

Peer-Advocate Action Roundtable

SOCIAL JUSTICE MEDIATION INSTITUTE TRAINING

May, June 2014

Peer Advocacy Action Roundtable (PAR) is a pilot legal advocacy training and coaching project for peer-to-peer community lawyering efforts. Located in the *Dudley Square* neighborhood, it aims to collaborate with residents to develop a toolkit and curriculum to support legal advocacy, problem-solving, and social justice. Their goals are to Identify resident priorities regarding unmet legal needs and hardships. Develop a resident-driven curriculum to address priority legal issues.

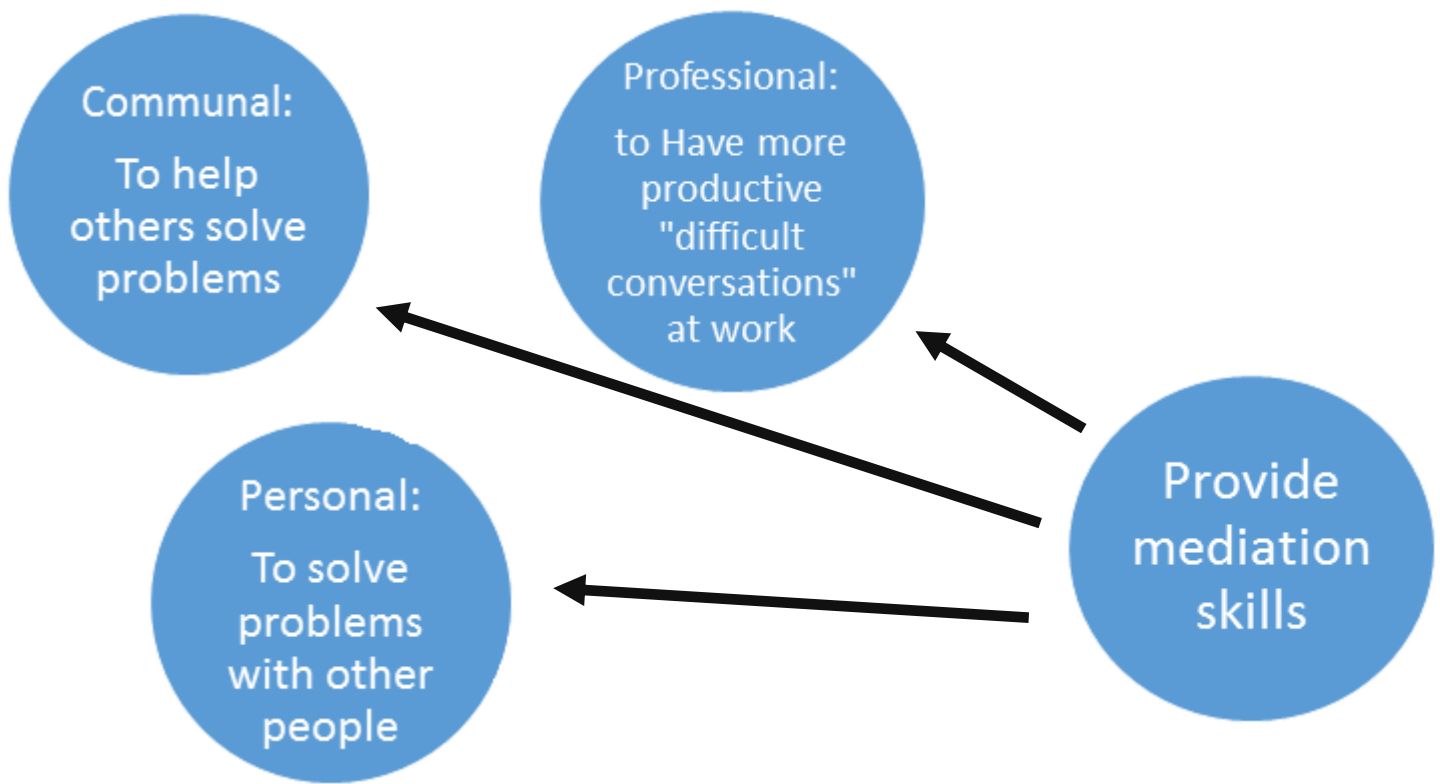
The Dudley community is one that is progressing from an unsafe and cautious neighborhood to one of unique opportunities oriented around family and community values. The Peer-Advocates Action Roundtable (PAR) has focused on ways in which they can make the Dudley community better in order to achieve their 5 year goal. There are few accessible and comprehensive tools which offer community members mediation training and an opportunity to learn and network amongst each other. Mediation and problem solving skills are essential in all facets of life; personal, professional and communal. Many members of the community do not have the skills and tools required to adequately voice their needs or fully understand the resources available to them.

- *Medical Legal Partnership Boston*
- *Dudley Children Thrive*
- *Race Equity Coalition*



Graduates of the Social Justice Mediation Training

In 5 years, youth will be playing happily in our neighborhood as parents sit together outside enjoying the peace.



Pre-training, participants identified mediation skills they want to develop:

Purpose

Based on numerous meetings involving community members, the Vital Village Network's PAR was able to visualize and sponsor the Social Justice Mediation Institute Training (SJMI). This training seminar is a step towards achieving the vision for the Dudley neighborhood in particular, as well as the Vital Village Network's broader focus in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods of Boston. Fundamental to the development of the community is the enrichment of the individuals who call it home. Community members recognized the need to develop their skills in order to affect change in their own lives, the lives of their family and community at large. By training individuals as Social Justice Mediators, the skills necessary for community advocacy, personal development and professional agency become a reality.

