



Can You Hear Me Now?

By Adrienne Keith

“Can You Hear Me Now?” Verizon Wireless created an ad campaign around this catch phrase. While cell phone coverage may not be as ubiquitous as the devices themselves, the concept of “being heard” is far more universal. Today our modes of communication far outnumber those of the past -- forget smoke signals, carrier pigeon, or some scribbles on a scrawl -- now even my pre-teen niece has her own “smart phone,” and her mother tells her that it’s time to say goodbye in slang. “GTG, GTG” she says. In other words, she’s directing my niece to text message her friends “got to go.”

As prevalent as modes of communication are, communicating about the things that are most important remains challenging, especially within a family when parents and their teenage children need to communicate about everything from recreation to driving to dating to attending class. Teenagers and their parents struggle to negotiate the inevitable conflicts that come with a teen’s transition to independence.

For over ten years, Bellevue’s Parent-Teen Mediation program has been providing a specially tailored mediation process for parents and teens to talk about those important things. It is based on a concept tested by Program Coordinator Cathy Goldman in her thesis work on truancy in Shoreline schools. A former teacher, Cathy understood that many of the reasons kids don’t go to school are family-related. And, as a result of her work with TeenHOPE in Shoreline, Cathy knew firsthand that the bond between a teen and a parent is strong one, even if it isn’t perfect. As one TeenHOPE worker commented, the teens who came to the shelter always wanted to call their parents to let them know they were ok, even when the parents were the reason that the teens were there!



By choosing mediation, teenagers and their parents can focus on those conflicts that have become intractable. Often the parents have tried exerting authority in any way they can, including taking away privileges like access to a car or a phone. Teens have rebelled in anger at these constraints on their freedom. In mediation, the conflicted parents and teens are encouraged to discuss the things that are truly important to each of them. Mediators also

work to make sure that each person is heard and acknowledged.

The Bellevue program uses a co-mediation model -- one adult and one teen. The teen mediators understand the world that the teen parties live in because it’s their world, too. Adult mediators more readily relate to the caring intentions of a parent. As a co-mediation team, they can often bridge the gap of mistrust and misunderstanding that divide worried parents and teens staking out their independence. In a successful mediation, parents and teens work out agreements on negotiable points and acknowledge the areas that are non-negotiable.

Each year Cathy recruits Bellevue high school students for the program. She selects about fifteen teens from diverse backgrounds, with strong verbal skills, strong listening skills, and a strong desire to help. They complete a 40-hour mediation training with selected adult volunteers. One teen volunteer, Jacob, commented that even during that initial training he felt that he gained insight into human nature, an appreciation of the power of open-ended questions, and an ability to recognize and empathize with a person’s emotions. Katia, another teen volunteer, became involved because she is interested in communication. As a volunteer, she’s found that her conflict resolution skills enable her to have better relationships with family and friends. She’s also recognized

that listening patiently and checking for understanding—key skills for success in mediation—are the same core skills that are critical to diplomacy and negotiation on a much larger stage.

Lars Watson, certified as a mediator by the Washington Mediation Association, has been involved with the program since it started. He remembers two notable mediations. In one, the teen simply wanted to spend some of free time playing computer games. He already excelled academically, was involved in organized athletics, and was musically accomplished. However, his parents were so invested in his success that they were not willing to let him use his time in a seemingly frivolous activity until they had his reassurance that his first priority was continuing to achieve academically, athletically and musically.

Lars's second memorable mediation is an example of a powerful technique that transcends parent-teen mediation, and mediation in general. In this case, he recalls that this father was again focused on the suc-

cess of his son, and it was so the son would do better than his father. The father, who was barely getting by on a minimum wage job, had not completed high school. By simply asking what kind of relationship the father wanted to have with the son, Lars posed a question that led the father to appreciate the fact that he had a relationship with his son at all.

Parent-teen mediation works because it helps families focus on those values and needs that are continuous across generations, and because the parents and teens who come to the program want to connect. Through mediation, the parents and teens can hear each other, understand each other, and connect in a way that they had not thought possible. Whether it's a first mediation session where the parent and teen are working on an interim agreement, or a subsequent session when the parties begin to explore foundational relationship issues such as trust and respect, the outcome of a session can be deeply emotional, with the reconnected parents and teens hugging, crying and laughing.

