

NEIGHBORLY

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WELCOME ALL-

to Neighbor-to-Neighbor's brand new quarterly newsletter **NEIGHBORLY!** We're so excited to share an array of information and updates here, including volunteer bios and articles, messages from staff, upcoming events, and more. This newsletter is intended as a mixing pot of information to inform new and old audiences of our services and events, discuss mediation topics, and highlight the incredible work of our volunteers, who are the day-in-day-out lifeblood of this organization. As Executive Director Marc Steiner outlines in his piece, *A Season of Change*, this year has seen many personnel and programmatic changes at Neighbor-to-Neighbor, and this newsletter is both another new development as well as a vehicle for capturing and relaying these changes.

With love,
The N2N Team



Marc & Michael guide new volunteers through our latest Basic Mediation Training





Gwen, Anne and Eric at a break out session.

Making Responsible Assumptions, by Kate Hall

Everyone evaluates and makes assumptions about what is going on in other people's minds. When we are waiting to cross the street and we see a car slowing down, we assume the intention of the driver is to obey traffic laws and to allow us to get across safely. When we bump into someone on the street, we evaluate their intentionality - was that bump a mistake or did that person mean to hurt us or pickpocket us? When someone says something to us in a brusque manner, are they hungry, tired, stressed about something else, or are they angry or annoyed with us?

We make these evaluations on a micro level all day long, and they often become automatic. (When was the last time you thought about why someone was slowing down as you waited to cross the street?) Because our default perspective is our own, it is easy to settle into a self-focused mindset and assume that the actions of other people are based around us, when in reality there are many different things that affect a person's reaction or response to a situation.

This can become dangerous when we assume that other people can or should anticipate what is going on in our minds, or when we develop a tendency to assume that others are interacting with us with a less than positive intention without further investigation. Both of these tendencies can decrease understanding and increase conflict.

What we can do in the moment to help evaluate another person's intentionality responsibly:

- Ask yourself: Are you separating their behavior from your perception of their intention?
- Ask yourself: What else do you know about the person's current mindset?
- Ask them: Engage in communication with curiosity when appropriate.

As an example, consider a situation where you walk into your house and your spouse makes a comment about you being late and then doesn't speak to you during the car ride to the event you are headed to. Your reaction might be to get defensive. You might think that that your spouse is only ignoring you to make you feel bad. Plus, you're not that late and you could not help it that you were stuck behind the train!

If you stop the analysis there, you both might automatically attribute hurtful intentions to the other, which results in increased conflict and a missed opportunity to connect. The best way to understanding is discussion, but do your research first:

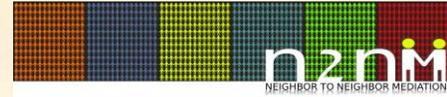
- Ask yourself: Are you separating their behavior from your perception of their intention?
 - First, stick to the observable facts: Your spouse made a comment about your lateness and then did not talk to you during the car ride. Simply noticing the behavior and not automatically attributing an intention (that they are trying to make you feel bad) can create space for further discussion.
- Ask yourself: What else do you know about the person's current mindset?

Next, consider where the other person is coming from. Start with the basics: is it possible that person is hungry, tired, or frustrated by something else? Is it possible your spouse did not even realize that they ignored you during the drive because they were thinking ahead to the event or preoccupied about something else entirely?

- Ask them: Engage in communication with curiosity when appropriate.

The simplest way to avoid misattributing intention is to ask! But do it right – if you ask from a place of curiosity when you feel calm about the situation (and you make an informed evaluation that the other person will probably also be calm at that time), you are more likely to start a conversation in which both of you can share your perspective with the other. If you come into the conversation genuinely trying to understand their experience, your spouse might be more willing to hear your frustrations around having to wait for the train.

Like any other skill, taking on another person's perspective comes easier with practice. Try putting yourself in someone else's shoes when you are not in conflict, and your future conflicts could get easier.



