

# ANNUAL REPORT

November 7, 2003

As Northern Community Mediation (NCM) enters into its tenth year of providing services to the citizens of Charlevoix and Emmet counties, it is faced with an exciting, but challenging future. Fortunately, it has the available resources to make the next major step in its evolutionary process of growth.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The success of a non-profit organization is directly dependent upon its leadership. NCM is no exception to this rule. In fact, its accomplishments exemplify this rule. Traditionally, the Boards of Directors and Executive Directors have provided guidance and direction so that NCM could draw from its past experiences, provide services to the citizens of Charlevoix and Emmet counties on a daily basis, as well as plan for the future needs within those communities. The dedication, organizational skills, and foresight necessary to accomplish these goals have been particularly evident this past year.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Under the leadership of President Lou Fantini, the Board of Directors has accomplished much this past year. It has served as a resource for two Executive Directors, distinguished its role as it relates to policy and procedure as opposed to management, conducted a successful search for a new Executive Director, planned for a transition period from one Executive Director to another, and not only realized the importance of but also participated in two strategic planning workshops. These workshops, which were facilitated by Erik Larson, are providing a framework under which the Board can operate in order to enter into its second, ten-years of operation.

The major themes that surfaced during the Board workshops were as follows:

- NCM is an organization in transition from its birth to its need for greater structure and autonomy. The new Executive Director and the rejuvenated Board of Directors will focus on the organizational structure by clarifying roles and responsibilities, defining policies and procedures, implementing checks and balances, while maintaining quality services in meeting community needs. Formalizing Board Governance Policies, establishing active-standing committees, and developing an organizational chart will help to accomplish this goal.
- The greatest asset NCM possesses is the people who work for the organization: the Board of Directors, the paid staff, and the volunteer staff of mediators. Without the dedication and passion of these individuals, NCM would lose its effectiveness. It is critical that their roles and responsibilities are well defined, that they believe they are team members, and that their voices are heard. In order to accomplish these goals, realistic job descriptions are being either updated or created (including one for mediators), Board members are being asked to sign a commitment form, extensive Personnel Policies with emphasis upon fringe benefits that create a sense of worth for the employees are being developed, and a self-regulating Mediator Facilitation Committee has been established. Additionally, the Board and the Executive Director are considering the possibility of hiring a part-time Mediator Coordinator at some time in the future.
- It is essential that NCM become a self-sustaining, financial organization that is not dependent upon only one source of income. It must diversify its financial support. This will necessitate investigating a variety of sources, inclusive of but not necessarily limited to county funding, court funding, fees for services, membership, grants, foundations, private donors, expansion of services offered, and increasing case load. The Board and staff have already begun this ongoing process.
- Not only must NCM increase its understanding of community needs, it must also reach out to increase understanding of itself within the community. By addressing both sides of this issue, awareness of NCM will rise, which should result in an increase in case load as well as provide additional funding, be it through fees for service or donations. The Mediator Facilitation Committee along with the Intake Coordinator and Executive Director will be able to address the

issue of increasing awareness of community needs. On the other hand, the Board and Executive Director will be the major contributors towards spreading the value of mediation and the services offered by NCM.

- Although NCM has a future that is full of potential, that prospect is somewhat unclear at this point. The development of monitoring calendars for both the Board and the office, the two Board workshops, the process of developing a strategic plan, and the commitment to the implementation of that plan are providing a renewed sense of direction and hope for NCM.

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

NCM has been fortunate to have had Executive Directors, each of whom has taken the organization to the next level of effectiveness. Maartje Nolan was no exception. Although she resigned effective August 31 so that she could spend more time with her family, she will continue to serve as a mediator. Her commitment to mediation and dedication to the process will leave a lasting imprint upon the organization.

Effective September 1, Jane Millar became the new Executive Director. Her first challenges have been to organize the Board workshops, implement the directives of the Board based upon the results of those workshops, organize a Mediator Meeting, update and where necessary create job descriptions, propose Board governance policies, propose formalized Personnel Policies, write formal office policies, design financial statements that are easily understandable, design evaluation forms for staff and the Board, and implement monitoring calendars. For those interested in knowing more about the new Executive Director, copies of her resume are available.

### **STAFF**

Just as an organization needs strong leadership to be successful, it cannot survive without qualified, dedicated staff. This is particularly true in non-profit organizations. NCM is fortunate to have a staff that believes in the mediation process and is willing to reach beyond minimum standards.

