

GRASS-ROOTS QUALIFICATIONS

by Daniel P Joyce

I am compelled to write this as a response to all this folderol about licensing, credentials and certification of mediators. As the director of a grass-roots community based mediation center, I generally do not concern myself with the machinations of the "professional" dispute resolution community. However, I have learned that the "professional" community has been discussing matters that could have a profound on every grass-roots community based mediation program in the country.

I am confident though that this is just talk, because I am sure the "professionals" would not violate the fundamental principle of conflict resolution which is that all parties with an interest must be included in the discussions. In case I am overlooked here are my two cents worth.

Violates fundamental principles.

The concept of qualification from an intrusive outside entity for grass-roots community based programs is contrary to the fundamental empowerment principle from which these programs sprang. The thought behind community based programs is that everyone could and should mediate. The goal of a community based program is to offer a viable alternative to court. Our belief is that through the management of the program (the board of directors) and the community members acting as mediators, the community becomes empowered.

The community that we serve is racially culturally, socially and economically diverse. Our volunteers come from all walks of life; people who are homeless to an accountant. They are high school drop-outs to graduate degree people. Their age

range is from 16 to 76. We have devised a mediation process that transcends educational and written skill level. Our mediators resolve interpersonal, intrafamily and intra-community disputes.

Training

Mediators attend sixteen hours of basic mediation training. Before actual mediation they receive an additional four hours of role-play supervised by skilled mediators. Then mediators are required to observe a live mediation. Mediators are evaluated by staff and experienced mediators who make a mutual decision about the "new" mediators' readiness to mediate. Experienced mediators serve on a panel. Also the panel is balanced along gender, race and age lines.

We have a system that has worked for eleven years. Our initial response to anyone who would try to tell us who could mediate for us, or what disputes we could mediate, would be to challenge their moral right to do so. Our experience and proven track record gives us a legitimate claim to the crown of "expert" mediator as anyone.

Those of us who have been in this "field" for longer than it takes to get a J.D. or Ph.D are very familiar with this dispute. I have ignored it because; 1) there is room for everyone, 2) "professionals" don't want our clients, and 3) I do not have the resources, time or energy to do much about it. I took time to write because of the following incident.

At a recent workshop a young lawyer with her freshly minted cards cornered me and said, "I have a lawyer friend from another city. He said that they let people who are barely literate mediate. Don't you think that gives the field a bad name?" This person was taking her first mediation course.

I do not know who is going to decide what for whom. When it is decided I

Calendar

will be here working with the community volunteer mediators who in the past week:

1) Convened and facilitated a meeting with representatives from six social service agencies, whose client was an elderly widow in danger of being evicted from her public housing apartment;

2) Mediated an inter-family dispute involving a "feud" between two Appalachian families. Both families threatened to resolve the feud by shotgun;

3) Mediated an inter-family dispute where racism was identified as the underlying cause by both parties;

4) Mediated a dispute between a primary school teacher and fifty parents. Physical and emotional abuse were alleged; and

5) Began to mediate an intra-family dispute between a terminally ill woman and her ex-husband whom she has not spoken to in 11 years. She wants to plan their son's future collaboratively.

Who other than the parties themselves has a right to "judge" the effectiveness of the mediations?

My fervent hope is that any "professional" credentialers whom this article reaches realizes that there many of us who "toil" in this field and have no desire to be part of your "profession." You are presumptuous to make decisions that will have a dramatic effect on grass-roots community based programs, either in the short or long term. I challenge your moral and ethical right to do so.

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We will list conferences and trainings here to the extent that space permits. To be sure your information is included, and in full, ask about our price for advertising.

Feb 24-27, Training: Mediation for the Professional, Center for Dispute Settlement, Washington DC. Tuition - \$595 before Feb. 1, \$650 after. Contact: CDS, 1666 Connecticut Ave NW, Ste 501, Washington DC 20009. (202) 265-9572.

March 6 - May 2 - Training: 4 part series of workshops, "Learn to Embrace Conflict." Contact: Felicity T. Lavelle, Mediation Center at Feasterville (PA), (215) 725 8310

May 16 - 18 1993 - 8th Annual Meeting of the Systems Change, George Williams College near Chicago. International gathering focusing on Yugoslavia. Contact Donald W. Cole, c/o The Organizational Development Institute, 781 Beta Dr, Ste. K, Cleveland OH 44143. Tel: (216) 461-4333, Fax (216) 729 9319 E-mail 563% Cleveland.freenet.edu@cunyvnm

May 22-25, 1993 - National Multi-Cultural Institute's 8th Annual National Conference, "Confronting the Challenges of Dialogue in a Multi-Cultural Society". Washington, DC. NMCI, 3000 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 438, Washington, DC. Tel: (202) 483-0700, Fax (202) 483-5233.

May 27 - June 1, 1993. Nat'l Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution, Portland, OR. Theme: "Diversity, Peace and Justice" Contact NCPCR, 4400 University Dr, Fairfax VA 22030, Phone: (703) 993 3635, ConflictNet ncpcr.

July 23 - 28, 1993. Nat'l. Assgn. for Mediation in Education conference, Carthage College, Kenosha WI. Deadline for workshop proposals, Feb 15, 1993. Contact: NAME, 425 Amity Street, Amherst, MA 01002 or call (413) 545-2462, ConflictNet name.