Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

During the reporting period of April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 NYSDRA provided community legal education to 241,956 individuals through community dispute resolution center advertisements, print outreach materials distributed, community presentations about available services (ex. Farm group meetings), and people reached at conferences.

NYSDRA's primary target population included New Yorkers in need of conflict resolution services, including mediation, and other services aimed at improving New Yorkers' access to justice and meeting the need for quality means of conflict management and resolution. This includes the range of programs and services managed by NYSDRA and provided by the Community Dispute Resolution Centers, including: Disability Mediation Programs (Early Intervention Mediation Program, Special Education Mediation, and ACCES-VR Mediation Program), the Community Mediation Service Corps Program (CMSC AmeriCorps), New York State Agricultural Mediation Program (NYSAMP), and the Lemon Law Arbitration Program.

NYSDRA's disability mediation programs serve children and their families in need of early intervention and special education services as well as adults in need of vocational rehabilitation or training services. The Community Mediation Service Corps program mobilizes AmeriCorps members to serve their local communities in three service tracks; School Based Conflict Resolution Specialists, Youth Services Specialists, and Family and Custody Visitation Service Specialists. The target population for the CMSC program is schools, youth, and families facing custody and visitation disputes. The NYSAMP program serves New York's agricultural/farming communities with conflicts with farm transition issues, credit and loan cases, and general family/relationship/business issues affecting farming families. The Lemon Law Arbitration Program serves all automobile, motorcycle, wheelchair, and mobile home consumers seeking redress from an automobile manufacturer for the purchase or lease of a "lemon" (i.e., bad vehicle).

NYSDRA is the association of the statewide network of 20 Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) throughout New York State. Under a service agreement, memorialized in a Memorandum of Understanding between NYSDRA and each CDRC, services are provided in all 62 counties in New York State. NYSDRA's programs, and by extension the services of the CDRCs, are available to all New Yorkers. These services are designed to provide the timely and satisfactory resolution to a wide range of conflicts. Such conflicts might otherwise be litigated, but as the costs and time required to pursue a court case is prohibitive to many low-income individuals, the services become vital in helping low-income New Yorkers access justice, often resulting in resolution of many contentious issues, that would otherwise have a negative impact on the social and financial circumstances of those individuals accessing the services. NYSDRA's programs, therefore, provide resolution to problems facing New Yorkers in rural, suburban, and urban areas, and offer access and opportunity for resolution to conflict in a wide range of issues faced by many low-income New Yorkers in areas of family, youth, disability services, property, and community disputes. In many cases, parties resolve their disputes leading to improved relationships, improved communication, time, and financial savings.

**Population Served:** Community Dispute Resolution Centers

**Area Served:** Statewide

**Total Funding:** $2,421,410

**Total IOLA Grant:** $137,500

**Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 7.20
- Lawyers: 1.40
- Others: 5.80
Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>241,997 people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>241,997 people</td>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

NYSDRA has several state contracts including; the ACCES-VR Mediation Program, AmeriCorps Community Mediation Service Corps, Developmental Disabilities Planning Council Project, Early Intervention Mediation Program, Lemon Law Arbitration Program, NYS Agricultural Mediation Program. NYSDRA manages the state contracts for mediation programs and oversees the program service delivery of the CDRCs. Each contract has case metrics and available funding for outreach efforts to increase awareness and usage of these community programs. For each of our programs we have an estimated case-load per year and have seen increases in certain programs as a result of community legal education through outreach, networking, informational materials, and online and print communications. Each program works closely with CDRCs and state partners to increase case load goals, refine service delivery, program improvements, and develop strategies to influence populations to utilize dispute resolution services as an alternative to other due process forums such as court processes and impartial hearings. For this fiscal year (4/1/20-3/31/21), NYSDRA conducted about 1711 cases. From 2019-2020 the CDRC network 27,068 cases and served 71,876 individuals.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

1. The Annual Conference is one of NYSDRA’s signature events and provides a wide array of professional development opportunities. This year the Conference was held fully virtually from November 16th - 18th, 2020 and convened 287 attendees—an increase of over 22% from the previous year’s in-person event. The agenda offered 18 sessions, including 3 with Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credit available and a keynote address by Soffiyah Elijah, the Executive Director of the Alliance of Families for Justice.

2. NYSDRA offered a wide variety of webinar programing this year, with more than 50% of the programs made available at no cost to participants.

