

Living

The process of becoming a mediator

This past spring, I attended the Mediation and Conflict Resolution Workshop offered by Mediation Services of Adams County (MSAC). I took the workshop because I wanted to volunteer as a mediator for MSAC, and also to help members of my cohousing community deal with interpersonal and group conflict more effectively. We are a close-knit community at Hundredfold Farm, working together to implement our shared vision of caring, paring and sharing. We are building our eco-friendly housing development, and own and operate Seven Springs Tree Farm. In any group working towards common goals, disagreements arise, and I thought it would be helpful to have another person in the group trained in conflict resolution. In the workshop, I also discovered that the skills I learned can be applied to other relationships in my life, including at home, work, and the nonprofit organizations where I volunteer.

The 22-hour workshop, held over two weekends, was led by skilled trainers Janet Powers, Mary Kay Turner and Linda Kocher. The first half of the workshop focused on communication skills. We learned about conflict styles, practiced active listening techniques and developed skills that would help us to promote collaboration, such as how to recognize communication blockers and to use supportive and assertive language.

MEDIATION SERVICES

Rosie Bolen



The second half concentrated on the process of mediation. Mediation is a method of resolving conflict in which a neutral third party (the mediator) helps disputants find a win-win solution that everyone thinks is fair. Mediation can prevent minor disagreements from escalating into more serious situations, and is more convenient, timely, and affordable than legal alternatives such as arbitration or litigation. Mediation is highly effective because the disputants communicate openly in a non-threatening environment and are empowered to develop their own solutions. The process can be healing because it helps the disputants deal with future conflicts in a more positive way.

In the workshop, we practiced mediation through fun and interesting role-plays. We were presented with various scenarios involving conflicts, and we took turns acting as disputants and mediators. As disputants we enjoyed indulging our

inner thespians (some of us really got into the roles!), and as mediators we received helpful feedback from the trainers and gained valuable experience in all steps of the process.

While I have not mediated a formal dispute in our co-housing community yet, I am looking forward to my first mediation for MSAC next week, in which I will be paired with an experienced mediator. I am also implementing the communication skills I learned in the workshop into my interactions with people. It can be difficult to break out of old habits, especially in the midst of a heated conflict, but it is getting easier with practice.

MSAC offers this workshop at least once a year, typically in the spring. If you are interested in becoming a trained mediator, improving your communication skills, or learning about conflict resolution techniques, this is the workshop for you! For more information, please contact MSAC at 334-7312, email mediationac@yahoo.com, or write to P.O. Box 4113, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

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