

March 9, 2023

Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee,

Good Afternoon. My name is Patrick Sponsler and I am the Administrator of the Oregon Office for Community Dispute Resolution, the legislatively established office that holds the standards for community mediation in Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The network of 15 Community Resolution Centers help to address some of the most pressing issues facing Oregonians. In the last biennium, the network served over 50,000 community members with services that helped to improve school success and graduation rates, reduce crime recidivism among youth and adults, resolve disputes faster and cheaper than courts, and help keep people housed.

Through mediation and restorative justice, people find solutions that come from listening, connecting, and understanding. In mediation, people are encouraged to seek legal counsel and are connected to resources to help them make informed decisions and to help them self-determine the agreement that can work for them.

Resolution Centers provide services that are cost effective and complementary to existing avenues for justice. Increased funding for the Resolution Centers will stabilize these valuable organizations, increase community connections and expand services. With appropriate funding, Resolution Centers can quickly mobilize and respond to pressing and changing needs.

An example of their effective and efficient work is the ongoing 1-year eviction prevention mediation demonstration that is part of the legislative investments made in SB 5561 in December 2021. In a mix of 12 urban and rural counties, Resolution Centers are stabilizing housing within an upstream, integrated community response with local renter assistance programs, such as community action agencies, legal aid, rehousing programs, and the courts. Years of recorded experiences align with demonstration data, that is, mediation is an effective housing stability tool. 79% of court connected eviction mediation cases are resolved, 89% of survey respondents are satisfied with the outcome of the mediation, and 83% say that their stress about the conflict decreased after participating in mediation.

Lincoln county legal aid director sums up mediation well in a letter to my office, where he writes, "Mediation not only produces better solutions, it does so with less cost and with preserving the relationships of the parties." End quote.

Please support SB 600 with a sustained and continuous appropriation to expand access to justice for low-income Oregonians across the state.

Thank you, Chair Dembrow.
/s/ Patrick Sponsler

Eviction Prevention Mediation Demonstration

March 1, 2023

“Thank you! I worked with my manager to have a little more time, and they kindly waited on eviction. All back rent is now paid!”

-Renter

“Mediator amazing at making sure both parties were heard and respected.”

- Housing Provider

“The mediator let each party discuss their perspectives. The client said that this was the first time they had truly been heard.”

-Social Service Case Manager

Summary

In December 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed SB 5561, which included State General Funds for eviction prevention and diversion services. The Eviction Prevention Mediation Demonstration (EPMD) formally launched in November 2022 in 13 Oregon counties with services provided by five community Resolution Centers. This report period includes data during the scale-up through January 31, 2023. EPMD sites are providing mediation services within an integrated upstream eviction prevention system in connected partnership with local renter assistance programs, such as legal aid, rehousing programs, community action agencies, and the courts.

Completed cases

713

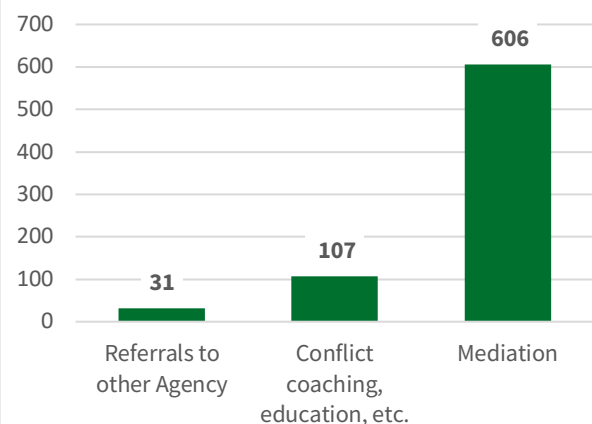
People served

2,892

Housing stability services

Resolution Centers provide referrals to other agencies, conflict coaching, and/or mediation to help stabilize housing for both the renter and the housing provider. Conflict coaching helps a party to anticipate problems, reality test options, and strategize a solution. In mediation, two or more parties are assisted by a mediator to reach a mutually acceptable resolution to the dispute. During the reporting period, Resolution Centers served approximately 2,892 people through 107 conflict coachings and 606 mediations.