Webinar offering ranged from stand alone trainings, such as “Remote Arbitration What You Need to Know” with trainer Steve LaLonde and “Mediating in the Era of Polarization Webinar” with Prof. Alexandra Carter, to a selection of webinars included in multi-day conference—including the ACR-GNY Annual Conference in Spring 2020 and NYSDRA Annual Conference in Fall 2020. In March 2021, NYSDRA also launched the 2021 Disability Programs Mediation Training series with trainer Amber Kane, featuring four unique webinars made available to both CDRC staff and the public at no cost. Registration for this series quickly reached capacity and plans are in development to expand the offering so it may be available to all who are interested.
**Significant Collaborations**

As the association of the Community Dispute Resolution Centers, NYSDRA conducts program and contract management, legislative advocacy, and outreach to communities to spread awareness of community mediation services leading to effective dialogue and stronger relationships.

Through the Community Mobilization for Access to Justice & Equality Initiative, CDRCs are offered training tailored to meet the needs of the individual CDRC, with options ranging from single day 4-hour trainings to multi-day trainings. For most CDRCs, their communities have prioritized conflicts associated with the pandemic and racial justice. To this end, the Community Mobilization for Access to Justice & Equity Initiative has engaged CDRCs in a series of applications focused on racial and social justice, aligning with the social justice foundation of many CDRCs.

Between April 2020 through March 2021, NYSDRA held 12 Community Mobilization training events available to all CDRC volunteers and staff, for a total of approximately 60 hours of training. 16 of the 20 CDRCs were engaged, with a total of 150 staff and volunteers from the network participating in at least one training.

CDRCs also were also offered the opportunity to schedule a training delivered directly to their CDRC. Options available ranged from 4-hour trainings to 12-hour trainings and included:

- **Undoing White Supremacy in the Workplace**, a 1-day presentation to help us understand the role of race and ethnicity, oppression dynamics and the impact of racial invalidation in our work cultures.
- **Holding Space**, a 1-day presentation on self-education resources in holding affinity, anti-racist, mutual aid, self-education and support groups.
- **Dialogues across Differences**, a 3-day learning intensive examining underlying theory and practice principles, introducing and modeling the dialogue pattern, examining the considerations that will occur in groups, and guidelines for when dialogue may be ill advised.

In 2020, NYSDRA engaged with the New York Council on Nonprofits to undergo a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Assessment process which required NYSDRA to assess organizational culture, values and guiding principles, internal systems, human resources practices, program, and service delivery. Results showed that NYSDRA is a driver of diversity, inclusion and equity, and that our organization is driving organizational change, particularly with our partnerships in accessibility efforts. NYSDRA is further developing its Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Action (IDEA) Plan for the next phase of our development, including the inclusion of an IDEA model into the bylaws and organizational policies and practices.

This year, we have continued to strengthen our partnership with the New York City Impartial Hearing Office (NYC IHO). Increased communication and shared strategy with the NYC IHO led to increased usage of special education mediation by 20%, diverting impartial hearing requests, as appropriate, to mediation. This reduction in impartial hearing traffic has relieved the hearing backlogs, helping ensure access to due process for parents, students, and school administrators.

NYSDRA relies on expertise from professionals in many related organizations and engages in events sponsored by other dispute resolution organizations, such as the Association of Conflict Resolution of Greater New York. NYSDRA is an active member of several organizations whose work is critical in enhancing and promoting the dispute resolution field as well as the nonprofit sector. These groups include The Association for Conflict Resolution Greater New York Chapter, Inc. (ACR-GNY), the New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc., the National Association for Community Mediation, the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education, New York State Council on Divorce Mediation, and the national Coalition of Agricultural Mediation Programs.

Some of the programs that resulted from partnering with Columbia University and the Eastern District of New York were **Anti-Racism and the Mediator’s Role: Irreconcilable Differences or Ethical Imperative** and **Mediating in the era of Political Polarization**.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

The work of the CDRC network is dependent on the work of community volunteer mediators and arbitrators. NYSDRA provides support and technical assistance to volunteers across the state as well as training and professional development opportunities in the form of in-person trainings, webinars, and sessions at the annual conference. NYSDRA highly values the work of volunteers throughout the CDRC network as mediators and arbitrators. NYSDRA’s next phase of the Community Mobilization initiative will focus on enhancing and strengthening the work of the centers by engaging with their communities, building relationships and trust as community service providers and focusing on volunteer recruitment and engagement and forging new relationships within communities to make CDRC services more widely known and accessible.

NYSDRA actively recruits and encourages participation from students and membership is made available at a discounted rate. This year, NYSDRA was pleased to welcome Columbia University’s Association for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Students (ANCoRS) as members, and student memberships account for 5% of NYSDRA’s total membership.

Sources Of Funding

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