

# Dispute Resolution Center ANNUAL REPORT

October 1, 2023—September 30, 2024

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### **MISSION**

The Dispute Resolution Center is an independent, nonprofit organization that provides and promotes accessible, high-quality dispute resolution services for all people in the Travis County Area and surrounding areas.

### **PHILOSOPHY**

The Dispute Resolution Center (DRC) believes:

- People in our diverse community can best be served through a diverse organization.
- People can resolve their own disputes, and the DRC can encourage resolution by providing trained volunteers who are impartial.
- People who develop their own resolutions are more likely to do what they have agreed to do.
- People can use the experience gained at the DRC to resolve future disputes.

### GOALS

- Provide accessible, high-quality mediation using community volunteer mediators.
- Evaluate and, as appropriate, implement additional dispute resolution services to meet community needs.
- Develop and maintain an organization that reflects the diverse population of Travis County.
- Serve the diverse population of Travis County.
- Provide training and continuing education for DRC Volunteers and Staff.
- Maintain positive relationships with the Travis County Commissioners Court, county agencies and departments, referral sources and related organizations.
- Promote public awareness of DRC services and accomplishments.
- Provide community education about dispute resolution.
- Ensure funding for the DRC and responsibly manage its resources.
- Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the DRC program.

# DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS



Bettye Benten President



Judge Belinda Herrera Vice President



Susan Bergen-Hart Past President



Katie Tousignant Treasurer

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS



Judge Catherine Mauzy Judiciary Representative



Donna Holt County Judge Appointee



Renita Sanders Precinct 1 Appointee



Jeff Jury Precinct 2 Appointee

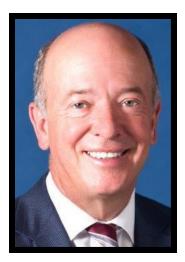


Sameer Shah Precinct 3 Appointee

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS



Nadia Bettac Member at Large



Senator Kent Caperton Member at Large



Deven Desai Member at Large



Fred Hawkins Member at Large



Karl Spock Member at Large



Drew Thomas Member at Large

# Dispute Resolution Center Board Presidents 1992 - Present

₽		4
	1992-1993	Melba Watley
	1993-1994	Roland Cook
	1994-1995	Jim Gudenrath
	1995-1996	Dave Dickson
	1996-1997	Alice Dendinger
	1997-1998	Jim Gudenrath
	1998-1999	Ann Graham
	1999-2000	Fred Clement
	2000-2001	Jeff Blackwelder
	2001-2002	Clemith Houston
	2002-2003	Erma Morrow
	2003-2004	Jeff Jury
	2004-2005	Jennifer Cook
	2005-2006	Karl Spock
	2006-2007	Patrick Keel
	2007-2008	David Garza
	2008-2009	Robert Kamm
	2009-2010	Ami Desai
	2010-2011	Charles Cannon
	2011-2012	Theodore Daniels
	2012-2013	Ben Cunningham
	2013-2014	John Fleming
	2014-2015	Damon Moore
	2015-2016	Dale Matthews
	2016-2017	Craig Bell
	2017-2018	Karen Smithson
	2018-2019	Nancy Juren
	2019-2020	Bill Woodson
	2020-2021	Hannah Temple
	2022-2023	Susan Bergen-Hart
	2023-2024	Bettye Benten
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# DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER STAFF 2023—2024



