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CDRC: 25 years and still talking

Judy Saul / Guest Column

This year marks the 25th anniversary of CDRC, the Community Dispute Resolution Center. Since 1983, our mission has been to help our friends and neighbors foster constructive responses to the conflicts we all face every day. Our simple belief — that “talk works” — belies how challenging it can be to start the conversations that lead us to easing the difficult moments in our family lives, professional lives, school lives and even our later lives, as we may grow less independent. Despite our best efforts, conflict sometimes catches us by surprise, yet that conflict need not be entirely negative or destructive. It need not be suppressed or create rifts between us and those with whom we live and work. At CDRC, we believe that through skillful mediation we can help transform the stress, strong emotion and potential miscommunication of unmanaged conflict into a dynamic and constructive problem-solving conversation.

There are several ways that we at CDRC practice cultivating the kind of talk that really works. We are not only mediators but educators and facilitators, as well. As mediators we provide opportunities for individuals to move away from feeling stuck in contention, toward clarity and agreement. As facilitators we open the door to many larger conversations that need to happen around decision- or policy-making in workplaces or communities, helping to keep the conversation among many stakeholders on track and productive. And as educators we train young people, elders, community members and our own volunteers in skillful conflict management, imparting ideas that will last a lifetime.

We at CDRC know that mediation is not something that is familiar to everyone, but for those who have used mediation, it has been invaluable. Many of the situations we've mediated might have escalated or ended up in court, at great financial and emotional cost to those involved directly or indirectly. We know that talk works, and

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ERIC STEWART / Journal Staff

Judy Saul

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beginning there we have built a strong case for open communication and a history that includes:

- * Helping more than 52,000 people face their difficult situation;
- * Mediating more than 8,000 cases; and
- * Facilitating nearly 500 meetings, retreats, trainings or other group "conversations" for more than 5,000 individuals at 300 local businesses, schools, government agencies and neighborhoods.

We've also increased the capacity of individuals in our communities to help themselves and each other through:

- * Training 430 adult volunteers to mediate at CDRC and more than 1,800 students of all ages in local schools to mediate among their peers;
- * Instructing more than 2,800 employees of local businesses, organizations and educational institutions in effective communication; and
- * Educating more than 2,100 young people in managing their responses to conflict.

As we look back on these 25 years, we are so proud of what our community has accomplished with us. Mediation has slowly but surely become a more mainstream option for people, and the support we have received from courts and government has helped to make this happen. To honor these accomplishments, we're having celebrations in each of the counties we serve. They will be parties with a purpose, as we'll be not only entertained, wined and dined, but also shown the best of what CDRC can do. On March 4 in

Schuyler County, we'll facilitate a community conversation on the challenges of land-use and growth; on April 23, we'll be in Chemung County at the Wings of Eagles Discovery Center, celebrating our youth programs with guest Carl Hayden, chancellor emeritus of the Board of Regents and chairman of the SUNY Board of Trustees; and finally, in Tompkins County, we'll be having our grandest event on Oct. 20 with our guest, Dr. William Thomas, a revolutionary in elder care and founder of the Eden Alternative.

Also over the course of our anniversary year, we'll use this column to share what we do, and what we've learned along the way. We'll discuss the various options we have, as citizens, when conflicts or differences arise. Certainly, we at CDRC are here to help, but what other options are out there for our particular issues? From time to time, as things in our community or beyond dictate, we'll revisit why it can be so hard to find our way when caught in the midst of strife and how we can go about choosing the path forward with a clear head. We look forward to sharing our stories with you as we celebrate our 25 years of service.

Editor's note: Community Dispute Resolution Center's monthly column will appear on the last Friday of each month in 2008. To suggest a column topic, contact Judy Saul (contact information below) or Andrew Tutino, The Journal's Opinion Editor, at atutino@ithacajournal.com or 274-9213.

Judy Saul is a co-founder and executive director of the Community Dispute Resolution Center. For information on the agency or events, got to www.cdrc.org, e-mail cdrc@cdrc.org or call 273-9347.

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Congratulations Judy and all at CDRC! Your organization is a huge asset to our community. Keep up the great work! Here's to another 25 years...Cheers!

Posted: Fri Jan 25, 2008 7:00 am

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