

Mediators help nonprofits find peaceful solutions

Common Ground negotiates conflict for civic and religious groups

By Monique Bosolet

mbsotel@idahostatesman.com

Sit down with Bob Rainville and Larry Hauder of Common Ground Conciliation Services Inc., and you will see firsthand how the Mennonite pastor and the retired Forest Service official facilitate productive dialogue.

Ask them what it means to be "therapists," and the deliberations begin.

"I guess a parallel might be, if you were a person who needed therapy, you'd go to a counselor's office," said Hauder. "We are working with individuals within a system, an organization. And that organization has its own persona, its own stress producers."



Bob Rainville

organizations, faith-based groups and civic associations.

Both conclude they're not "therapists," but as certified professional mediators, they help people who comprise "the backbone of our community" talk out their occupational problems and reach reasonable solutions through effective communication.

"My assumption is that conflict will always be something that (society) wants to ignore, push away and pretend is not

Rainville and Hauder teach preventative tools for better communication through Common Ground, a nonprofit Boise mediation group, which arbitrates issues for other nonprofit



Katherine Jones/Idaho Statesman

Common Ground Conciliation Services offers conflict mediation, group facilitation and organizational consultation, as well as training. Bob Rainville leads a four-hour workshop on how to have tough conversations and still stay in positive relationships.

there," said Hauder. "When that happens, (problems) sort of fester and grow. This is a more wholesome way of addressing a particular issue they may be addressing."

Hauder cites lack of resources, staff and minimal budgets as the roots to misunderstandings within organizations.

Common Ground conducts preventative workshops, like the one for community faith leaders held last month called "How do you have difficult conversations in the church and still love your neighbor."

Of course, when small problems become large ones, Common Ground is there, too.

"Nonprofits in particular are vulnerable.

They are often operating with limited budgets and heavily rely on volunteers to provide their services," said Rainville. "Volunteers are usually motivated by a deep and emotional commitment to the organization's mission. Sometimes roles and responsibilities are not clear. When issues occur, they are not communicated. Turnover increases. As staff and volunteers disappear, the organization's ability to fulfill its mission is damaged."

After an initial meeting with consenting group leaders, Hauder or Rainville will map out a plan of action, tailored to the organizations, which will give everyone a chance to give input on what they believe

Why I Serve



Larry Hauder

"(Bob and I) cover from different backgrounds. I'm an ordained Mennonite pastor. Bob is a retired Forest Service Executive, but we're both certified professional mediators.

I was doing it professionally in the church. I was a district pastor, so I was involved in faith-based conflicts a lot across the Northwest."

"Common Ground arose out of a vision that I had. We looked around the community to see if other organizations did what we do. We couldn't find any."

Larry Hauder, co-founder

Common Ground Conciliation Services Inc.

Are their services right for you?

Common Ground Conciliation Services Inc. serves organizations that normally couldn't afford mediation and facilitation services. It delivers tailored programs to nonprofits, faith based communities and other small organizations on a sliding scale with supplemental costs offset by grants. For more information or to schedule a consultation, call Common Ground at 947-5899 or visit www.commongroundcs.org.

the problems to be.

"I'd say that one of the outcomes is that after reading this article (organizations) would know, 'I can call Common Ground. I know there is help out there. I didn't know this resource existed. I'd like to get a handle on this before it gets a handle on us,'" said Hauder.

Monique Bosolet: 672-6716