Service Provided



Mediation has a long history in Oregon as an effective housing stability tool before an eviction is filed (prevention), as well as, after the eviction is filed (diversion). Currently, Oregon has no statewide formal requirement or incentive to mediate before an eviction is filed. There are a handful of Oregon courts that do require mediation prior to the trial. These policy differences (voluntary vs. required) create differing data flows and differing impacts on case outcomes. This report offers prevention and diversion details, respectively.

Integrated community response

Resolution Centers have established formal and informal pathways for service providers to stabilize housing efficiently and effectively. For example, Washington County’s Center for Mediation and Dialogue participates in bi-monthly meetings with housing advocacy groups to share information and improve support systems.

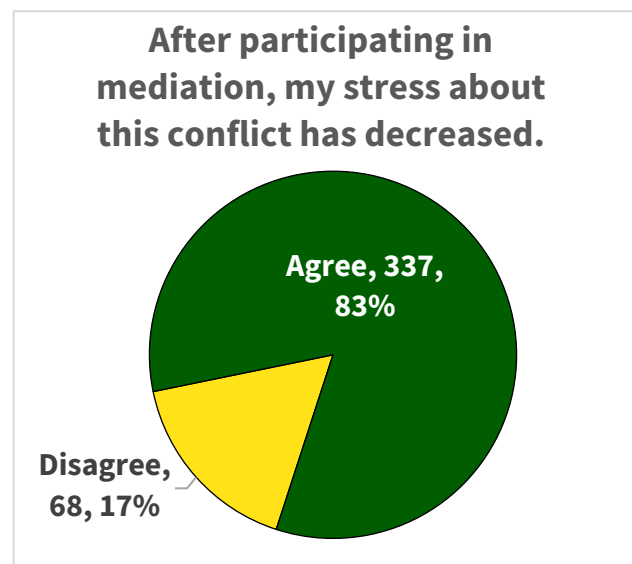
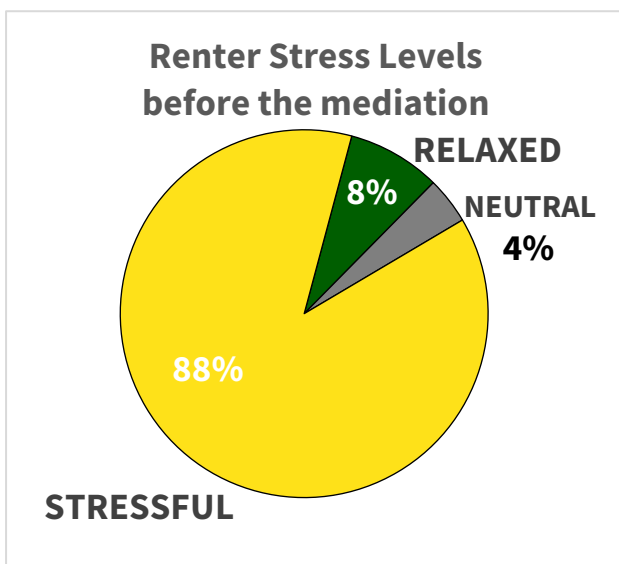
Specialized trainings

Resolution Centers provide continuing education opportunities directly to their local community mediators, and OOCDR supports development of the qualified basic mediation lead trainers and the statewide cadre of community mediators. In January 2023, qualified lead trainers (ORS 36.175) from EPDM sites participated in a 40-hour equity-in-mediation training to deepen accessible and inclusive services. In the next quarter, EPMD Sites are continuing to implement equity-in-mediation trainings for their community mediators. For example, Clackamas County Resolution Services has hired local and national trainers to facilitate a series that will cover topics such as: equity basics, equity in mediation, case development, equitable policies, and continued growth.

