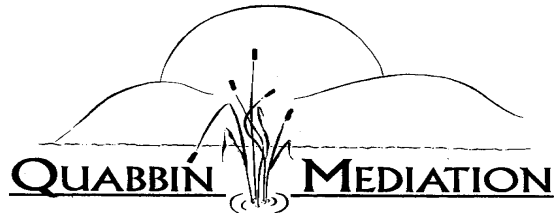




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## VETERANS MEDIATION

The intent of Veterans Mediation is to create more, widely accessible, resources for veterans that are provided by veterans.

Veterans Mediation was created when Leo Parent and Steve Connor, two Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) from Franklin County and Northampton, and ten others who are veterans or veterans' family members, took Quabbin Mediation's free 36-hour mediation training last year. Nine of them formed and sit on the Veterans Mediation Board of Advisors.

They are:

- Leo Parent, VSO serving Franklin County.
- Steve Connor, VSO serving Northampton.
- Nancy Mooney, 2006-2007 Commander of the Massachusetts DAV Auxiliary.
- Jacques Carl, a Gulf War veteran who works for Dept. of Children and Families.
- Sheila Davies, a Gulf War veteran who works as a re-entry therapist at the Leeds VA hospital, and is also a member of Quabbin Mediation's Board of Directors.
- Leonard Four Hawks, a Native American veteran of the Korean and Viet Nam Wars.
- Strong Oak, a Native American woman whose father was a Korean War veteran and who works to prevent and intervene in domestic violence.
- Darryl Benson, a veteran of the Gulf War who is a member of the staff at Soldier On, an agency working with homeless veterans.
- Stan Moran, a Korean War veteran and member of Amherst's Homeless Task Force.

As trained mediators, veterans can help take care of their own instead of relying solely on government services. People who have a conflict can figure out their own fair solution with the help of mediators. This resource is non-institutional and community based.

Quabbin Mediation, based in Orange, and North Central Mediation Services, based in Leominster, are two of the 15 community mediation programs in the state which are approved by the Mass. courts to train, supervise and support community mediators. Usually we have two mediators working on a case; when we have newly trained mediators, they are always paired with an experienced mediator. The mediation programs' professional liability insurance covers all of their mediators: staff, consultants and volunteers.

Mediation is confidential under state law, but only when the mediator is working with a court-approved program. With few exceptions, such as if someone is in imminent danger, mediators never

divulge the content of a case. This guarantee of confidentiality allows people to do the difficult work of solving their problems face to face knowing their personal information is secure.

Mediation is voluntary. No one can be forced to the mediation table and anyone can leave it at any time. Mediators do not take sides, make judgments or suggestions. Informed consent is another basic tenet of mediation. Mediators are not counselors. If someone is not able to understand and participate in the process, then it is the mediator's responsibility to suspend the mediation and refer the participants to appropriate resources. Having VSOs and others involved in the community as mediators is important, because they know what those resources are.

In the case of Veterans Mediation, at least one of the two mediators is a veteran (or a veteran's family member) and at least one side of the conflict is a veteran or a member of a veteran's family.

As I am writing this, the wife of a soldier recently returned from Iraq called to inquire about using mediation. It is beneficial for them to have a veteran, someone who understands his experiences, to be part of the mediation team.

Senator Stephen Brewer and Senator Stan Rosenberg are architects of a plan to take the program statewide. In time, once those who are part of Veterans Mediation have the four years' experience needed to qualify for court approval, the program could become independent of the community mediation programs.

No public funding has been provided to Veterans Mediation to date. The free mediation training offered this fall by Quabbin Mediation and North Central Mediation Services is supported by the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts.

If you have any questions, or would like more information, you are welcome to call or write us. We would also be glad to come to a meeting and answer people's concerns and questions.

Sincerely,  
Sharon Tracy, Executive Director  
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