Erin Patterson Executive Director



Susan Sneller Case Manager



Rita Rancken Office Manager



David Huang Director Case Management & Volunteer Services



Lisa Weger Finance Director

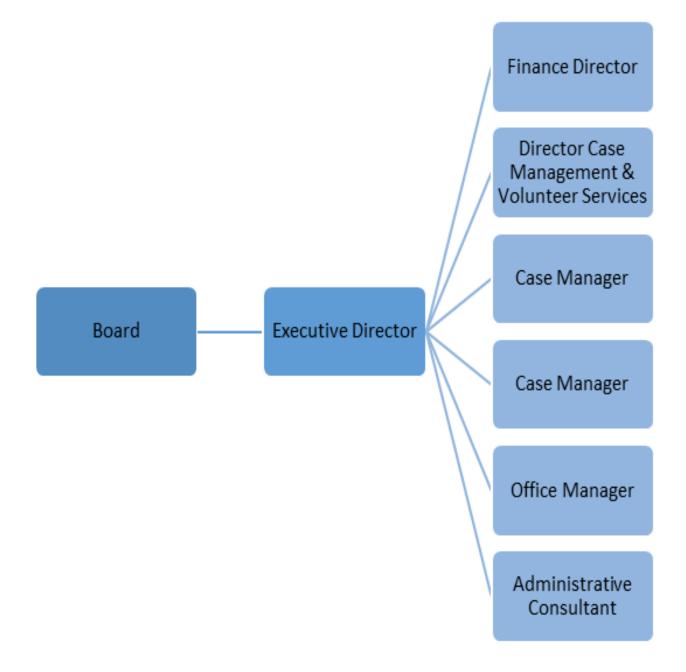


Mindy Roeder Case Manager



Patsy Shepherd Administrative Consultant

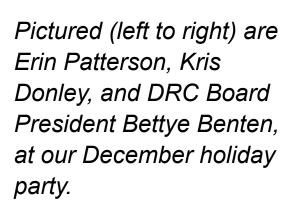
# DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



### Message from the Executive Director:

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for the warm welcome to the Dispute Resolution Center and the larger mediation community. It has been a year of learning, growth, challenge and excitement. While we all look forward to the coming year, let's take note of a few highlights:

- 1. Erin Patterson joined the Dispute Resolution Center as the Executive Director in October of 2023.
- 2. We said a very fond farewell to Kris Donley, our Executive Director of 30 years, in December of 2023.



See more photos from the party on page 23.



- 3. Lisa Weger successfully led the DRC through the annual audit in December 2023.
- 4. Erin Patterson collaborated with a real estate broker at Don Cox & Associates and representatives of Travis County to identify and eventually move DRC offices to a new location.
- 5. Volunteer appreciation lunches were hosted at Chez Zee American Bistro in the winter and Moonshine Grill in the spring.
- 6. The DRC continued to offer 40-hour mediation training courses and one 30-hour family mediation training.
- 7. Increased mediation fees were proposed and approved by the Board of Directors in May of 2024.

#### Highlights of 2023 – 2024 - continued

- 8. Erin Patterson began participating in the ACC Nonprofit Austin Leadership and Membership 1-year course.
- 9. The Dispute Resolution Center Strategic Plan was drafted and approved by the Board in May of 2024.
- 10. Erin Patterson continued to participate in the Texas DRC Directors Council as the Treasurer.
- 10.10 new volunteer mediators joined the DRC in our work to serve the Central Texas community.
- 11. DRC staff and Board members began working with Ashford Creative to rebuild and launch a new website.
- 12. DRC staff worked to build relationships with Travis County employees, including the Community Legal Services and Grants teams.
- 13. Clay Avery, Marisela Maddox, Matt Smith, and Michelle Edwards were confirmed as incoming trainers and will prepare to consolidate the training curriculums and begin conducting mediation trainings in October 2025.
- 14. At our September 2024 Board meeting, the DRC welcomed new Board members Judge Daniella Lyttle, Judge George Thomas, Heather Moreau, and Renee Shiraishi.
- 15. The Board bid a fond farewell to Jeff Jury and Drew Thomas.
- 16. Judge Belinda Herrera agreed to serve as Board President with Sameer Shah acting as Vice-President for the upcoming fiscal year.
- 17. Donna Holt was appointed as the DRC's Volunteer Mediator Representative.

# **MEDIATION PROGRAMS** A SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

**Community Mediation Program:** A service for individuals, groups, businesses, domestic partnerships, etc. that provides parties with mediators for four hours of mediation time and space at the Center. Typical cases include: family conflict, landlord/tenant, contract disputes, partnership dissolution, real estate, vendor-consumer, insurance, and neighborhood. Nominal administrative fees are charged per party per session and may be waived for parties with financial hardships or qualifying court referrals.

