

Connections



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Mediator Spotlight: *Marilyn Rothstein*



As a volunteer peer counselor, **Marilyn Rothstein** worked at FOCUS for some years. Seeking change, she began to work in the Mediation Center's office - at that time, located upstairs at FOCUS - which led to her initial training in Basic Skills and then in Family Mediation. She currently mediates Juvenile & Domestic Relations (JDR) cases, and is a JDR mentor mediator.

She and her husband Harold - who is also a mediator, court-sitting for General District cases - have three children (one of their sons died some years ago) and nine grandchildren.

Her mother, who was widowed at a young age, urged her daughters toward nursing so they would always have work. As a nurse first in oncology, and then dialysis, Marilyn enjoyed being with people, so family mediation was a good fit for her.

Marilyn sees herself mediating "forever . . . though I've gotten to the point where I want to co-mediate paired with people I enjoy, a point where you recognize what's good for you." The positive energy she receives from other people makes a mediation session, whatever its ups and downs, a healthy experience, and "it's giving back to the community that's important".

To Marilyn, the best part of mediation is that her work makes a real difference, helping parties reach a place where they're talking about their children and working past the grief of the relationship dissolution. More challenging are times when the parties hold fixed mindsets, and are angry and resistant to hearing each other, so there's little forward movement.

"As neutral as you try to be, you hear things, and you pick up on body language," Marilyn notes. That attention can be useful in deciding whether a caucus (that is, meeting with each party separately) might help a mediation progress.

What are the qualities that make a good mediator? Marilyn perceives them as patience; developing an understanding of others, especially those who have led different lives; and attentive listening.

"But I've reached an age where you can say what you like . . . I can be much more open," says Marilyn. "And I've gotten more understanding of people's lifestyles, more accepting of differences."