Training Events
12

Outreach Events
36

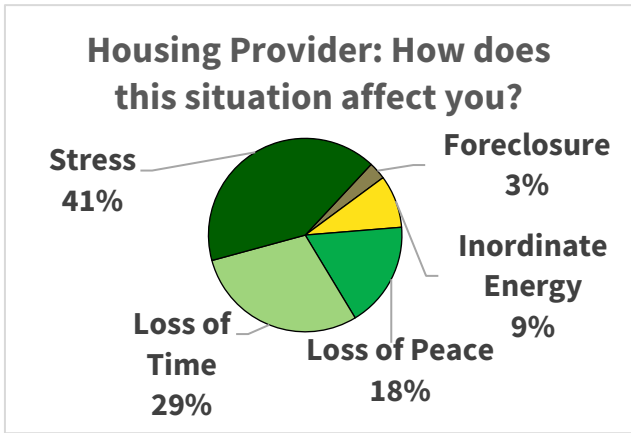
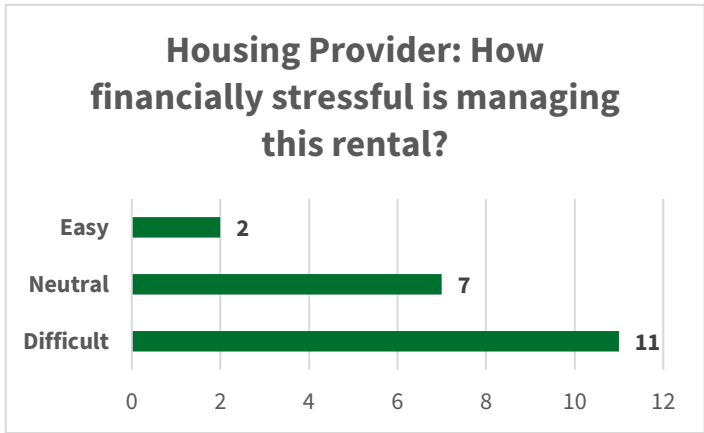
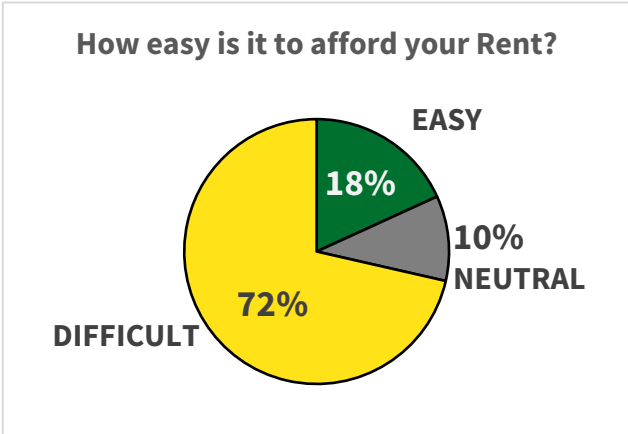
Number of Volunteers
50



Eviction prevention details

Renters are reporting high stress levels related to their housing, with 64% reporting ‘Very Stressful’. 72% of renter respondents report that it is ‘difficult’ to afford their rent. 61% of Housing Providers are reporting that managing these rentals is ‘difficult’ and they are impacted with stress, loss of peace, loss of time, inordinate energy, and foreclosure.