**Civil Litigation Mediation Program:** A mediation service for attorneys in the community for referring cases that have proceeded to an adversarial litigation process but are now in need of a more cost/time efficient manner of disposition. Attorneys are present and may request either an attorney or non-attorney solo practitioner. Private caucus (individual sessions) with the parties or just the advocates may be prevalent. Administrative fees are \$200.00 per party per session. Typical cases include: custody, property settlement, and visitation in divorces; business disputes; real estate; insurance; and employee grievances.

**Arbitration Program:** An arbitration service for attorneys and all individuals who desire an arbitrator to make a decision based on the facts of the case. Attorneys may be present as advocates and advisors of the parties' interests and legal rights. Witnesses may attend to support a party through testimony of facts involved in the dispute. Typical cases include: custody, divorce, property, and visitation issues; businesses; real estate; insurance; and employee grievances. Administrative fees are \$200.00 per party per session.

*Juvenile Programs:* The DRC has enjoyed a long and rewarding relationship with the Travis County Gardner-Betts Juvenile Justice Center, providing mediators as requested by the juvenile court judges.

The **Victim/Offender Program** was established in 1993 and provides an opportunity for juvenile offenders to mediate restitution for offenses against their victims with the help and neutrality/safety of mediators.

The **Parent/Child Pre-release Program** allows detained juveniles to meet with their families prior to release and returning to the home environment. This process facilitates open communication for the establishment of ground rules and an opportunity to reflect on needs of family members who have gone through the recent trauma of infractions, separation, and now the intervention of the police and court systems.

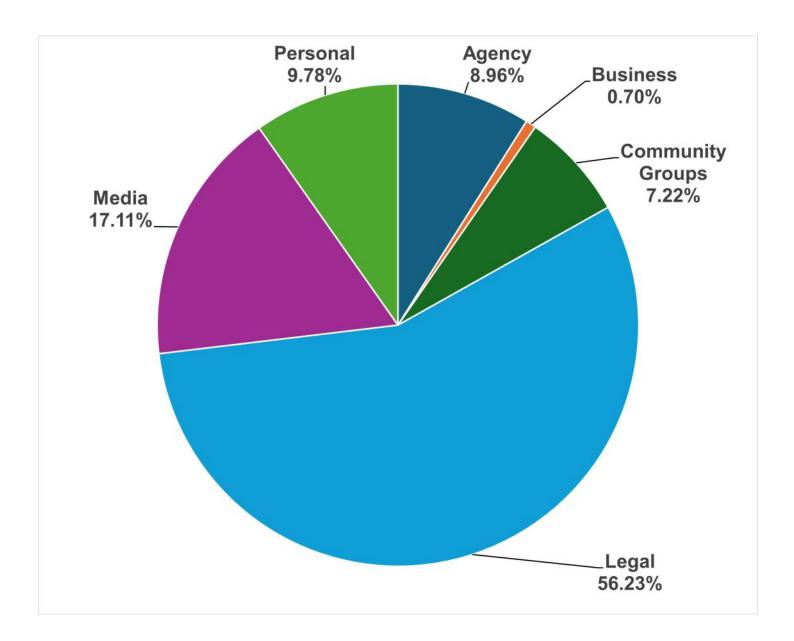
*Facilitation Services*: For groups with a desire to move forward in planning or dialoguing the challenges and opportunities they face, a neutral facilitator can assist in maintaining a safe and effective forum. Profit and non-profit/governmental rates are available.

While our focus remains on providing mediation to the community, how we accomplish our performance outcomes is more specifically delved into with the graphs on pages 13 through 16. Since 1983 we have been offering mediation services to Travis County and the surrounding communities.

