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Contact: Alice Eskind, 615.333.8400
alice@nashvilleconflict.org

Nashville Conflict Resolution Center Expands Services to Memphis thanks to VOCA Grant

Nashville, TN – Nashville Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) has been awarded a grant through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), a federal fund that supports NCRC’s restorative justice approach to promote healing for juvenile victims and offenders. The grant awards NCRC \$500,000 over three years, supplementing the organization’s current funding that lasts until 2021. For the past 20 years, NCRC has been engaged in the complex but rewarding work of victim-offender mediation, primarily in Davidson County.

“Thanks to Debi Taylor Tate, Director of the TN Administrative Office of the Courts, and her championing of the use of mediation to divert young people from the court system, NCRC will now provide mediation for young victims and offenders in Memphis, as a partner of the Shelby County Juvenile Court, led by Judge Dan Michael,” said Sara Figal, Executive Director of NCRC.

Judge Michael, who helped shape the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018, has successfully implemented numerous measures to reduce the contact that young people have with the court. Adding mediation to existing programs will further expand the positive impact upon young people, their families, and their communities. Says Judge Michael, “In the Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County, our focus has been on alternatives to detention since I was elected Judge. The restorative justice model has shown positive results in jurisdictions across the country and the NCRC is a proven asset for making the victims whole again while positively addressing low level delinquent behavior with a firm but fair hand. I look forward to working with the Memphis Conflict Resolution Center.”

“In the current juvenile justice climate, the role of the court has to be lowering Racial & Ethnic Disparities (RED) and Conflict Resolution by design should greatly reduce contacts with Juvenile Court”, added Judge Michael. “I was recently sworn-in as President of National Council of Juvenile and Family Judges (NCJFJ) after serving on its Board of Directors for the past 6-years. Our organization provides all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of the families and children who seek justice. The NCJFJ is a leader in the development and implementation of policy and practices nationally and we feel the Conflict Resolution model is certainly a positive step in the right direction for even greater Juvenile Justice Reforms.”

Another organization that will act as a crucial partner in Shelby County is CJAM (Community Justice & Mediation Center), the nonprofit organization that provides Shelby County and other West Tennessee General Sessions Courts with pro bono mediators. Karen Phillips, tapped to run the NCRC Memphis office, is an experienced family mediator who serves on CJAM’s Board of Directors.

“We have long anticipated being able to reach across the state and help develop nonprofit mediation in counties that don’t yet have their own robust programs,” explained Figal. “To be able to work with the Shelby County Juvenile Court and Judge Michael is remarkable. We hope this will catalyze access to the gentler justice of mediation and trauma-informed care throughout the region.”

NCRC's original VOCA grant, awarded in 2018, allowed significant expansion of the Juvenile Victim-Offender Program into Sumner, Rutherford and Williamson counties, establishing relationships with their Juvenile Courts. Within Nashville, NCRC was able to offer additional mediation resources to the Davidson County Juvenile Court, and also to MNPS middle and high schools, NCRC also began mediating school-related cases, repairing relationships among students and teachers and limiting the need for suspensions.

As the court systems reopen in Memphis, Nashville, and surrounding counties, NCRC hopes to help relieve the busy court dockets that have built up over the past few months.

Lisa Deal, NCRC's Juvenile Victim-Offender Program Coordinator, is excited at the prospect of expanding, particularly now as current events have prompted a broader appreciation for restorative methods of justice. "Our main goal is to serve young people by helping them repair their relationships and move forward as peaceful and productive members of the Tennessee community."

Founded in 2000, Nashville Conflict Resolution Center provides free and low-cost mediation to individuals and groups throughout Nashville and surrounding counties. Through referrals from the community partners, NCRC resolves school fights, custody agreements, and neighborhood conflicts. NCRC believes in mediation as a first-choice method for resolving disputes privately, respectfully, and with dignity.

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