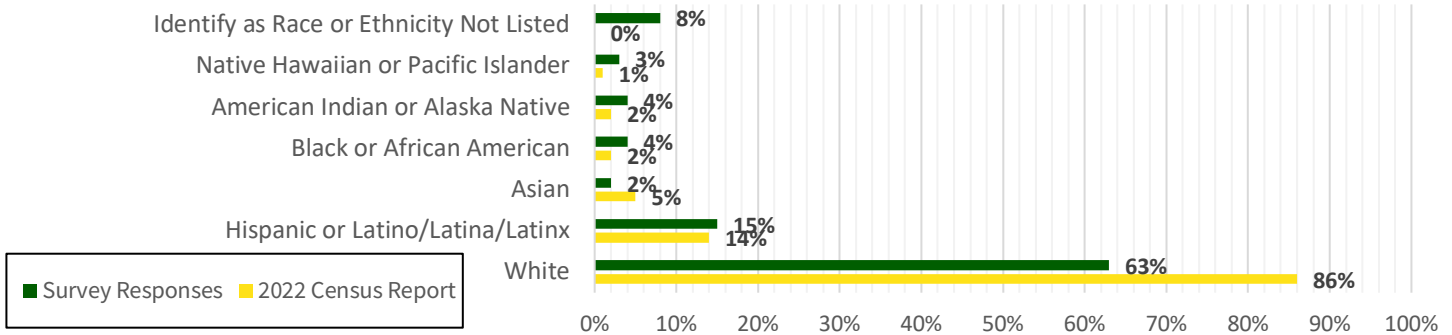
63% of renter survey respondents identify as white, 15% identify as Latinx, 4% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 4% as Black or African American, and 8% identify as a race not listed on the survey. Comparing the survey data with statewide data for Oregon in July 2022, resolution services are being provided slightly less to those who identify as white and Asian, and are provided slightly more to those who identify as Latinx, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR>).



**Eviction Prevention Case Study
Homelessness Prevention**

A housing authority was striving to provide stable housing to an individual who had been in and out of homelessness. Unfortunately, there was a \$250 judgement on the renter’s record from several years ago that prevented the housing agency from helping the renter. Bringing parties to the mediation table, the mediator helped the parties untangle much of the red tape and helped to find a way to reconcile the debt that was for a now deceased housing provider. Through mediation, the debt was settled, and a path was cleared for the renter to enter stable housing.

Participating Renter Demographics and Oregon Census Data



These service trends roughly align, when considering the median household income gap in Oregon between Black, American Indian, and Latinx households compared with white households. As calculated by the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, Latinx, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander households tend to have 10-20% less income than white Oregon households. (<https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2022/12/14/racial-and-ethnic-economic-disparities-in-oregon-an-update/>).

Mediators often find that the mediation is the first time the two parties have had an actual conversation. Often, overcoming the language and/or cultural barrier is the key to resolving the dispute and stabilizing housing. In eviction prevention cases, Resolution Centers report that 12 cases utilized Spanish language interpreters and one case utilized Russian language interpreters.

Many of both Renters (62%) and Housing Providers (69%) report that their relationship with the other party is positive or neutral. These amicable relationships may help to provide a foundation for seeing the struggles of the other party and helping to make an agreement that works for both parties.

I felt safe to say and express what I really wanted to say. You restored my dignity.

- Renter

Polite, informative, and helpful!

- Housing Provider

Allowed me to create a realistic payment plan for the near future.

-Renter

Waiting times are rough but everyone is kind and respectful. More mediators please.

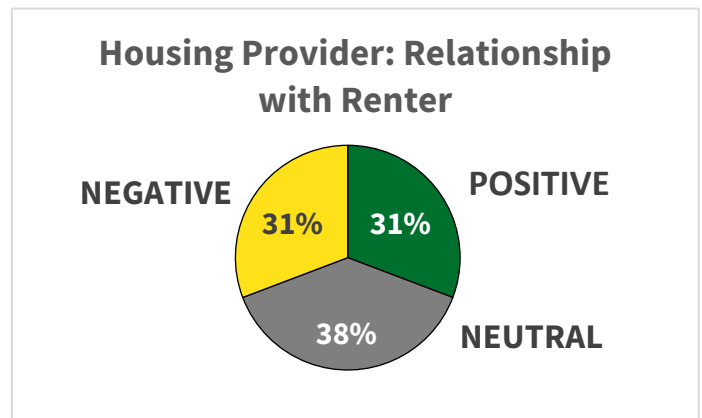
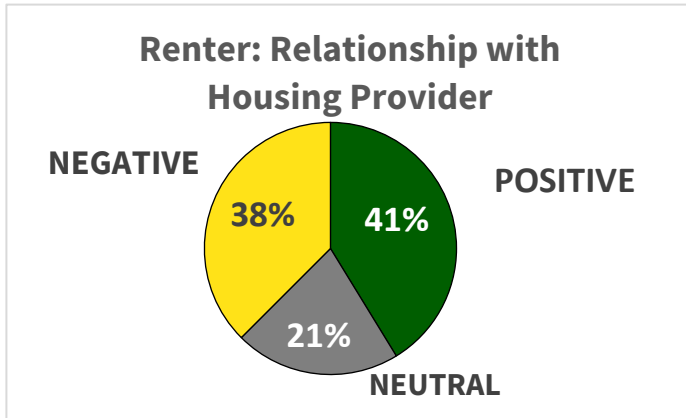
-- Housing Provider

