearse some of those difficult conversations we anticipate, but how often do we get a chance to do this with a skilled audience offering constructive feedback. Other times they review e-mails that the caller is thinking of writing. Sometimes they do shuttle mediation, working back and forth between parties, helping to craft an agreement. Finally they prepare parties for coming in to mediation: telling them what to expect from the process, coaching them on how to present their interests and needs in a way that will help the mediation succeed.

Conciliation has many facets and requires many skills. Over my years here, I have seen some true masters, and I have seen many, many volunteers acquire

tremendous skills. We have excellent volunteers doing this work of conciliation. Kudos to them!

In May BNMP staff is collaborating with Lake Hills Library to put on a workshop series called:

Can’t we all just get along?

This 6-part series will provide conflict management tools for neighborhood, parent/teen, and cross-cultural disputes. Free and open to the public. Please register for one or all at www.kcls.org or call the Lake Hills Library at 425-747-3350 for more information.

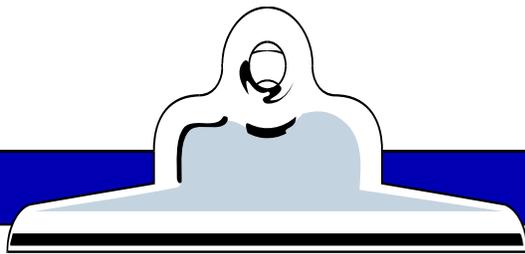


BNMP Volunteers honored at President’s Volunteer Service Awards

March 30, 2010



From left to right: Mayor Don Davidson, BNMP Program Manager Andrew Kidde, Honoree Josh Sundt, and Honoree Catherine Zimmerman



Parent—Teen Update

By
Cathy Goldman

I have completed my recruitment process! I am compiling applications from those who applied and I hope to select the new volunteers by mid April. It has been fun presenting at the high schools in Bellevue. We have a lot of interest in our program! Thanks to all the teens that have helped me present our program to present 9th grade students. It is great for the prospective teens to hear about the program from our teen mediators. I have also had lots of interest from adults who want to be part of our program. I am confident we will have a great training class this June.



Our April in-service training will take place at Bellevue City Hall on April 14th from 6 to 8 pm. We will do "Mock Mediations" so we can keep up our skills. Come ready to take the role of mediator or play a parent or teen!

Hope to see you all after your Spring Break!

BNMP Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators

Parent-Teen In-Service Training:

Mock Mediations with Cathy Goldman
Wed. Apr. 14th, from 6-8 PM in room 1E-112

Mediation Training:

Basic Mediation Training Spring 2010

Wed. **April 14** 5:00 pm — 9:00 pm
Fri. **April 16** 9:00 am — 5:00 pm
Sat. **April 17** 9:00 am — 5:00 pm
Wed. **April 21** 5:00 pm — 9:00 pm
Fri. **April 23** 9:00 am — 5:00 pm
Sat. **April 24** 9:00 am — 5:00 pm
Cost: \$250

Parent-Teen Mediation Training 2010

Mon. **June 21st** through Fri. **June 25th**
8:30 am — 5:00 pm each day

17th Annual Northwest Dispute Resolution Conference:

At UW School of Law, Seattle, WA
Fri. April 30th and Sat. May 1st
www.mediate.com/nwadr

Moving Beyond Impasse:

How Dialogue works at the Mediation Table

With Bob Stains, Regina Lyons, and Ann McBroom
Thurs. April 29th, noon — 5:00 pm
Cost: \$95.00
www.publicconversations.org/workshops

Program Staff:

Program Co-Manager:	Cheryl Cohen	-	452-5222
Program Co-Manager:	Andrew Kidde	-	452-5288
Program Assistant	Gwen Jones	-	452-2897
Parent-Teen Coordinator:	Cathy Goldman	-	452-4091

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

Volunteer Profile:

Colleen James



I first became interested in mediation when I participate in the mediation clinic while attending Seattle University School of Law. After graduating in 2008, I wanted to expand my mediation experience, so I started volunteering with BNMP. What I like about mediation is how it offers so many avenues to resolution that are not present in other dispute resolution models. Eventually I would like to incorporate mediation into my family law practice. I was married in May of 2009 and live in Kirkland with my husband and two cats. My husband has been a very good sport about my mediation training – I like to use him to practice my reflecting and reframing skills.

**BELLEVUE
NEIGHBORHOOD MEDIATION PROGRAM**

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