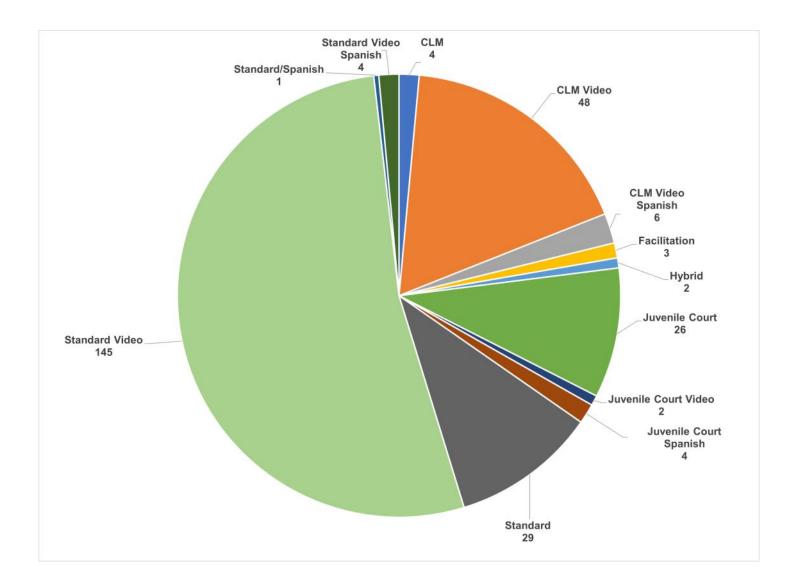
# WE MEDIATE MANY TYPES OF DISPUTES

**Neighbors Barking Dogs / Noise** Property (Trees, Fences, etc.) Landlord / Tenant **Roommates / Friends** HOA / Neighborhood / Community Personal Injury / Property Damage **Contracts / Collections** Real Estate (Buyer / Seller) **Consumer / Merchant Business Owners** Employer / Employee / Co-Workers Pre-Divorce / Post-Divorce Partners / Unmarried Parents Relatives (Siblings, Parent / Child) Elder / Family Issue / Estates ...and More

### REFERRAL SOURCE PERCENTAGES OF 859 CASES OPENED 2023-2024



### 274 TOTAL ADR SESSIONS HELD 2023-2024

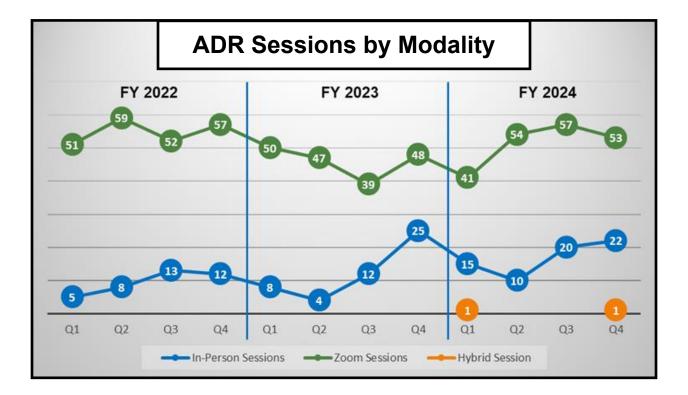


#### CLM = Civil Litigation Mediations

# **ADR Sessions by Modality**

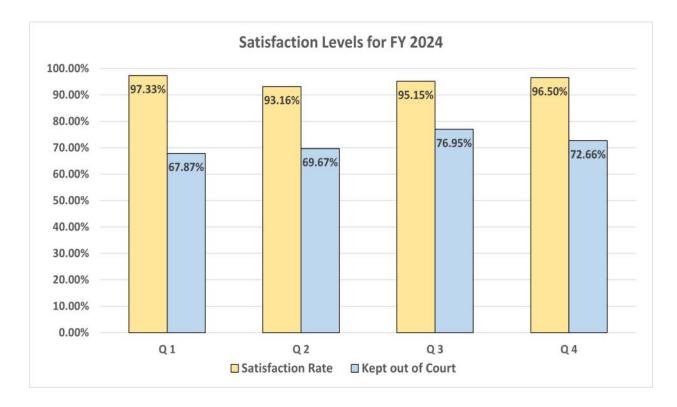
The increased demand for virtual ADR (alternative dispute resolution) sessions (mediations, arbitrations, or facilitations) has remained steady throughout this past year, as evidenced in the graph below. In response to this new trend, the DRC staff continues to work diligently on improving the services offered through this platform.