Eviction Prevention Resolution Rates

72%

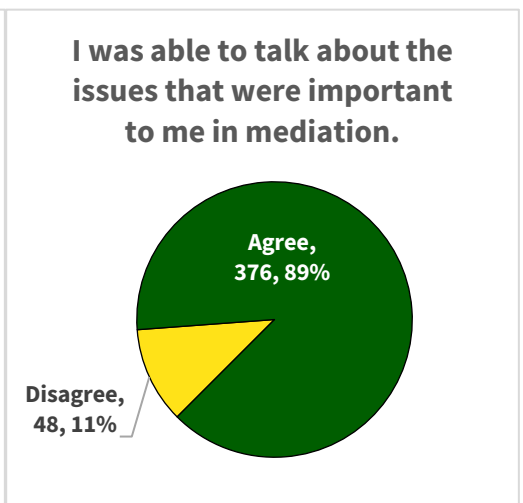
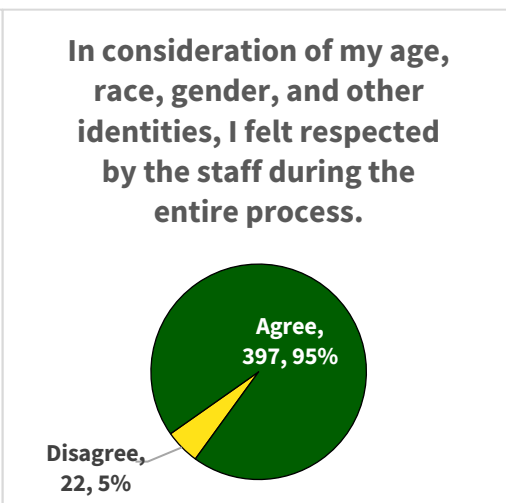
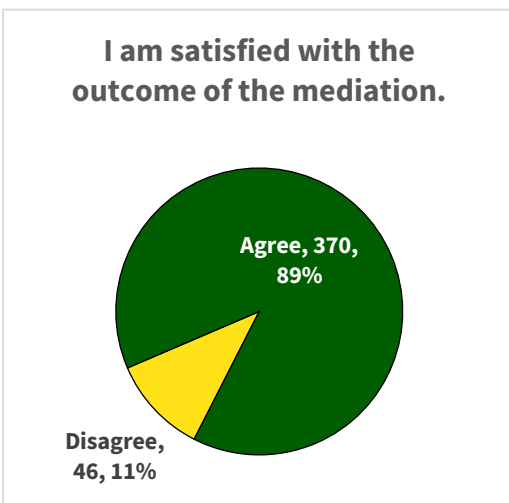
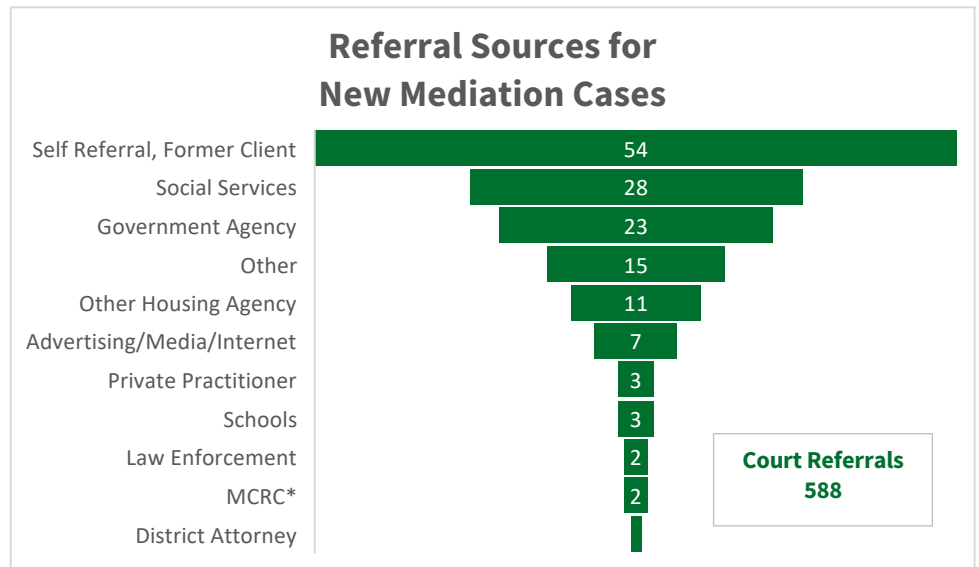
Eviction Diversion Resolution Rates