16th Annual Northwest Dispute Resolution Conference

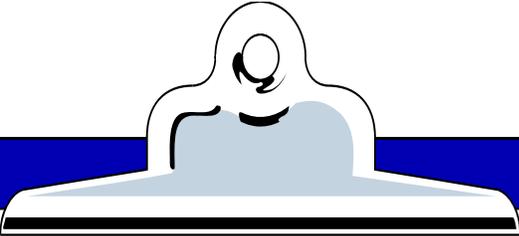
If you are interested in attending the 16th Annual Northwest Dispute Resolution Conference on May 1st and 2nd at UW School of Law, please consider registering through our office. We are eligible to get the group discount (20%). See the online brochure for more information (website address is below). Just call or email to let us know, and we will give you instructions for payment, etc. For those of you who were wondering, you can register for only one day and get the group discount. We need to register by April 17th, or the prices go up, so don't delay! If you attend a session that is particularly helpful, we encourage you to write about it for possible inclusion in our newsletter.
<http://www.mediate.com/nwadr/>

Basic Mediation Training 2009

**Congratulations to the
graduates of the 2009
Basic Mediation Training!**



(from left to right) Celia Sekijima, Carol Xiang, Juan Esparza, Renee Eskenazi, Lynn Terpstra, Anne Marie Reger, Elaine Bishop, Perlas Sapida, Jenifer Fuqua, Nicki Myers, Judy Spunt, Debbie Aubrey, Heidi Brantzeg, Fedra Pacheco, Nan Humble, Sandra Wallace, Michael Elwin, John Farver, Gregory Lucas.



Parent—Teen Update

By
Cathy Goldman

We are getting a steady stream of cases now. It is so great to see all the mediators put their skills to use in the mediation room. We have received positive feedback from many clients! It is always a joy to hear that parents and teens are getting along better and working through their issues after experiencing mediation sessions! Thanks to all the committed mediators and observers!



On April 22nd at 6 pm Lars Watson, a long time mediator and volunteer in our program, will present a training on "Dealing with Mediator Emotions." Lars will focus on mediator emotions in the role of the mediator. Please mark your calendar for this event. Our May and June in-service trainings will focus on cultural issues. I will keep you informed about the dates via e mail.

Thanks for your continued enthusiasm toward the parent-teen program!

BNMP Training Opportunities For Mediators and Conciliators

Joint Neighborhood and Parent-Teen In-Services:

Dealing with Mediator Emotions

Lars Watson

Wed. Apr. 22nd, from 6-8 PM in Room 1E-112
6:00 refreshments, 6:30-8:00 PM

Cross Cultural Experience

Cathy Goldman and Ilana Vayman

Wed. May 13th, from 6-8 PM in Room 1E-112
6:00 refreshments, 6:30-8:00 PM

Training:

Conciliation Training Fall 2009

Dates: TBD

16th Annual Northwest Dispute Resolution Conference:

At University of Washington

Fri. and Sat., May 1st and 2nd

For more information go to:

www.mediate.com/nwadr

VOLUNTEER NEWS

New conciliators:

Natalie Daniels

Moved into observation phase:

Silvia Wilson

Josh Sundt

Moved into co-mediation phase:

Barbara Barnes

Travis DesAutels

Graduated from practicum:

Michelle Mentzer

Adrienne Keith

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:

Barbara Barnes



Barbara, a “country-girl” from California, has lived in Bellevue for over twenty years. She and her husband have three grown children in the Seattle area. Barbara has a coaching practice through which she coaches businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals to work more effectively and reach personal or professional goals. Trained at the DRC, Barbara has worked as a conciliator for about a year at BNMP and the DRC, and has just begun to mediate in Small Claims Court. She thoroughly enjoys her work in mediation and has found it has enhanced and broadened her skills as a coach. Barbara is studying Spanish in order to relate more personally with the people she and her husband work with on their annual trip to the remote village of San Diego de Tenango, El Salvador. Barbara loves the outdoors and is an avid runner and hiker and frequents Bellevue trails. She recently started playing golf, which, to her surprise, she likes.



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