The DRC staff members collaborate with our mediators, arbitrators, and facilitators through the feedback they provide on how better to serve our clients during the online process. Our staff members also scrutinize the feedback received from participants through the comments they submit in the evaluation forms provided at the conclusion of each session.



## **SERVICES EVALUATION 2023 - 2024**

Our court diversionary rate averaged 72%, and the overall satisfaction rate was 96%, confirming that these community services continue to satisfy the user while lessening the burden on the court.



"The mediator was very thorough, kept us on track, acknowledged that there were hard emotions to deal with as we went through our co-parenting agreement, and brought us out to the other side despite going over our allotted time. I really appreciate them for this tenacity and empathy."

"This mediation helped open up conversations between myself and my estranged spouse that I have been dreading. Thanks to a neutral third party we were able to bring these up with some guidance and with some action tied to them that helped us get from a really stuck place to one where we have a template for how to interact."

See more mediation evaluation comments on the next page.

### SELECTED EVALUATION COMMENTS FROM MEDIATIONS

Evaluations are provided to participants at the end of each mediation held in person or via Zoom . Below are some of the comments we received this past year about the mediations and our Mediators, as well as about our Case Managers, who coordinate the administrative functions for the mediations.

#### Mediators and the Mediations at the DRC

Mediators were kind, professional, and helpful. I'm extremely grateful for this experience and will recommend the DRC to others in similar situations.

It showed me new ways to communicate with the other parent to reach a solution and gather new perspectives.

It changed my life and the emotional relief is indescribable.

We wouldn't have come to an agreement without mediation so I'm very grateful. I have a more positive view of the ways disputes can be handled outside of court and know now that pursuing legal action is not the necessary first step in cases like these.

Both mediators were fantastic. Patient, impartial and invested in facilitating resolution. The entire experience with the DRC has been impressive.

The mediation allowed an open and comfortable space to speak freely and really communicate my points while also having her speak to her points.

Set all parties on peaceful, cooperative track for all involved.

With the high demand for mediation for people with low income you guys are doing a great service for the Austin community. I could not have afforded any other mediation program. Thank you!

Mediator was prepared and was able to handle a very difficult personality properly. Saved my client a truck full of money.

The mediator handled the communication between me and my past business partner well, and the document written up satisfied all our needs.

Allowed for safe communication to someone I generally am uncomfortable around.

I loved seeing the finer details of the mediation and am glad we didn't need to go to court. I have and will continue to recommend the DRC to anyone in a touchy disagreement and now I can say I've done it first hand.

Travis County DRC has an excellent system at present. Personnel makes it a pleasurable experience.

#### Mediators and the Mediations at Juvenile Court

It helped me understand where my mother's mind was and I understand her better in how the way she acts.

Helped by having everyone take the time to listen & not talk over everyone.

It helped the family come closer. I loved it and I would definitely attend another one if needed.

It helped me a lot. I got to understand my mom more and how she felt and she also got to see how I feel.

This mediation helped me by opening up and understanding my son a little more than I did before. He helped me use my words more.

Mediation helped understand what each of us needs to move forward to be successful living together.

Helped me understand my son also has needs and wants mom back.

We found a solution to help us!

#### DRC Case Managers: David, Mindy, and Susan

The case manager was organized, empathetic, and responsive. For our initial check-in call I asked about an hour's worth of question and the case manager stuck with me to give thorough answers and I felt really confident about the mediation services I would receive afterwards.

The case manager's assistance was extremely helpful at every phase of the project.

The case manager was very effective and managed the process and coordination very well. Was a pleasure to work with.

Great to work with / responsive / assisted with schedule conflicts.

Supportive, neutral, clear communication.

5 stars! Thanks to the whole team involved.

# TRAININGS

# **40-Hour Basic Mediation Training**

This course is a 5-day training offered to the general public several times each year. This course is designed to give individuals the skills and credentials they need to serve as a mediator in the State of Texas. The training focuses on the Community-Based Mediation model. Individuals actively participate in practice mediation following each lecture session, and certificates are provided to participants upon completion of the course.





