



DRS DIALOGUE

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DISPUTE RESOLUTION SERVICES
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
SUPREME COURT OF VIRGINIA

GREATER RICHMOND COMMUNITY MEDIATION CENTER

Est. September 2023

PAMELA K. STRUSS, PHD

The Greater Richmond Community Mediation Center (GRCMC) came to life on September 19, 2023 by the approval of incorporation papers and a non-profit status 501-c-3. The first step was to meet and form agreements with the Richmond area General District Court systems. From working with LJ Pendlebury of Alexandria I knew coordination contracts bring in a small stipend, and of course, revenue from mediating cases. Financial viability is critical for community mediation centers.

GRCMC's financial foundation is built on a minimalist perspective: virtual office, cell phone, PO Box, website with email, and ADR notable for case management. GRCMC utilizes community spaces - the library and generosity of a church for meetings and trainings. I am the only staff-right now unpaid. However, at the request of the Judges, all mediator contractors are paid. After extensive research the common themes that contributes to financial distress for community mediation centers are expensive office space and too many staff members. Having a big fancy office is not in GRCMC's future but a small 2 room office is. Revenue must first be reliable; grants are being pursued.

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GRCMC is a vehicle for me to engage in community development, teach and train, build community peace, research and mentor a new generation of alternative dispute resolution practitioners. GRCMC provides an umbrella for others who want to promote and practice in a particular sector such as the environment; and build bridges between people with diverse ethnicities, socio-economic levels, education and point of view for peaceful communities

GRCMC was selected as a 2024 NAFCM emerging center, one of three in the United States. Their support, instruction and guidance has been very helpful. As a community mediation center, associating with Resolution Virginia and NAFCM have been the best professional associations yet.

GRCMC is currently searching for mediators to add to its roster for GDC cases. Compensation varies depending on length of mediation service.

If you have any questions, please reach out to me at pstruss@richmondmediates.com or 804-720-0715.

INTRODUCING ROLE PLAY TO THE MENTORSHIP PROCESS

MICHAEL BARR, ADR ANALYST

How many newly certified General District Court mediators experienced a struggle to find sufficient cases to co-mediate? How many mentors and mediation centers in the Commonwealth received calls from persons excited from taking the Basic course, only to be disappointed with lack of opportunity to practice? How many mediators sought extensions on the two-year limit, especially during and after the pandemic? How many mediators in the process of becoming certified realized they had enough cases (3) but insufficient hours (5) to apply for certification? How many mediators met the case and hourly requirements but were not able to serve as scrivener of a settled agreement?

In response to such concerns, DRS formed a committee in April 2023 to discuss the use of role-play, mentored as an actual case, to fulfill a portion of the co-mediation requirements and facilitate the mentorship process necessary for mediator certification. The committee of 10 from across Virginia consisted of mediation trainers, mentors, court coordinators, the manager of DRS, and myself and built upon the work of a pilot program sponsored and initiated by NVMS Conflict Resolution Center in 2021. Our work focused on devising a policy document – [Mediation Role Plays for Certification: A Guide for Using Role Play Scenarios in the Mediation Mentoring Process](#) – to formalize a program through which an aspiring mediator can experience the challenge of an actual case in a simulated environment.

The mentor will work with the mentee on the role-play case in the same manner as a court-referred or private case, with similar substance and complexity, from storytelling to possible settlement. The Role Play Guide provides a framework that any VA mediation center or enterprising mentor may use to establish such a program. It includes sections on the responsibilities of both participating mentors and role-players; a tips sheet to familiarize parties that are new to mediation on how to play a role convincingly; a modified evaluation form to submit to DRS, as well as sample role plays. We hope this innovation is a creative way to address the questions at the top of the article all the while enhancing quality control through a regulated mock mediation.

POST YOUR TRAINING WITH US!

