



Northern Community Mediation

Where The Solution Is Up To You

Serving Emmet &
Charlevoix Counties

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Executive Directors Reflect

Fifteen years ago, the state of Michigan enacted legislation that established the Citizen Dispute Resolution Program (CDRP). The purpose of this program is to ease the court burden by providing mediation, an alternative means of resolving conflict. Mediation is a process in which the parties in disagreement come together to discuss their differences of opinion. With the facilitation of a mediator, the parties come up with their own solution to the disagreement. Mediation is an economical, efficient and effective means of settling disputes.

The year 2004 marks the tenth anniversary of Northern Community Mediation (NCM), one of 21 CDRP centers in Michigan. In celebration of this landmark event, the three previous executive directors of NCM met and reflected upon the changes in the organization since its inception.

Celia Partida, who served from 1994 to 1996, saw a natural fit between her commitment to conflict resolution, violence prevention and the goals of NCM. As the part-time executive director, she started with only a telephone and an answering machine. She “never thought it would grow into what it has become.”

In 1996, Kathy Lame agreed to serve as interim executive director. What was to be a three-month commitment turned into a three-year responsibility. Lame was able to add an “office the size of a closet” to the telephone and answering machine. She was faced with “a huge educational piece in order to make a go of it” and “establishing that NCM was legitimate.”

When Lame decided to become the Director of the Child Abuse and Neglect Program for NCM in 1999, Maartje Nolan took over as executive director. During her leadership, Nolan continued extending the services of NCM and expanded the office in general. According to Nolan, “My challenge...was to maintain the integrity of the process and the quality of the service,...as well as to increase the case load.”

All three agreed that going from five phone calls a month in 1994 to handling approximately 330 cases in 2003 was “mind boggling.” Partida attributed much of this growth to the fact that “our courts are top of the line and are willing to look at and invest in new ideas.” Nolan added, “This is a testament to the quality of people who live in Charlevoix and Emmet Counties and their willingness to be proactive.”

All three women envision mediation’s becoming “more of a household word” and that NCM’s ultimate purpose is to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Charlevoix and Emmet Counties. Lame summarized the tone of the meeting when she said, “It would be nice if people

would think in terms of ‘I am going to *mediate* you rather than I am going to sue you. Mediation would be the first place you would go to resolve a conflict rather than the last place.’”

Anyone interested in learning more about Northern Community Mediation should contact Dr. Jane Millar at 231.487.1771.

Pictured from left to right: Celia Partida, Maartje Nolan, Kathy Lame