

NHCRA Member Profile: Rebecca Morley, CFM

by Adriana Elliot

I had the pleasure of meeting with Rebecca Morley on a beautiful autumn day, while sipping pumpkin spice latte in the sun. Rebecca, or “Becky,” is a long time NHCRA member and former NHCRA board member who lives in Enfield, NH, with her husband and three children.

Becky started mediating in the 1990's as a volunteer in a community mediation program. She did a 60-hour mediation training with Esther Tardy-Wolfe (now of Round Table Mediation in Bedford), and worked as part of a large corp of volunteers, doing Parent Youth mediations, DCYF referrals, and CHINS-related conflict resolution. Becky was then hired to be Ms. Tardy-Wolfe's assistant, and eventually took over management of the community mediation program, which operated under the auspices of Southwestern Community Services, a CAP program based in Claremont and Keene.

After doing her divorce mediation training with Olivia Ruel and Gregory Martin, Becky became certified as a Family (then Marital) mediator, and started working under the court contract. Each year there were fewer grant funds available, and she eventually had to discontinue almost all community mediation services. She continues to work doing private and court-based work under the name Lake Sunapee Area Mediation. The majority of her cases are divorces, but she also does some small-claims, landlord-tenant, and business disputes. Becky still receives a very small grant to do peer mediation with 4th through 8th graders in Sullivan County. Each year she provides training at four Sullivan schools, where the guidance counselors run the mediation program. She cares deeply about the school-based mediation, saying “My kids don't have mediation training in their school, and I wish they did. Conflict resolution is a life skill.”

While serving on the NHCRA board, Becky organized an annual statewide Peer Mediation Conference with Carol Stewart, another former NHCRA board member who served the organization for many years. Schools from all over New Hampshire sent children to participate in two all-day conferences – one for elementary and one for middle and high school - including a variety of conflict resolution workshops, taught by professionals from all over the state. Most of the training was provided on a volunteer basis, and the schools provided transportation and paid a reasonable fee to cover the cost of attendance for each student. The conference took place at the New Hampshire Technical Institute in Concord. Along with gaining conflict resolution skills and meeting with peers from around the state, the students benefited from spending the day on a college campus, which they loved. Becky mused “It was really a shame that it ended.”

When asked what she loves about mediation, Becky answered, “Helping people and seeing an end result... the relief in people's faces and demeanor when they've reached a resolution.” Over the years she says she's learned to talk less and let the parties talk more. She says her biggest challenge is the reality of demographics and the economy. “It's difficult to charge people when they say 'If I have to pay this I can't buy groceries.’”

Becky said that she tends to mediate in joint session, working in caucus when it seems appropriate, as determined by the parties' needs. She noted that “people have to get their feelings out and feel like they've been heard before they can move onto settlement talk.” She further noted that it can be very productive to have attorneys in a mediation session, particularly if the clients have unrealistic expectations and the attorneys are able to provide a reality check.

When asked about her vision for the future, Becky said she'd love to expand her practice and open up a

mediation center that would operate “like a storefront.” She envisions having regular hours in an accessible location, where people could bring their conflicts in just like they'd walk into any other store looking for help. The challenge of economics was a recurring theme in the conversation; Becky said, “I think the need is there, but it is a matter of how are people going to pay for it.”