### What Participants Learn:

- Key considerations in setting up a mediation.
- A seven-stage mediation process based on the theory of interest-based negotiation.
- Specific communication skills to assist the negotiation process.
- Management of face-to-face negotiations between the parties.
- Guidelines for working with attorneys in the mediation session.
- Use of individual sessions as a tool to facilitate problem solving.
- Ethical considerations for mediation practice.



# **Meet Your Trainers**



Walter Wright, J.D., LL.M TMCA Credentialed Mediator Your Trainer in February, April, & September

Diane M. Harvey, LCSW TMCA Credentialed Advanced Mediator Your Trainer in June & November

# **TRAININGS (Continued)**

# **30-Hour Advanced Family Mediation Training**





The Advanced Family Mediation Training is 30 hours of instruction fulfilling the Texas ADR Act requirements for mediators doing court-ordered family mediations. The course follows the standards set by the Texas Mediation Trainers Roundtable. Sessions include family law, family dynamics, domestic violence, and child development, with ethical and practical considerations in a combined lecture and role play environment. 40-Hour Basic Mediation Training is required prior to taking this course.

# **Your Trainer**



Diane M. Harvey, LCSW TMCA Credentialed Advanced Mediator

# **TRAININGS** (Continued)

## **Customized Training**

The DRC offers a variety of customized training, ranging from several hours up to two days. These trainings focus on conflict within the workplace and collaborative problem solving for community groups. Rates vary according to length, content, and number of participants. The structure includes the use of didactic and experiential training techniques, employing hands-on practice throughout the learning experience. Customized trainings can be conducted in person or as a live, interactive, online training.

Here is a sample of requested Customized Trainings that can also be customized for your needs upon request:

- The Angry Customer
- Conflict in the Workplace
- Conflict Prevention and Management
- Work Culture and Conflict Prevention
- Conflict Resolution for the HR Professional
- Strategic Planning
- Communication Tools For Resolving Conflict

# **Facilitation Skills Training for Teams**

The DRC now offers Facilitation Skills Training for groups of 10 to 20 people. This training is designed to provide participants with the skills to enable productive conversations within groups that are experiencing a diversity of opinions, experiences, and philosophies. The training can be conducted in person or as a live, interactive, online training, in half-day or full-day sessions.



# TRAININGS (Continued)

# **Volunteer Training**

The DRC encourages and supports continuing education training for our Volunteer Mediators. Two of the most popular training opportunities occur at the **Texas Association of Mediators (TAM)** Annual Professional Development Conference and the **Texas Mediator Credentialing Association (TMCA)** Annual Symposium.





The **National Association for Community Mediation (NAFCM)**, of which our Center is a member, offers a variety of trainings through member organizations across the country.



At the local level, our Mediators have continued to benefit from attendance at bi-monthly speaker presentations through the **Austin Mediators Association (AMA)**. This past year some of these trainings were presented via Zoom and some in person at our Center.

Topics presented through AMA this past year were:

**Restoring Communities Through Restorative Justice**, by Debbie Hammill, restorative practitioner and Operations Manager for Northern Ireland Alternatives

**New Year's Resolutions: Achieving Better Mediation Outcomes**, panel discussion by long-time Mediators Linda Gibson, Diane Harvey, and Sara Saltmarsh, and moderated by Marcy Goodfleisch

Mediating Special Education Disputes, by James Raup, J. D.