Season of Change, a Note from Our Executive Director

As the winter approaches and the holidays evoke the bittersweet changes of bringing in the new and delegating the past to fond memories, Neighbor-To-Neighbor is experiencing its own season of change. 2017 saw three employees choose to retire or move forward into other adventures. So now Robyn James, our Administrative Assistant in Albany, becomes the 'veteran' on staff. She has welcomed into the fold myself, Michael Thomson (Program Manager for Benton/Linn), and recently, Gwen Hammond, our Administrative Assistant in the Salem office.

Gwen brings an enthusiasm and tenacity to the office here in Salem. Her optimistic and 'can-do' approach to everything will be a positive influence here at N2N. She recently completed the Basic Mediation Training. We are excited to have her on board.

Most of you have met Michael. He came to us from Vermont and Minnesota with an incredible passion for mediation and restorative justice. Stay tuned for more on Restorative Justice in the new year. I'm sure most of you in Benton/Linn counties have already spoken to Michael. We are lucky to have such a smart and enthusiastic person on our staff.

Robyn has brought that constant that every organization needs, especially as she is our point person for Benton/Linn between the community and our volunteers. We are fortunate to have her continue to be a part of this rather new staff.

Much of my 27 years in mediation includes working in community mediation centers, supervising a pool of volunteers serving various programs such as parent/teen mediation, peer mediation, workplace, small claims, foreclosure, and more. Because of my passion and background as a trainer, we will continue to expand training services as well.

In 2017, we offered a Victim/Offender training in the spring, a fall Parent/Teen mediation training, and conducted five In-Services. We will continue offering training for our volunteers focusing on youth and community mediation, manufactured home parks, small claims, and innovative restorative systems. We also hope to offer a wider variety of training services from N2N to organizations in our community as well, such as workplace staff skill development.

Our staff makes up only part of the team we call Neighbor-To-Neighbor. The larger part of the N2N team is our volunteer mediators. In 2017, we welcomed in another 20 new volunteers. Each of these new volunteers completed our Basic Mediation Training. Now, our new mediators are mentoring with the more experienced, often sharing feedback and ideas in order for all of us to grow our skills and better serve our community. Our volunteers have generously offered much time, expertise and heart to N2N and the community at large for many years. We are all grateful for this dedicated and skilled group!

Over this last year of transition, we have reached out to our volunteers through our on-going educational opportunities and questionnaires, asking for input. Some of our plans include their suggestions. One new change in the coming year will be our newly designed website, with a resource page for the public, a resource page for our volunteers, and many other reformatted and interactive options. Stay tuned.

Also, thanks to Michael, we now have forms and other documents available electronically to our mediators. Due to our volunteer feedback, we are also modifying our case management system into a hybrid. In some cases, our staff will be conducting initial pre-mediation conversations and getting buy-in and commitment from clients prior to assigning cases. In other cases, mediators continue to do this case development. We hope to speed up the time between referrals and mediation. And of course, this newsletter is our first!

Outreach activity has grown into more partnerships with community organizations. This has led to more opportunities to provide parent/teen mediation, new restorative justice applications, an expanded manufactured home park program, and so much more. We will continue to offer our monthly In-Services, new training options, and other ways to connect with and offer opportunities for our volunteers as well. Volunteers - - feel free to contact us anytime with your thoughts, and know that our In-Services are the best way to connect with your peers each month. Thank you all for what you do for our communities, and know that the staff and board here at N2N continue to grow and learn as we find ways to better serve our volunteers and bring peaceable alternatives to our community at large. Here's a fond farewell to 2017 and an exciting welcome to 2018!

Mediation and Cynicism, by Michael Thomson

Mediators have an unusual perspective on cynicism, defined here as “contemptuous distrust of human nature, and an inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self-interest.” The issues and conflicts we all face often become easier to understand, though also a good deal more intractable, when boiled down to rational actors pursuing fundamentally incongruous self-interest. When adopting this outlook our choices become simpler: we can either ignore the issues or fight them out in court, in an alley, over the phone, in an email, or on Facebook and Twitter.

At its core, the perception of self-interest as axiomatic, from which cynical viewpoints derive, opposes the notion that empathy, compassion, vulnerability, or kindness have a role to play in conflict. Mediators hear this from a party who says “You could try to talk to him, but he doesn’t listen to anybody and it’s usually his way or the highway,” or a spouse arguing “She doesn’t care at all about our kids. She just wants her money.” From these assumptions, it’s understandable why so many parties decline an invitation to participate in mediation. From their perspective, the only conceivable situation offered by mediation is one in which each party states their position and then glares at the other awkwardly until one walks away.