79%



Eviction diversion detail

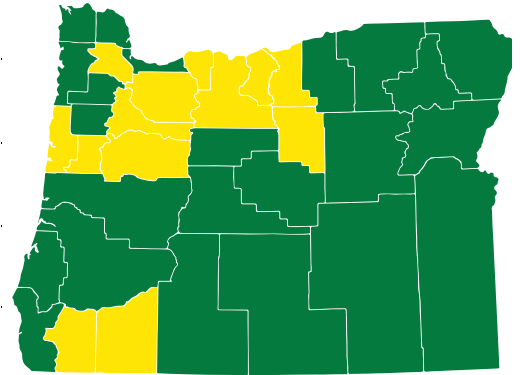
Eviction diversion mediation is well established in two of the five EPMD regions. Due to the fast pace of court processes and the court’s restrictions on the collection of certain data, diversion data is more reliant on the survey tools OOCDR uses for all case types. Court referrals will continue to be high, as some courts require mediation prior to the trial.



Eviction Prevention Mediation Demonstration sites

The EPMD Sites cover 13 counties that include rural and urban communities, indicated in yellow on the map. The EPMD Sites and county service areas are:

The Center for Mediation and Dialogue	Washington
Clackamas County Resolution Services	Clackamas
Neighbor-2-Neighbor	Marion, Linn, Benton, Lincoln
Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center	Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler
Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice	Jackson and Josephine

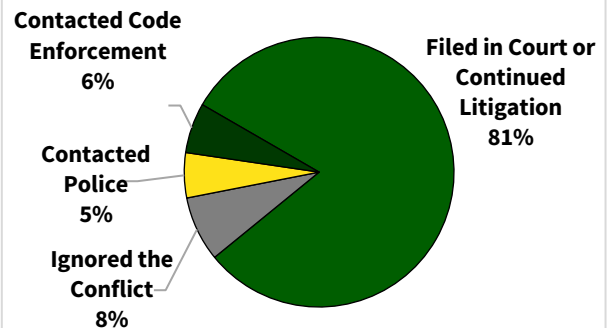


All EPMD Sites are part of Resolution Oregon – the network of community resolution centers that provide cost-effective and complementary avenues for justice to all community members throughout Oregon.

Eviction Diversion Case Study
Helping to Create Access to Language Justice

A housing provider filed an FED for not receiving payment of rent. It quickly became clear that the renter and housing provider had had limited communication up to that point. The housing provider did not speak Spanish or have their written communications translated into Spanish. With the aid of a Spanish interpretation service, the mediation established that the renter had submitted the rent on time, but the records were stolen during a break-in at the rental office. With communication restored, the renter was able to resubmit rent to the housing provider, and the housing provider agreed to send letters in Spanish. Housing is stabilized and constructive communication pathways are open for future conversations.

If mediation services had not been available, how would you have dealt with the conflict?