Mediators who would like their courses displayed on the DRS Training Calendar will now submit the course information via a survey. You may click on the calendar below to access the link. This link will also be included in the email sent to you when your course is approved. If you have any questions, please contact disputeresolution@vacourts.gov



DRS IN THE FIELD

DAN WASSINK,
DRS MANAGER

DRS continues to place a strong emphasis on training and educating our judges and clerks of court whenever possible. So far in 2024, our outreach efforts have focused on the clerks, with opportunities to meet with judges just around the corner.

In February, newly-elected circuit court clerks met for several days at the Supreme Court building in Richmond for their orientation. Michael Barr and I were given time on the jam-packed agenda to educate the clerks about mediation; as well as the very popular Judicial Settlement Conference (JSC) program, which utilizes retired circuit court judges trained in mediation techniques to assist parties in settling their disputes before trial.

In March, Michael and I made the short trip to Glen Allen to attend the Judicial Management Program, a multi-day orientation session for newly-appointed district court clerks. We touted the benefits of court-referred mediation in both GD and JDR courts, and used a quiz format to educate the clerks about the mediation process. Our presentation also stressed the importance of parent education seminars, which are mandatory for parties in cases where custody, visitation or support is contested.

Next up are the judges, where DRS staff will hit the road on the following dates:

•**May 14** to meet with our JSC judges in Norfolk during the Judicial Conference of Virginia

•**June 25 & 26** to meet with new district and circuit court judges in Newport News at the Pre-Bench Orientation Program

•**August 19 & 20** at the Judicial Conference of Virginia for District Courts in Roanoke. Jon Lamp and I will distribute resource materials, and make ourselves available to chat with attendees about mediation and other ADR services.

DRS IN THE FIELD (CONT)

DAN WASSINK,
DRS MANAGER

MEDIATION WITHOUT BORDERS



I was also fortunate enough to enjoy a taste of the international flavor of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) community. On April 12, I traveled to Fairfax to meet with 20 mediators and other ADR practitioners from the Republic of Kazakhstan. The visit was hosted by the Northern Virginia Mediation Services (NVMS) Conflict Resolution Center and was coordinated by the International Human Rights Center.

I joined a six-person discussion panel to present information about the use and impact of ADR in Virginia, and to answer questions from the foreign delegation. NVMS and a delegation representative also signed a memorandum of cooperation to encourage the development of international educational programs to meet the advanced training needs of mediators in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

This was a wonderful experience that reminded me of the global reach and impact of ADR, and I was grateful for the opportunity to interact with my fellow mediators from Kazakhstan. And THANK YOU to NVMS for the invitation!

MEDIATION CENTER OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

TAYLOR FROME,
MEDIATION CENTER
OF CHARLOTTESVILLE



The Mediation Center of Charlottesville is happy to be one of DRS's Parent Education Providers, as well as a center providing mediation services in Charlottesville, Albemarle County, Fluvanna County and Greene County. We offer monthly parent education workshops, generally on the 2nd Saturday of each month, from 10 AM to 2 PM. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all workshops virtually, but now, in 2024, we are alternating in-person with virtual workshops. The parents we serve find the virtual workshop to be more convenient but the in-person workshop to be more useful. We have three parent education workshop facilitators. Walt Megonigal and Emily Willey have led these workshops for years and we are excited to add Margaret McNeill to our team this year.

Walt and Emily are both trained Co-Parenting course instructors, as well as Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and Circuit Court Family mediators. Walt wrote and teaches three certified CME courses, "Human Communication for the Mediator", "Active Listening", and "Co-Parenting for the Mediator". Emily has written a new course, "Mediation Serving Charlottesville Police Department" that is awaiting certification.

We are also excited to be selected by the City of Charlottesville to receive a Vibrant Communities Grant to train and deploy a team of mediators who empower community residents to find agreement before their conflicts need legal or police intervention. In addition, we, in collaboration with Resolution Virginia and the Piedmont Dispute Resolution Center, have applied for an AmeriCorps planning grant that could lead to funding for service-learning programming at our centers. We are hopeful to continue the good work that is our foundation, as we expand our role and capacity in the coming years.