With some exceptions, this ‘glaring awkwardly in silence’ situation is rarely how a mediation ends. While it’s not an atypical beginning, a skilled mediator’s questions, reflections, and demeanor can foster a different dynamic. Indeed, many tools that a mediator uses aim not only to validate a party’s need or feeling, but also to suggest to the other party that this need or feeling is legitimate and thus encourage empathy from the latter party to the former. This would be a nonsensical approach in a situation where neither party is capable of feeling empathy towards the other.

The point here is that we do have and pursue our own needs, interests, and feelings, but we also have propensities toward compassion, vulnerability, and empathy. Mediation at its best is a conversation where all of these elements are present and dynamic. Even after bitter arguments in mediation, it’s not uncommon to hear a party say, “look, I feel bad for them and want to be a good neighbor, but...” or even “you know, I’m not happy about this situation, but I could see how they were hurt when...” These types of comments reflect a dissonance that parties grapple with as they continue to pursue their interests but become more aware and sensitive to the interests and needs of the other party. It’s a dissonance that wouldn’t be possible without both the capacity and desire to empathize, and reflects a fundamentally different reality than that of the cynic. It’s also often the turning point in the mediation, where parties problem solve and collaborate to meet as many of everyone’s interests as possible. And in some cases, Party A is now interested in an outcome that works for Party B not only because that outcome would benefit Party A, but because Party A now genuinely cares about Party B and wants Party B’s needs to be met.

There are also mediations, successful and unsuccessful, where the pendulum starts and stays with parties’ unsympathetic and unflinching pursuit of self-interest. And that’s okay. Mediators have a unique perspective on cynicism not because mediators hold an idealistic view of human nature (though some surely do), but because mediation affords a unique lens into the interaction between self-interest and empathy. People exhibit their best and worst selves in mediation, and the mediator’s job is to highlight this exhibition in a light that clarifies, validates, and sometimes changes the perspective of those at the table, and then to assist in moving and molding the transformation that follows and leads to an agreement. This is a pragmatic approach, but one that differs drastically from that of a Machiavellian cynic.

From the Front Desk, by Robyn James

Volunteerism

I’ve spent a good amount of time volunteering in the past. I did it for my kids, I wanted to be a positive addition to their public school experiences. I remember being thanked for being there and at the time didn’t think of how much of an impact I and the other parent volunteers were making. Now I see the other side of the story!

Volunteers are really worth their weight in gold. When I say “we couldn’t do it without you” I truly mean it! You, our volunteers, are the life blood of a non-profit like Neighbor-to-Neighbor Mediation, and I want to thank you!

Good wishes to you and yours in this New Year!



Up-coming Events:

In-Service Dates-

- January 10th, 5:30-7:00pm
 - Salem Office
- February 21st, 5:30-7:00pm
 - Sunset Building (Corvallis)
- March 14th, 5:30-7:00pm
 - Salem Office

Trainings-



- Small Claims Training
 - February 10th
- Community Member Training
 - February 15th
- Mobile Home Park Training
 - March TBD
- Basic Mediation Training
 - April 6th-7th, 13th-15th
- Parent/Teen Training
 - July 18th- 19th & 21st

*For more information regarding trainings contact N2N staff.

Volunteer Opportunities-

- Coaches needed for our next BMT
- Volunteer newsletter submissions
- Upcoming outreach/farmer's market tables

How you can reach us:

Website:

<http://n2nmediation.org/>

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Marc- n2nmarcsteiner@gmail.com

Gwen- N2NMediation@gmail.com *contact to subscribe or unsubscribe to newsletter

Albany office: 541-223-4189

Michael- n2nmichaelthomson@gmail.com

Robyn- n2nbentonlinn.assistant@gmail.com

Visit our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/neighbor.mediation/>

Donations:

We happily accept donations of all sorts!

THANK YOU Lynn J. for the kind donation of candy for the Albany office!