### PAID STAFF

Pat Dull and Karen Tank exemplify staff members who go above and beyond what is required of them. Both take initiative, accept responsibility, produce quality work, and function as team members. Their day is done when their work is done, not when the clock says the day is done.

As the PPMP Coordinator, Kathy Lame is outstanding. All of the descriptions that apply to the other staff members apply to her as well. Because of her hard work, the Charlevoix-Emmet PPMP program is one of the top two in the state of Michigan. Kathy is often called upon to do presentations at the state level as a result of her expertise.

### MEDIATORS

Although they are not paid, the mediators are the backbone of NCM. By providing continuing education opportunities through meetings and workshops, they are able to maintain their professionalism. Hence, a workshop was held in October. At that time, basic housecleaning information was shared. Most importantly, however, was the fact that Kathy Lame conducted a brief seminar reviewing mediation techniques and introducing the Mediator Facilitation Committee concept. The results of the survey of the mediators were also revealed.

- The 40-hour training and the 10-hour observations are very worthwhile.
- The mediators feel that other staff members treat them respectfully.
- Although the mediators feel that they are team members, they did not feel this strongly. Consequently, a focus will be placed upon improving that impression.
- Most mediators would like to meet either twice or three times a year in the late afternoon or early evening for professional development workshops.
- Information packets prepared for the mediations contain the appropriate materials.

- Most mediators would like to facilitate more mediations.

In order to maintain a pool of qualified mediators, a forty-hour training was held in May. Twenty-two individuals participated. Upon completing ten hours of observation, NCM will have a broader base of mediators from which to draw.

## **GOVERNANCE**

As NCM has grown, the need for formalized documents that define the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved within and with the organization has become an important criterion. Consequently, a nineteen-page document for Personnel Policies and an eight-page document for Board Governance Policies have been written in the form of proposals. These proposals will ultimately go before the Board of Directors for approval. Additionally, the staff is working on developing an Office Policies Manual.

Job descriptions, inclusive of one for mediators, are included within the framework of the Personnel Policies. Contracts for appropriate employees and commitment forms for Board members have been devised. Evaluation forms for paid staff, mediators and Board members have been written.

The intent of these various manuals and documents is to formalize the policies and procedures so that NCM can become an even more professional organization than it has been in the past. This step is typical for an institution that is ten years old.

## **MEDIATION/CASE LOADS**

As of October 31, the caseload for NCM was down 3% from the previous year (2002). All indications are that that difference will be picked-up by the end of 2003, meaning that the caseload will be the same as or surpass that of 2002. Unfortunately, as of September 30, NCM's caseload was down 13%. This impacted funding from the State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) such that NCM will receive \$4650 less for 2004 than 2003.

Based upon the caseload report dated October 31, a summary of the data is as follows:

- 255 cases
- 129 cases mediated to agreement
- 34 cases mediated without agreement
- 26 cases resolved without mediation
- 4 cases unamenable for mediation
- 1 case facilitated

The top three referral sources were court (141), self-referrals (59), and private attorney (27). The top three dispute types were breach of contract (112), other, which is primarily PPMP (52), and domestic relations (35). Over \$652,083.31 was disputed in the mediations.

The mediators have volunteered 605 hours of their time in performing the 255 mediations. They have traveled a total of 7894 miles.

## **FINANCIAL HEALTH**

The financial status of NCM has both positive and negative components. The projected income for 2003 is \$10,855.81 over budget. However, \$16,394.58 of the overage is due to in kind, whereas there is a shortage of \$6029.05 in real income. The projected expenses for 2003 are \$4357.82 less than budgeted. This is counterbalanced, however, by the liability of \$3869.30. Fortunately, Maartje Nolan was frugal, which puts NCM in the position of having sufficient funding to ride out the dry spell.

NCM owns two certificates of deposit. The one at First Community Bank, which matures on March 28, 2004, is worth \$6524.65, and the one at Northwestern Bank, which matures on March 27, 2004, is valued at \$5164.35.

In looking at the financial well being of NCM in 2004, the organization will receive \$4652.91 less than it did in 2003. There is considerable likelihood, however, that funding of \$15,000 will be received from both Charlevoix and Emmet counties. There appear to be some excellent grant opportunities, and consideration is being given to implementing a minimal administrative fee for opening a mediation case. NCM has entered into a tentative agreement with Munson Hospital to mediate their grievance cases. This would provide another source of income. In other words, NCM can afford to be cautiously optimistic.

