



## community connection

# IMPACT

By Meredith Mann And Cassie Lively

### What is the Center for Conflict Resolution?

CCR began in 1979 in a storefront in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood, started by young lawyers hoping to help neighbors resolve their disputes through mediation. In the early 1980s, CCR began working with the Circuit Court of Cook County to receive referrals and has since established partnerships with many nonprofits, municipalities and community groups.

In the past year alone, CCR has provided free mediation services to more than 5,000 community members and trained more than 500 individuals in mediation and conflict management. CCR has eleven full-time staff members and approximately 140 active, trained volunteer mediators. All CCR mediators have been certified and undergone an intensive 40 hours of training and a three-month mentorship program. CCR regularly handles disputes involving parenting time and decision making, guardianship and probate issues, consumers and merchants, breaches of contract, foreclosures, landlords and tenants, condomini-

um associations, religious institutions, schools and neighbor/community conflicts.

### What is mediation?

Mediation is a negotiation that is facilitated by a neutral third party mediator. Unlike a court proceeding or binding arbitration, the mediator does not make decisions for the parties or provide advice. Rather, the mediator facilitates a conversation between the parties to help them identify what is most important to them and to develop solutions that meet their needs. The process is based on the idea that the individuals in conflict are best situated to solve their own disputes and is designed to give each party a voice, allow them to be heard and to assist

the parties in making thoughtful and informed decisions. As CCR volunteer and Glencoe resident Howard Epstein puts it, "The most effective and beneficial solutions are the ones the individuals come up with themselves." When parties do reach an agreement, the mediator helps them write up the terms they have agreed to. Thus, mediation can be a great alternative to court for people who have a previous or continuing relationship.

### I'm interested, now what?

Many of your Glencoe neighbors are involved with CCR! Among CCR's volunteer mediators are Howard Epstein, Lisa Sandlow, Jonah Orlofsky and Lulu Witcoff. Howard Epstein has been a certified volunteer mediator since 2010. He is a trainer for CCR's Mediation Skills Training programs, a mentor in CCR's Mediation Mentorship Program, a member of CCR's Volunteer Council and in 2013 was recognized as CCR's Trainer of the Year. Lisa, Jonah and Lulu are all certified volunteer mediators and serve in varied roles as Volunteer Council members, Continuing Education committee members and Outreach Ambassadors. CCR's work would not be possible without our dedicated volunteers.

Each of these volunteers found their way to CCR through different means and it ended up bringing them togeth-

er because, although they all live in Glencoe, they did not know each other until they met here! Howard's own difficult experience with trying to get justice through filing a small claims court case led him to overhear a judge referring parties to mediation -- this piqued his curiosity to seek training and become a volunteer, drawing on his background in psychology and law. Howard says that getting involved with CCR has helped him to "make lemonade out of lemons."

Lulu learned about CCR through a friend and highlights one of the biggest advantages to mediation when by pointing out that she has "been in a room with people who have made life miserable for each other for years, but who have not talked to each other during that entire time." Mediation provides the perfect context to have these difficult conversations. Lulu has mediated cases through our Juvenile Victim-Offender Program, a restorative justice model that allows court-involved youth to participate in a session with their parent or guardian and the victim in their case. These disputes have been eye-opening for Lulu and she feels that "it is essential that we never turn our backs on the community at large and remember that we all need to work to improve what is happening beyond our own backyard."

Jonah was drawn in through the services CCR provides through the Circuit Court of Cook County's mortgage foreclosure program and initially volunteered as a mediator working with homeowners and lenders -- he has since gotten involved working with different types of disputes and recently mediated a dispute between two teenagers involving bullying on social media that had escalated to a court case with a motion filed for an order of protection. Jonah says, "Although I've been representing people in lawsuits for 35 years, it is now extremely gratifying to help people resolve matters amicably and avoid the litigation process."

Lisa took CCR's course after 20 years of experience practicing law, as she came to feel that acting as an advocate for her clients was sometimes just not enough, and she wanted to do more to help her clients engage with conflict productively, beyond just "winning" the dispute. Lisa says, "Fortunately, I found CCR to take my mediator training class, then never wanted to leave the organization. CCR's mission of assisting individuals through conflict, regardless of their ability to pay, has become a true calling for me. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to help people through these difficult times."

CCR is incredibly grateful for the generosity of our volunteers, including Howard, Lulu, Jonah and Lisa. Because CCR's mediation services are provided free of charge, we also rely on the support of the community at large. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer with CCR or making a contribution to benefit CCR, please visit [ccr.org](http://ccr.org). You can learn more about mediation and how CCR can be a resource for you or your municipality at our website or contact CCR by phone at 312-922-6464 x22 or by email at [cm@ccrchicago.org](mailto:cm@ccrchicago.org).