

More than their Money's Worth by Mary Sargent

Google "mediation" and you will find a deluge of advertisements for Professional mediators, websites listing private mediation practices and firms selling mediation training and consulting. Yet there is little reference to the volunteer mediators sprinkled throughout the ADR community.

Volunteer mediators are the backbone of traditional community programs. These programs draw from the community to find volunteers willing to be trained as mediators to help others resolve disputes. Drawn to the opportunity to learn about and help resolve conflict, these volunteers may be nurses, welders or students when not mediating. According to Mary Pat Jackson of Milford Area Mediation, last year 20 volunteers from her agency mediated 47 family, work place and property disputes, most requiring multiple sessions, helping preserve families and diverting disputes from the legal system.

Peer mediation is another model using volunteers. Most often used in school settings, student volunteers are trained to mediate disputes between other students. Many kids have few tools for dealing with conflict and may resort to bullying or being bullied. Peer mediation provides kids with a healthy alternative to resolve conflicts in school and elsewhere in their lives. Imagine the implications of teaching mediation skills to kids early in life. This model of mediation is also being used in housing programs and the work place.

Busy agencies also use volunteers to offer mediation. Did you know that the Consumer Protection Bureau (CPB) of the New Hampshire Attorney General's Office uses volunteers to mediate disputes between consumers and businesses? According to Mary Thayer, Legal Assistant at the CPB, currently there are 19 volunteer mediators and last year 911 cases were mediated for free by these specially trained mediators. Many of these cases ended in agreement rather than law suits.

Many professional mediators double as volunteers by donating their time & talents to supervise, train and consult. They also serve on professional boards to support the ADR arena. These efforts are critical to encourage and protect a fairly new and developing field.

Volunteer mediators help expand the idea of mediation beyond the typical venues making mediation accessible to folks who may not otherwise know about or be able to afford private mediation or the fees associated with hiring counsel or filing suit. Bringing mediation to as many people in as many places as possible will go a long way helping to change the way more people address their differences.

Small claims mediation.....	\$60/case
Civil writ Mediation.....	\$120/case
Court ordered marital mediation.....	\$60/hr
Private mediation.....	\$100-500/hr
Volunteer mediators.....	Priceless