

MEDIATION WEEK 2012 CELEBRATION



The County's dispute resolution programs have enjoyed wide success, and have proven to be a valuable resource to the public and the courts by providing an alternate way of settling disputes outside of the traditional justice system. This has been a huge cost-saving to the taxpayer. Last year, the eight (8) community-based organizations and five (5) public entities that do this important work, assisted more than 27,000 County residents, businesses, and organizations in resolving more than 11,000 disputes.

The Dispute Resolution Program contracts, awarded to 13 agencies and 14 contractors in Los Angeles County who participate in the "peacemaking" process, fall under the dominion of the County Commission of Human Relations and Executive Director, Robin S. Toma.

As Toma explains, "the intent of the Dispute Resolution Program (DRP) was to reduce the backlog of cases that were in the Civil Courts. The Legislature passed ***The Dispute Resolution Programs Act of 1986*** to provide for the use of dispute resolution services as an alternative to formal court proceedings."

On March 29, 1987, the Board of Supervisors approved the implementation of the Dispute Resolution Program and designated the Community and Senior Services of Los Angeles County as the grants administrator of the process.

DRP Contractors handle a wide variety of disputes and their services are provided by volunteer neutrals trained in accordance with the requirements specified in the DRP Act. The volunteers are the core of the program and they are carefully trained to ensure that they have a firm understanding of the process, are neutral, and have the ability to draft understandable, concise agreements.

It takes a special person to be a mediator, but their talents and services pay huge dividends for the County which last year saved 31 million by resolving conflicts through mediation rather than the court process. The money to operate the program comes from first time civil court filing fees. These fees were \$3 in 1988 and have increased to \$8 in 2010. This represents a huge area of savings for county government; possibly why more than 75% of California Counties use the process.

The Board of Supervisors honors outstanding mediators each year; this year one adult volunteer and one case will be honored at a Board Office ceremony on April 24th.

Bob Dillion is this year's recipient of the William C. Hobbs (Outstanding Adult Volunteer) Award. He is a volunteer for Centinela Youth Services. Mr. Dillion is a very devoted and caring volunteer and has worked on some of the most challenging mediations aimed at shifting the youth's attitude to his/her surrounding environment, thus giving the youth courage and hope to succeed in life.

Mr. Dillion has a strong belief in restorative justice and the role of vested volunteers giving back to the community. He has volunteered 300 hours with Centinela Youth Services, and earned the gratitude of countless families through his efforts. He has made a difference in their lives by encouraging dialogue and creating trust that builds a foundation for a better relationship. Mr. Dillion is much respected for his dedication and expertise in the field of family mediation and restorative justice. He has made a long lasting impact on the community.

This year's Outstanding Case Award will be given to the Loyola Law School Center for Conflict Resolution and accepted by Sara Campos and Sarah Jane Stecker. On December 2011, a consumer came to the Loyola Law School Center for Conflict Resolution, with a bag full of medical bills. With no job, no medical insurance and a fixed income of \$1000 per month, the consumer was unsuccessful in negotiating his debt of nearly \$55,000. The Center diligently negotiated the debt and was able to eliminate it 100%, through the hard work and efforts of the team involved.

This case is one that is representative of our challenging economic times; it could easily have resulted in a process that left both parties frustrated, angry and misunderstood. Such a process would have left a stressed and worried

consumer feeling further traumatized. Instead, because of the Dispute Resolution Program, it is a story that ended on a positive note and both parties walked away from the process feeling that the outcome was fair and that they had received exactly the assistance that they needed.

The Mediation Week scroll, being presented to Cynthia D. Banks, Director of Community and Senior Services, outlines the value of this service to the people of the County and demonstrates special recognition of the outstanding individuals, organizations, and cases that are exemplary in demonstrating the success of the dispute resolution program.