### **PPMP**

The Permanency Planning Mediation program continues to grow. It currently serves three counties: Charlevoix, Emmet, and Cheboygan. The work in Cheboygan county is in collaboration with the Gaylord center, Community Mediation Services.

There should be no problem in reaching the 2003 goal of fifty mediated cases. Year-to-date, 43 cases have been mediated: 24 in Charlevoix-Emmet and 19 in Cheboygan. With help and assistance from its partners, the program continues to provide educational opportunities for its mediators with bi-annual in-service workshops that address subjects that are pertinent to child welfare issues.

Having been involved as a pilot site since its inception in 1998, the Charlevoix-Emmet PPMP site is the oldest program in the state of Michigan. It is also known as the leader in permanency planning mediation in the state. Dedicated volunteer mediators who contribute many hours of their time are the reason for this reputation.

Although Kathy Lame cannot attend this year's annual meeting, she wants to emphasize the value of the commitment made by the mediators and their hard work.

### **FUTURE**

The year 2004 marks the tenth anniversary for Northern Community Mediation. At the end of this year's annual meeting, planning will commence for the celebration of this event. Input from staff, mediators and Board members is highly encouraged.

Hopefully, the year 2004 will find NCM with two office locations. Shortly after the first of the year, the PPMP program will move into a small office in the Charlevoix City Hall. NCM will be able to make use of their conference rooms for mediations. Upon locating someone to sublease the office on Bridge Street, the NCM main office will be relocated in Petoskey on the second floor of the old monastery behind St. Francis Church. This facility has rooms that can be used for mediations as well.

The staff will continue to focus upon its professionalism. The Office Policies Manual will be completed. A minimum of two professional development workshops for the mediators will be held: one in April, the other in September. Formal job evaluations for all staff, including the Executive Director, will be conducted. The Mediator Facilitation Committee, which is being headed by Kathy Lame, will define its role and plan an active role within the organization.

At the end of this meeting, the new Board members will schedule an orientation time with the Executive Director. The Board as a whole will enter into the year 2004 with the charge of developing, evaluating and prioritizing strategies to accomplish specific objectives towards meeting goals that were established during the Board workshops.

- The Finance/Funding Committee will focus on improving the reporting of the financial standing of NCM. It will also seek sources for increasing funding through grants, foundations, fees for services, local government, fund raising events, and individual donations, particularly those of a substantial amount. In doing so, a funding model plan, which will ultimately be tied to a marketing plan, will be designed.
- The Governance Committee will review the by-laws and recommend changes if appropriate. It will do the same for the proposed Board Governance Policies, of which the Board monitoring calendar is a part. It will work on developing an organizational chart and ensure that training sessions relating to roles and responsibilities are scheduled if necessary,
- The Human Resources/Personnel/Nominating Committee will focus on quality improvement and increasing the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various players within the organization. This will be accomplished by ensuring that 1) surveys are conducted to determine paid staff and mediator satisfaction 2) the voices of the mediators are heard, 3) individuals are recognized for their contributions, 4) well-defined job descriptions are in place, 5) the effectiveness of Mediator Facilitation Committee is monitored, 6) the possibility of hiring a part-time Mediator Coordinator is evaluated, and 7) the proposed Personnel Policies are reviewed and appropriate recommendations are made.
- The Strategic Planning Committee will work on creating a marketing plan that aligns the needs of the community with the services offered by NCM. It will review the quality of services provided by NCM and develop a quality improvement process. It will also ensure that a Board workshop is scheduled for reviewing and updating the overall strategic plan.

NCM will be able to draw from its increased sense of direction and increased level of commitment and energy to implement these objectives in order to accomplish the overall goals. The high level of Board and staff expertise, knowledge, diversity, networking capabilities and reputation are strengths upon which they can draw to overcome their shortcomings. The fact that effective monthly accounting practices and monitoring mechanisms are in place will enhance that process.

There is no doubt that the year 2004 will be a challenging one. It will also be an exciting one because Northern Community Mediation is about to enter into a new dimension. By doing so, the quality and magnitude of its services will surpass the vision of its founding parents ten years ago. Those individuals who signed the articles of incorporation would be proud of what NCM has become—an essential and respected institution within Charlevoix and Emmet counties.