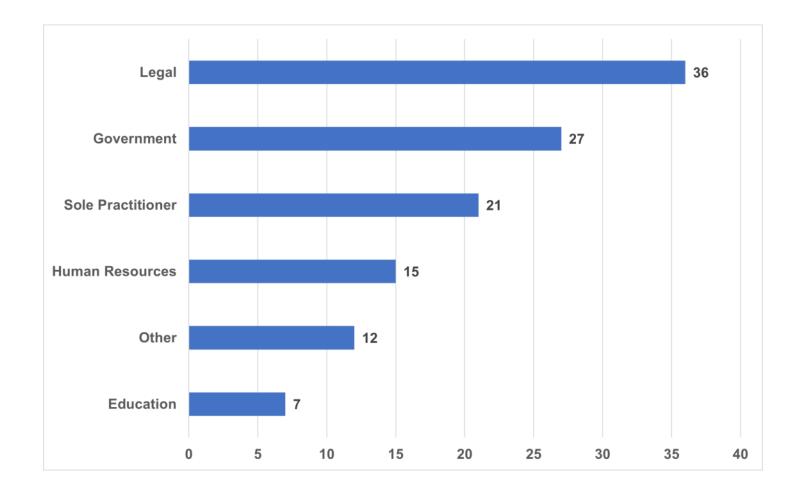
**Mediating Diversion Cases**, by Gene Valentini, Director of Lubbock County's Office of Dispute Resolution

**Judicial Insight Into Mediation**, in-person discussion at the Travis County Courthouse with Judges Jessica Mangrum and Daniella DeSeta Lyttle

Gender & Sexuality in Mediation, by Matt Smith, LCSW and Mediator



### OCCUPATIONS OF PEOPLE TRAINED AS MEDIATORS 2023-2024



### VOLUNTEER REVIEW 2023 - 2024

Our December 2023 Holiday Party was held at Chez Zee Grill, a favorite spot for our volunteer appreciation gatherings.







This party marked a transition. Recently retired DRC Executive Director Kris Donley gives her farewell speech (above) at the holiday party while new Executive Director Erin Patterson looks on.











### VOLUNTEER REVIEW 2023 - 2024

Our annual Volunteer Appreciation Party was held in May 2024 at a new venue downtown, the Moonshine Grill. We enjoyed a delicious meal and lively conversation in a delightful open-air environment. As always, our deepest appreciation and gratitude go to our amazing volunteer Mediators and Board.



Each volunteer chose a soft, cozy blanket as our thank-you gift.







### VOLUNTEER REVIEW 2023 - 2024

### **Remembering Bill Forbes**



This year the DRC community lost one of our long-time volunteers, Bill Forbes, who passed away on July 26th, 2024 after a short bout with cancer.

Bill became a DRC Mediator in 2014 and additionally served on our Board of Directors.

Bill and his wife Joan moved to Massachusetts several years ago, but he continued to mediate for us regularly via Zoom.

He visited the DRC last April, which was a delightful opportunity for us to reconnect and catch up.

Shortly before his passing, he donated his collection of mediation books to the DRC, which will be made available as an additional resource for our volunteers.

Below is a photo of Bill and Joan at our 2016 Volunteer Appreciation Party bat cruise on Town Lake.

Bill will be deeply missed and very fondly remembered for his warmth, enthusiasm, and dedication as a DRC Volunteer.



# DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

For the Twelve Months Ending September 30, 2024

0 1	Sep 30, 24
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Checking/Savings	
1000 · Cash - Operating	230,266.92
1100 · Cash - Money Market	176,439.04
1125 · Cash - CD	171,816.01
1135 · Business Savings - APlus	61,656.55
1150 · Petty Cash	125.00
Total Checking/Savings	640,303.52
Accounts Receivable	1 000 00
1250 · Training Receivable	1,900.00
Total Accounts Receivable	1,900.00
Other Current Assets	44,000,70
1200 · Travis Cty. ADR Receivable	44,898.76
1400 · Prepaid Expenses	8,797.08
Total Other Current Assets	53,695.84
Total Current Assets	695,899.36
Fixed Assets	74,000,45
1600 · Office Equipment	71,230.15
1625 · Website	8,000.00
1650 · Office Furniture	34,879.22
1700 · Accumulated Depreciation	-92,051.61
Total Fixed Assets	22,057.76
Other Assets	
1800 · Deposit - Office Space	4,501.75
Total Other Assets	4,501.75
TOTAL ASSETS	722,458.87
LIABILITIES & EQUITY	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Other Current Liabilities	F 070 00
2150 · Accrued Vacation	5,379.20
2152 · Accrued payroll	8,862.00
2244 · Unearned Trng Rev (9-24) 40-Hr	-1,900.00
2245 · Unearned Trng Rev (11-24) 40 Hr	12,350.00
2247 · Unearned Trng Rev (6-25) 40-Hr	950.00
Total Other Current Liabilities	25,641.20
Total Current Liabilities	25,641.20
Total Liabilities	25,641.20
Equity	200, 220, 20
32000 · Net Assets - Unrestricted	396,839.29
32100 · Net Assets - Board Designated	300,000.00
Net Income	-21.62
Total Equity	696,817.67
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	722,458.87

# DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

# For the Twelve Months Ending September 30, 2024

	Oct '23 - Sep 24	Annual Budget	% of Budget
Income			
4100 · Travis County ADR Fund	550,619.38	550,226.00	100.07%
4300 · Client Fees	35,535.00	40,000.00	88.84%
4400 · Grants	11,844.00	10,000.00	118.44%
4600 · Interest Income	5,721.67	3,000.00	190.72%
4650 · Room Rental	4,800.00	1,500.00	320.0%
4660 · Other Income	173.62	100.00	173.62%
4700 · 40 Hr. Mediation Trng.	96,900.00	85,000.00	114.0%
4750 · Other Training	14,100.00	9,750.00	144.62%
4800 · Donations	100.00	0.00	100.0%
Total Income	719,793.67	699,576.00	102.89%
Expense			
5130 · Mediation Trng - Miscellaneous	916.56	800.00	114.57%
5140 · Mediation Trng - Trainer fees	43,862.50	38,000.00	115.43%
5160 · Other Trng - Facility and food	68.10	350.00	19.46%
5170 · Other Trng - Miscellaneous	0.00	200.00	0.0%
5180 · Other Trng - Trainer fee	9,000.00	6,000.00	150.0%
5310 · Accounting	9,660.00	9,400.00	102.77%
5315 · Outreach	3,845.68	5,000.00	76.91%
5319 · Credit card fees	5,380.11	3,999.97	134.5%
5320 · Bank charges	2.50	0.00	100.0%
5330 · Equipment/Facility Purchases	3,855.84	10,000.00	38.56%
5341 · Contract personnel	14,149.00	12,100.00	116.93%
5370 · Dues and subscriptions	1,211.00	500.00	242.2%
5400 · Employee - Development	2,035.00	1,000.00	203.5%
5410 · Employee - Fringe Benefits	81,170.66	87,620.00	92.64%
5420 · Employee - Relations	6,849.99	6,000.00	114.17%
5430 · Employee - Salaries	350,864.42	337,426.00	103.98%
5432 · Trinet	18,627.96	14,000.00	133.06%
5440 · Employee - Taxes	27,103.84	26,657.00	101.68%
5500 · Equipment rental	3,425.67	3,000.00	114.19%
5510 · Insurance - Commercial	1,770.00	2,000.00	88.5%
5520 · Insurance - Directors/Officers	1,190.00	1,200.00	99.17%
5530 · Insurance - Worker's Comp	925.40	950.00	97.41%
5550 · Office rent	92,810.75	92,500.00	100.34%
5560 · Office supplies	4,153.70	3,500.00	118.68%
5570 · Postage	497.98	500.00	99.6%
5580 · Printing and production	0.00	500.00	0.0%
5590 · Public relations	614.06	500.00	122.81%
5600 · Repairs and maintenance	9,106.67	7,000.00	130.1%
5601 · Technology	5,628.30	10,000.00	56.28%
5610 · Telephone	6,101.87	7,500.00	81.36%
5620 · Travel and mileage	240.86	400.00	60.22%
5630 · Volunteer relations	9,179.49	10,273.00	89.36%
5660 · Board Activities	395.82	700.00	56.55%
7500 · Depreciation Expense	5,171.56	4,362.36	118.55%
Total Expense	719,815.29 -21.62	703,938.33 -4,362.33	102.26% <b>0.5%</b>

### EXPENDITURES 2023-2024