OREGON OFFICE
for
COMMUNITY
DISPUTE
RESOLUTION

Advancing State-funded investments by promoting problem-solving, learning, and growth towards a connected community.

**2022
BIENNIAL
REPORT**

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“Mediation not only produces better solutions, it does so with less cost and with preserving the relationships of the parties.”

-Lincoln County Legal Aid Regional Director **Blair Bobier**

INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO JUSTICE



The federal government invested in new tools to address community conflict by embedding mediation in the 1964 Civil Rights Act in an effort to address racial, ethnic, class, and gender inequalities throughout the courts and legal action. To provide neighborhoods with localized conflict resolution services, organizations sprouted nationwide, and community mediation began to take root.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

- Providing upstream alternative dispute resolution services
- Utilizing equity informed mediation tailored to the community
- Connecting people to local providers, e.g. financial resources, legal aid, rehousing & credit counseling
- Providing conflict resolution education for youth

OUR PARTNERS



Restorative Justice

Local community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) implement restorative justice models in partnership with juvenile justice centers that reduce recidivism rates and increase restitution rates.

60%

Decrease in discipline referrals for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) at Pheonix Oregon High School

Source: Resolve, Restorative Justice in Schools, 2019

4,000+

Oregon families retained their homes with the Oregon Foreclosure Avoidance Program.

Source: Mediation Case Manager

HOUSING STABILITY



Mediation offers more flexible solutions than can be ordered by judges.

The school district connected a Dispute Resolution Center with a group of renters facing eviction. Three undocumented single fathers, each raising one child, none of whom speak English was facing eviction. One of the fathers was badly injured and could not contribute to the household bills. The others pooled their resources to cover his medical expenses but still came up short.

With help from community resources, an anonymous donor, and the promise of the state-wide rent assistance program, amount owed became manageable.

After understanding the circumstances that caused the delay in payment, the housing provider became more sympathetic and more comfortable with dismissing the eviction before the remaining rent was paid, and the court date was canceled.

For renters,

mediation can address the specifics of each of their cases to see if arrearages can be made and tenancy stabilized, or a plan for moving out can be created.

For housing providers,

mediation can address rent arrearages and reduce costs associated with an eviction.

For communities,

mediation increases access to justice and is a site of referral to local resources.

Eviction prevention systems rely on mediation as an efficient and effective tool to keep people housed.

82%

**mandatory cases
created agreements**

76%

**voluntary cases
created agreements**

Source: OOCDR, 2017-19 Statewide

COMMUNITY DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTERS

METRO

Center for Mediation & Dialogue
503-526-2523

East County Resolutions
503-618-3247

Hillsboro Mediation Program
503-615-6651

Resolutions Northwest
503-595-4890 ext. 101

Clackamas County Resolution Services
503-655-8415

CENTRAL

Community Solutions of Central Oregon
541-383-0187

THE GORGE

Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center
541-386-1283

EAST

Eastern Oregon Mediation Center
541-786-0270

MID VALLEY

Center for Dialogue & Resolution
541-344-5366

Neighbor to Neighbor
503-585-0651 (Marion)
541-223-4189 (Benton/Linn)

Common Ground Mediation
541-751-9666 (Coos)
541-530-2578 (Douglas)

SOUTH VALLEY

Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution &
Restorative Justice
541-770-2468

COAST

Community Mediation Services
503-623-3111

Lincoln Community Dispute Resolution
541-574-9846

Your Community Mediation
503-435-2835

Oregon Community Dispute Resolution Centers Creating Safer Communities

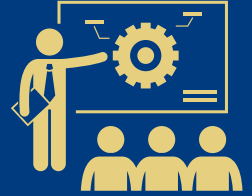


15

COMMUNITY DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTERS

799

COMMUNITY TRAINING PROGRAMS



51,613

COMMUNITY MEMBERS SERVED

9,206

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES



21,012

VOLUNTEER HOURS

1,194

TOTAL VOLUNTEERS



Source: OOCDR, 2019-2021 Statewide

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