



Northern Community Mediation

Where The Solution Is Up To You

November 23, 2022

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear NAME:

On November 30 at 11:30 at night, 12 year-old Matt took his dog out for a walk. His walk included wandering into the neighboring summer community where he set one of the cottages on fire. The fire was reported by a motorist who spotted the fire from the highway. Matt watched as the fire fighters tried desperately to save the cottage, but to no avail. The cottage burned to the ground.

Two nights later in the middle of the night, Matt again took his dog for a walk into the neighboring summer community. Matt torched a second cottage. This time, Matt anonymously reported the fire. Again, he watched as the fire fighters fought the flames. This time, however, the intensity of the heat from the fire was so intense that it melted the vinyl siding on the cottage to the left and blew out the windows on the cottage to the right.

Since Matt had used his cell phone to report the second fire, the police were able to identify him as the caller, which led them to arrest Matt as the arsonist. During interviews with the detectives, Matt was polite and openly admitted to having set the cottages on fire. When asked about his home life, he explained that he lived with his father, who worked nights. His mother lived in a town ten miles away with his two step sisters, whom he really liked. The detectives also learned that Matt liked school, was an A and B student and was on the robotics team. Additionally, Matt shared that he was fascinated with fire.

Even though this case involved a minor, the fact that it was a criminal case made the court hearing open to the public. In particular, the cottage owners whose cottages had been destroyed or damaged were present, as were Matt's parents. Additionally, there was representation from the police department, fire department, cottage association, and insurance company. As an aside, all of the cottages were insured by the same insurance company.

The challenge that faced the court related to the sentencing of Matt. Not only would "locking him up" serve no purpose, it would undoubtedly be detrimental. At the same time, the victims were entitled to be "made whole." It was possible that both concerns

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could be addressed through a restorative practices approach. First, Matt was to be placed in a specific, certified facility that provided 24/7 counseling, psychological help, and schooling for youthful offenders. Second, the case was ordered to mediation.

During mediation, each of the victims had the opportunity to express how Matt's actions had impacted each and every one of them. It was not merely the destruction of the cottages; it was the destruction of memories. The danger to the fire fighters, the thousands and thousands of dollars the insurance company would have to pay, the cost in time and money incurred by the police department and the court system, the strain his actions had upon his family—Matt listened to all of this. He also heard over and over again from all of the victims that they agreed to participate in mediation because they wanted to be a part of helping Matt. They did not want to give up on a 12 year old boy. He heard loudly and clearly that he was forgiven. All that the victims were asking in return was for Matt to take advantage of the help he would get in the downstate facility.

Matt's story is still being written. Matt is receiving the treatment and attention that he needs. Only time will tell what sort of future is in store for Matt. One thing is for certain; if the court had simply thrown Matt into prison, the outlook for his future in all probability would not have been a positive one.

I am sharing Matt's story with you in hopes that you will consider a financial contribution to Northern Community Mediation (NCM). NCM receives approximately 25% of its income from the state of Michigan and 50% from the local courts and counties. NCM is responsible for raising the remaining 25%, which is done through fund raising, grant writing and donations. Please, make a contribution to NCM so that we can continue to offer quality mediation services to the citizens of Charlevoix and Emmet counties.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jane Millar".

Jane Millar, Ed.D.
Executive Director