

Got Conflict?SM

Conflict Hurts. Mediation Helps.



AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE CONFLICT MEDIATION SERVICES SINCE 1979

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March 2023

Gail was invited by the City of Cambridge Peace Commission to deliver the remarks for the annual Martin Luther King Day Commemoration and Remembrance. A portion of her remarks are below.

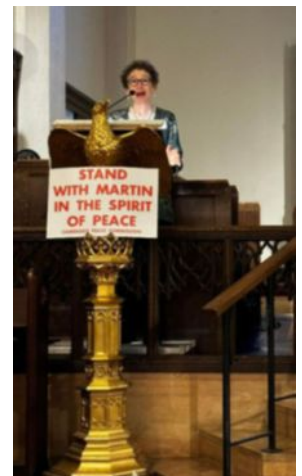
Note from Gail

I have been thinking a lot about what would MLK say to us today?

He might be shaking his head, muttering that not enough has changed. Still so many lessons to be learned and implemented. Though I still believe he would be the holder of hope. The beacon that he was/is still lighting the way: In his words, “No one, who has any concern for the integrity of life in America today, can ignore the present...” While he said that in the context of Vietnam, I think his message would be amplified still with the level of discord around us today, in the many concentric circles of our lives.

Here’s the question: What can we learn from the past to improve/inform our present....and our future? Let’s start with a STOP on demonizing and other-izing people who are different from us. Differences, which may result in disagreements and conflicts, are a normal part of the human condition.

How we deal with it is the challenge we face.



With gratitude,
Gail S. Packer, MSW
Executive Director

Legislative Briefing - CDSC joins hands with community mediation centers across the state

On January 26, more than 130 people gathered for a legislative briefing led by community mediation champions Representative Manny Cruz and Senator Paul Mark. In addition to presentations on the work of the centers, speakers provided information on this year's budget request, and the improvements it would bring.

A highlight was the video on community mediation services, coordinated by Ron Fredey of Resolution Massachusetts, and with participation from every center. CDSC was glad to work with Judges Gloria Tan and Kenneth King to provide interviews for the video – their support and understanding of the mediation process, especially for juveniles, was wonderful to hear!

See the video below (video will play in a new tab):



A CDSC Success Story

Two 12 year old boys showed up in Cambridge juvenile court.

Encouraged by local police and in order to protect her child Michael, Mrs. W* decided to file a harassment prevention order against Tommy, the other boy. Tommy had a brain injury that made it difficult for him to see that his “friends” may not have been acting in his best interests when they pressured him to threaten the plaintiff, Michael W. Michael was struggling with his own mental health issues that caused him to show up in the hospital a few times.

The boys used to be best friends.

Michael and his mother, Tommy and his father all sat down in one room, and after the CDSC Mediator’s introduction Tommy’s dad, Mr. M immediately said: “until I got served the paperwork I didn’t know there was any issue between the boys.” Classic juvenile court scenario.

The mediation moved forward where the parents had their first opportunity to discuss their boys’ conflicts with each other. Mrs. W and Mr. M were asked to leave the room and the boys had an opportunity to talk between themselves.

It became clear at one point that Tommy was struggling with signs of stress (severe fatigue and physical discomfort), and the Mediator was able to pivot and offer trauma-informed comforts such as water, snacks, Kleenex and a stretch break.

After 1.5 hours of mediation and an agreement everyone understood and agreed to uphold, parties waited outside the courtroom waiting to have the Judge approve the mediated agreement. The boys were standing around shuffling their feet in-sync and smiling shyly at each other, while the parents stood heads together, quietly discussing and sharing with each other. Another successful CDSC mediation in the books!

*All names have changed to protect disputants' privacy and the confidentiality of the mediation process.

Training Round-up

For anyone interested in becoming a Mediator, we hold our 32-hour Basic Mediation Training twice a year. Our Spring 2023 session is now underway, with a full class of 20. Please [contact us](#) to be added to the mailing list or with any questions regarding the Fall 2023 session. Spread the word!

More than 50 people registered to hear about managing secondary trauma from Erin Miller, chief strategy officer at the well-known nonprofit organization for homeless and nearly homeless women — [Rosie's Place](#). Erin has a long history

of teaching, learning and engaging people from all walks of life in the struggle for justice. Her thoughtful work around self care and managing secondary trauma have made her an important resource for direct care workers. Missed it? Contact cdscinfo@communitydispute.org for a copy of the presentation slides.

Upcoming in March: Join us in conversation with **Josh Hoch**, Director of

Ombuds and Mediation Services at MWI. During a one-hour roundtable on March 28 at noon, Josh will introduce tools to evaluate your effectiveness to use after each mediation. He'll also share advanced techniques that level up interactions with parties and help overcome impasse. These techniques help parties trust the mediation process, maintain flexibility, and generate their own creative options. You will leave with additional tools for self-evaluation, ways to be more purposeful during mediation, and with a toolkit of over 35 skills that will help you be a more effective mediator in 2023. **RSVP by emailing CDSCinfo@communitydispute.org!**

Look for our in April roundtable on mediation & neurodiversity: date and speaker TBA. Make sure you're on our mailing list to get the notice!

Please [contact us](#) to be added to the mailing list. Follow us on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#) to be among the first to hear about our roundtables and trainings!

Working to Make Re-entry from Prison Successful

Armed with the knowledge that the first 72 hours of release is a significant determinant of risk for re-incarceration, and the importance of building supportive relationships on the outside, the Community Dispute Settlement Center offers up to three, two-hour mediation sessions free of charge to incarcerated persons within 12 months of release. CDSC is one of several community mediation centers across Massachusetts to participate in this program.

CDSC staffperson Soraya Tramontozzi works with several mediators from the CDSC roster who have received special training from MOPC (the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration) at UMass. Says Soraya, "We are so glad to be offering this service to people leaving correctional facilities, so that their reentry can be as smooth and productive as possible."

Pre-release services around housing, job searches and substance abuse counseling are widely available in MA. However relationship planning with those

who can contribute to a successful release was missing and can complement other services. Evidence of success from a 15 year old program in Maryland formed the basis of the program in Massachusetts, which is funded by the Boston Foundation and the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation.

For the next several months, Yvette Cheeks, a seasoned mediator and trainer, has agreed to step into the the role of our interim Re-entry Coordinator. In addition, she and Molly Froelich have taken on the new role of Re-entry Mentor to help coach and support our mediators in this innovative, dynamic and challenging initiative.

In November of 2020 Massachusetts launched a new statewide [Eviction Diversion Initiative](#) that is run through the MA Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) and the MA Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD). The program supports mediation centers by providing free mediation to landlords and tenants involved in evictions due to Covid-19. It complements CDSC's existing mediation services offered through court-connected referrals and those referred from "upstream" community organizations and connections.

Staff comings & goings at CDSC

One of CDSC's greatest strengths has been the circle of friends with whom we work. We are so sorry to see Danae Kristiansen move on, and wish her the best in her next life chapter! Grace Ballenger arrives to take this important position – welcome Grace! Soraya Tramontozzi will be on parental leave until June – and we welcome Sara Hathaway who, as Case Coordinator, will oversee our community mediations while we wait for Soraya's return. Yvette Cheeks will be handling prerelease matters in Soraya's absence. Finally, we welcome Doug Thompson as our Practicum coordinator. Welcome all!



Established in 1979, the Community Dispute Settlement Center (CDSC), is a private, not-for-profit mediation and training center dedicated to providing an alternative and affordable forum for resolving conflict.

CDSC promotes better ways to understand and deal with conflict through skilled teams of pro bono mediators, training programs in mediation and conflict management, and broad community outreach.

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