



# Annual Report 2009

**Dispute Resolution Center  
of West Michigan**

678 Front Ave NW Ste 250 Grand Rapids MI 49504-5368  
616.774.0121 www.drcwm.org

## MISSION

*Our mission is to bring peaceful resolution to disagreements and conflicts; to foster respectful dialogue; and to promote peace with individuals, families and communities through mediation and educational services.*

## The Year in Review

The Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan experienced substantial growth in 2009, with cases increasing by almost 20% and the number of people served growing by 30% since 2008. We were able to accomplish this growth thanks to our strategic planning work and a diligent focus on capacity building in 2007-2009. You can learn more about this work in the "Grant Results" article.

Much of this growth came from new programs and services that we identified as essential for our community:

- A divorce mediation pilot program with the 17th Circuit Court for low-income individuals.
- Cooperative parenting, including instruction, coaching, and mediation, through the Encouraging Family Foundations program.
- Facilitating permanency planning conferences for children in foster care.
- Fast Track Accountability, which is a victim-offender mediation program offering opportunities for dialogue and restorative justice.

We are deeply grateful to the volunteers and donors who have made this work possible in our community.

## Volunteer Perspective

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Dispute Resolution Center. They provide the mediation services that make our programs and services possible.

We are thankful that almost 70 people volunteered in 2009, either as mediators or helping in our office. This includes a new influx of students from colleges such as Cooley Law School, Calvin College, and Grand Valley State University. A mediator invests at least 50 hours in training; more to be qualified for specialty programs such as agricultural or special education mediation.

Alyson Poe, a Cooley Law School graduate and volunteer, loved her class on alternative dispute resolution, so she started volunteering at the Dispute Resolution Center. "I think that people are too quick to rush into court over a disagreement, which ultimately costs them an insane amount of money and time. Mediation is efficient and it works! I volunteer because it's a great way to meet people, make connections, and stay involved in what is going on in the community."

Katie Cuncannan has been a volunteer mediator since the Dispute Resolution Center opened. She says, "Most people come for mediation by court order. They are amazed and excited about the possibility of resolving their own disagreements. After 24 years, I still love the process! Our whole community benefits when any of its citizens dissolve discord in this way."

We extend a sincere thank-you to all of our volunteers. They receive high marks from mediation participants, and they are the people who make mediation a success in our community.

## Financial Data

### Revenues

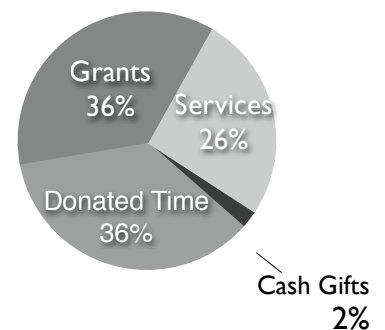
Grant revenue	\$150,429
Services revenue	\$108,046
Donated mediation services	\$149,962
Public support	\$8,746
Miscellaneous	\$560
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$417,743</b>

### Expenses

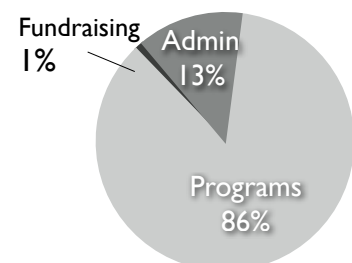
Program services:	
Mediation & training	\$399,177
Supporting services	
General/administrative	\$61,171
Fundraising	\$5,275
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$465,623</b>

**Net Change in Assets** (\$47,880)

### Funding Sources



### Expenses



## Grant Results

The Dispute Resolution Center was honored to participate in the federal Communities Empowering Youth (CEY) grant in 2007-2009, thanks to the support of one of our community partners, the Child & Family Resource Council. This grant, along with a Michigan NOW! grant through the Michigan Nonprofit Association, provided us with the resources to focus on three critically important issues.

First, we became a healthier organization by formulating important operational plans for marketing, fundraising, technology, and program development.

Second, we spent a significant amount of time on governance and leadership. This included development of new mission, vision, and values statements, as well as a renewed strategic plan and board recruitment. We also increased our capacity to handle more cases through improved efficiencies.

Finally, we also used our vision and strategic plan to guide the development of three new programs. Permanency planning conferences are facilitated meetings that bring all people involved in a child welfare case together to reach agreement on what is best for the child. Marital dissolution mediation helps low-income divorcing parties reach amicable decisions on issues such as division of assets in a faster and more peaceable way. And the FastTrack Accountability program encourages non-violent offenders to make amends for their crimes directly to their victims.

We are excited about the continued growth of mediation in our community and about the ways in which it can be applied to solve a diverse array of challenges in a way that brings peace and reconciliation. Grants such as CEY and Michigan Now! truly do increase our capacity to grow and adapt our services to changing needs.

## VISION

*Our vision is that the people in the communities we serve will live in peace.*

### 2009 Service Statistics

**Total Cases Opened: 596**  
**Total People Served: 1,145**

Participant Evaluations  
Satisfied with your mediator?  
Agree .....99%

Improved conflict resolution skills?  
Agree .....91%

Would recommend mediation?  
Agree .....97%

Would use mediation again?  
Agree .....96%

### 2009 Board Members

**President:** Ms. Anne Bachle Fifer ('12)

**President-Elect:** Dr. Ian Borton ('11)

**Secretary:** Honorable William G. Kelly ('11)

**Treasurer:** Ms. Kathleen Snapper ('11)

Ms. Lynne Goede ('12)

Mr. William Postmus ('10)

Ms. Cheri Stanton ('11)

Mr. Robert E. L. Wright ('10)

## Getting to Yes

The Dispute Resolution Center has been working in our community for almost 25 years. We are very pleased to say that 2009 represented one of our best-ever success rates in terms of helping people reach agreement.

Mediation gives participants a safe, structured way in which to share their feelings and arrive at an agreement. The mediator does not dictate the solutions; those are decided by the participants. The participants must either choose to come up with their own solution or proceed on to other options such as a court decision. Of course, that ruling may or may not be to either of their liking.

The volunteer mediators of the Dispute Resolution Center were able to help both parties reach agreement in 73% of mediations in 2009. That's a wonderful testament to our volunteers, and also a far more timely and cost-effective way to help parties reach an agreement they can both support. Our overall resolution rate on all services provided was 81%.

We believe a structured process and a well-trained mediator can help virtually anyone reach agreement with another party. The numbers prove it!

### Staff

#### Executive Director

Jon Wilmot

#### Case Managers

Cara Debbaudt, Alan Ryder,  
Shandra Steinginger

#### Parent Coach

Zayda Rodriguez

#### Facilitator

Cathy Cornelius