MEDIATION COORDINATOR MEETINGS

JON LAMP,
ADR PROGRAMS
SPECIALIST

In March, DRS hosted two virtual meetings with Mediation Coordinators. Participants were from all over the Commonwealth, from the Eastern Shore to Roanoke. Mediation coordinators manage their local court-referred mediation programs and serve a vital role as the liaison between their courts, roster mediators, DRS, and the public. Most coordinators have a contract with our office, but even those hired by the local court attended these meetings. The meetings separated GDC and JDR court coordinators so each could focus on issues unique to their types of cases. In the Fall, DRS plans to host a meeting with all coordinators to discuss topics common to all programs.

In each meeting, the coordinators were asked for feedback on the Evaluation of Mediation Session, ADR form 1002, the exit survey given to parties. These surveys are mandatory for court-referred cases (e.g. see Guidelines for the Training and Certification of Court-Refereed Mediators Section G.3) but mediators and coordinators have faced challenges in collecting accurate results from parties. Coordinators shared their difficulties in administering surveys for virtual mediations, the troubles with the content of the surveys, and questioned how the surveys are helpful for themselves and for mediators.

Another topic impacting both GDC and JDR coordinators is the balance of mediation cases to mediators. In both types of courts, some programs find themselves with more mediators hoping to join their roster than there are cases sufficient to meet the interest. A few programs, though, are searching for active mediators to join their roster. If you are interested in mediating court-referred cases, especially in-person, DRS recommends reaching out to your local mediation coordinator or court to see if they have space available on their roster.

Coordinators also discussed topics specific to the types of cases they coordinate. JDR coordinators discussed the work of a committee that is developing additional training materials for calculating child support, virtual vs in-person mediations in the year 2024, and how to increase referrals to mediation. GDC coordinators discussed mediation as a diversionary tool for eviction cases, the use simulated role play mediations to facilitate the certification process, and reviewing GDC mediator payment policies.

DRS greatly appreciates the service provided by mediation coordinators around Virginia!

FREE MARKETING!

DAN WASSINK, DRS MANAGER

A number of new marketing tools are now available to help you grow your business and spread the word about mediation.

Here at DRS, we recently updated a brochure that resides on our website ([Mediation: A Guide for Virginia Court Users \(vacourts.gov\)](http://vacourts.gov)). The publication contains a question-and-answer format designed to educate the general public about the mediation process and the advantages it holds over traditional litigation in resolving disputes. For free copies of the brochure, email Linda in the Office of the Executive Secretary's Purchasing division at: leadkins@vacourts.gov. The brochures come in packets of 50.

A similar brochure was produced by the Virginia Mediation Network's (VMN) court referrals task force, a group that has been looking at ways to boost statewide court referrals to mediation. If you are a VMN member, you can download and customize the brochure yourself by visiting the Resources section of the VMN website. Or if you prefer to receive non-customized brochures in the mail (also available in batches of 50), email your request to Christy at VMN: virginiamediationnetwork@gmail.com

The same task force also created a handy "business card" for mediators serving Virginia's courts, especially those engaged in court-sitting in General District courts. It's a handy marketing tool to distribute to litigants or court staff to let them know you are present and available, and it contains space for your name and contact information. The cards are also available for VMN members to download or order, just like the brochure.

DRS TRAINING CALENDAR



THANK YOU

for all you do!

CONTACT US

Dan Wassink,
DRS Manager- dwassink@vacourts.gov

Michael Barr,
ADR Analyst-
mbarr@vacourts.gov

Jon Lamp,
ADR Program Specialist- jlamp@vacourts.gov

Ann Warshauer,
Parent Education Coordinator-
awarshauer@vacourts.gov

Jordan Blackstone,
Administrative Assistant-
jblackstone@vacourts.gov

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS!

Have an idea for a future article?

Submit your ideas to
disputeresolution@vacourts.gov

As always, thank you for all you do for ADR in Virginia.

Dispute Resolution Services