

Winter 2026

February 2026

**From the Desk of Dawn K Wallant, Executive Director**

Greetings!

On this very wintry, snowy day, I hope that you are all warm, dry, and safe! While we're on the subject of winter, access and safety, I thought it might be politic to discuss a topic that has brokered much discussion--the topic is virtual vs. in-person mediation, while also bringing virtual mediation to another level of using AI as a tool during the process.

As many of you know, most mediations are held digitally/virtually at Common Ground. Many of the dispute centers have moved away from virtual settings, as COVID restrictions have waned, while still offering them as an option. Court appearances are also offered with both options. What are your thoughts?

Two very good opposing pieces appeared in the most recent Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Program Review, one by one of the most respected leaders in the field, Jim Malamed, writing in support of expansions into AI, "The Digital Evolution of Mediation: AI Integration and the Future of Conflict Resolution," (<https://mediate.com/lawyers-mediators-international-jim-melamed-of-mediate-com-on-digital-evolution-of-mediation/>) and the other, writing in support of "the human touch," being an essential requirement for break-through and connection by Tobin Lay, "The Human Touch: Why Mediation Thrives When Parties Share the Same Room" (<https://mediate.com/the-human-touch-why-mediation-thrives-when-parties-share-the-same-room/>).

These articles appear here, as well as other trade studies: <https://hnmcp.law.harvard.edu/adrblogs/> to get to the Harvard Review. *Indisputability* (trade articles and blogs) warns about ethical traps, confidentiality, and other traps inherent in using AI. Click <http://indisputably.org/2026/02/ai-risks-are-real-and-manageable/> for more discussion.

Thank you for all you do--this past calendar year, between the two counties, we had a 62% agreement rate, reaching 1061 individuals (youth and adults) through dispute resolution services!

In Peace,

*Dawn*

# Highlights

## Upcoming Trainings, Conferences, and Mediations

- Attorney-Client Fee Dispute Mediation (NYS DRA)
  - Date: March 12-13
    - Time: 9:00 a - 12:30 p - Free
    - Platform: Virtual
  - Click here for more information: <https://www.nysdra.org/eventsandtrainings>
- Academy of Professional Family Mediators
  - Virtual Spring Conference, "The Human Element: Empathy, Equity, and the Future of Mediation."
  - Date: March 25-27
  - Click here for more information: [https://apfmnet.org/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=9936197436&gbraid=0AAAAADLTKTjfeRYKF2gP7g1d9QjnZYeW0&gclid=CjwKCAiAkVDMbhBMEiwAnUA9BVXFLe4awUyQ\\_WVBkeAfHqrMMhzXkG2ymacpD8gnwleOEJ2EhKg5oBoCatUQAvD\\_BwE](https://apfmnet.org/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=9936197436&gbraid=0AAAAADLTKTjfeRYKF2gP7g1d9QjnZYeW0&gclid=CjwKCAiAkVDMbhBMEiwAnUA9BVXFLe4awUyQ_WVBkeAfHqrMMhzXkG2ymacpD8gnwleOEJ2EhKg5oBoCatUQAvD_BwE)
- NY Council on Divorce Mediation - Annual Spring Conference "Mediation, Bridging Troubled Waters,"
  - Date: April 30 - May 2
  - Platform/Location: In person, Gideon Putnam Inn, Saratoga Springs, NY
  - Click for more information <https://nyscdm.mykajabi.com/2026-nyscdm-annual-conference-brochure>

Other News: The NYS Unified Court System recently released the next five-year RFP for the New York Community Dispute Resolution Centers contracts. Common submitted its proposal in January, along with other DRCs, and we are all awaiting the court's decision. Our proposal consisted of 96 pages! Imagine! Sixty-two proposals, as well as some competing for the same County's contract, are all waiting with some degree of anxiety! Fingers crossed, and we'll keep you updated.

### Last Calendar Year (2025) Statistics:

- Number of Cases: 175
- Number of Student RJ Workshops: 70
- Total Youth Served (workshops): 865; Total adults (mediations & DR Services): 105
- Mediation to case ratio: 52%

City Court - Hudson- Fourth Wednesday of the month-- Open for mediator assistance (I am mediating monthly, and would be thrilled to have one of you join me!). Penny also welcomes mediator assistance in RJ circles at Hudson Middle/High School. Thank you!

Until next time (let it be spring!) and to all who celebrate, a happy Passover and joyful Easter.

