

BY DEBBIE NELSON, DNA CREATIVE COMMUNICATIONS  
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## Upstate Mediation Center: The Gift of Resolution



Upstate Mediation Center volunteer Robert Clark

"Serving as a mediator is a great opportunity for a practicing attorney, since it offers insight into both sides of a conflict."

Life is filled with conflict. It impacts all of us. Yet it is how we chose to handle these disagreements that can make all the difference.

Upstate Mediation Center (UMC) volunteer Robert Clark serves our community by guiding disputing parties along a path to resolution. What a priceless gift he offers!

Robert's service to the community began early in his business career when he volunteered with the Guardian Ad Litem program. This powerful experience led him to a new vocation. He decided to attend the University of South Carolina School of Law and to establish a family law practice. To further support his personal vision of helping children and families in our

community, Robert started volunteering as a mediator with UMC in 2004. Later he served on the organization's board and ultimately became chair.

Since its creation in 1999, UMC has provided high-quality, affordable mediation services to hundreds of individuals, families, and businesses each year. More than 70 highly trained mediators, like Robert, sift through the facts, emotions and individual interests of disputing parties to determine the real issues. By maintaining an unbiased perspective, they are well positioned to offer innovative approaches that can lead to positive outcomes.

Mediators are great listeners and communicators who are skilled at guiding people through the conflict

resolution process with neutrality, confidentiality, sensitivity and fairness. UMC mediators do not make decisions or provide legal advice or advocate for either party. They empower those in conflict and honor their choices.

Mediation generally takes place with each party in a separate room. Disputants are only brought together if both parties agree. The mediator starts by explaining the mediation process and answering any questions. The mediator then works to address any and all issues requiring mediation. This allows each party to express all of their concerns to the mediator so that a comprehensive agreement can be reached.

The process offers many benefits. It saves time, money and reduces the potential for additional conflict. Clients have a high rate of satisfaction and future compliance. "In addition, serving as a mediator is a great opportunity for a practicing attorney, since it offers insight into both sides of a conflict," explained Robert.

In Greenville County, mediation is required in civil cases in Circuit (i.e. contract disputes, injury, etc.) and Family Court (property, child custody, visitation and support issues) before the case goes to a judge or jury for final disposition. However, people can mediate almost any dispute, even before it goes to court. UMC also mediates Magistrate Court types of disputes, family disputes, employee/employer, homeowner association, property, nuisance complaints, and lawsuits under \$7,500.

Most clients come to UMC without understanding the process. "Once the disputants understand that mediation provides an opportunity to come up with their own solutions with the help of an impartial, active listener, they visibly relax, roll up their sleeves, and put in the thoughtful work needed to reach a mutually acceptable resolution. It is an empowering process," said Jennifer Olmert, UMC's executive director.

So what motivates UMC volunteer mediators? It is their role in helping to restore friendly relations between disputants. While there are generally no winners in family court, both parties can walk out as winners through the mediation process. "And there is nothing better than at the end of a mediation when the litigants lean over and give me a big bear hug," shared Robert.

Last year Upstate Mediation Center conducted 543 mediations and touched more than 900 children's lives with the support of 1150 volunteer hours. For more information please visit [www.upstatemediation.com](http://www.upstatemediation.com) or call (864) 370-9771.



Debbie Nelson is the President of DNA Creative Communications, an inspirational marketing and public relations firm for nonprofits. She is the founder of Shine the Light Nonprofit Forums in the Upstate and at the state level she coordinates SCANPO's Knowledge Network. Debbie is also an adjunct professor at Presbyterian College.



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