"I'm deeply concerned about the levels of violence and mistrust as a result of conflict and ignorance. To create peace we have to work within and acquire tools to bring solution and resolution." - Participant

Participant Goals

It was important that we evaluated what participants expected from the training in order to tailor future events to suit their needs better. Pretest and posttest data provided a comparative scale to gauge the competency of participants, their envisioned goals and success post training

Needs and Motivations

The participants in the SJMI came from varied backgrounds and as a result highlighted different interests in the program. There were a total of 22 participants and a majority of them worked fulltime, marking this training as a significant time commitment. One participant was particularly motivated to take the SJMI course in order “To gain more knowledge and understanding of current injustice practices around housing, eviction.”

45%

want to develop positive problem-solving skills that could be used to address challenges in their own lives

Participants Summary

The participants in the SJMI came from Dudley and surrounding communities. Their first hand experiences were crucial to the training seminars as they contributed a wealth of diversity and identified issues pertinent to their communities. The diversity of the group is reflected below;

1 out of the 15 participants was male.

Average ages was above 40 years old

Participants self-identified as:

3 African American,

2 White/Hispanic (mixed race Hispanic),

1 Haitian American,

1 African,

1 Hispanic

1 White



Process

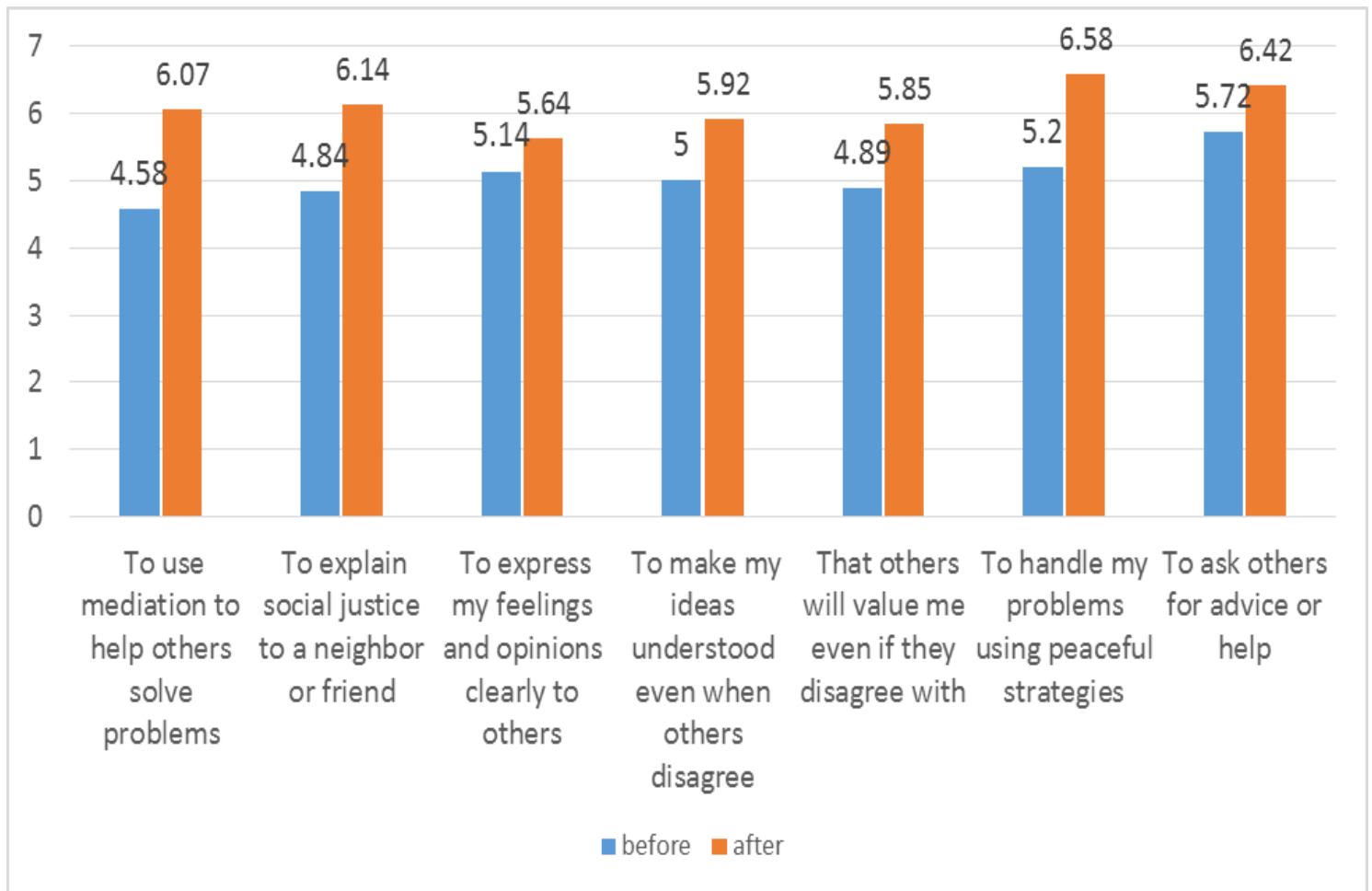
The Training model incorporated expert facilitators, interactive exercises and was dependent on the experiences of the participants.

Throughout 5 days, scattered through 2 weekends, totaling 40 hours, participants were trained in techniques of communication to address issues of Social Justice.

Participant Summary

This peer-to-peer model distinguished the SJMI from other mediation training. The use of social justice as the main lens of the SJMI training adequately conceptualized Social Justice as well as provided a toolkit to participants. This model is highly dependent on a skillful team of facilitators and the involvement of the participants. The facilitators also eased the discussion along, assuring participants that they were in a judgment free zone. This model also benefited from an interactive process which put theory to practice for a majority of participants.

“Presenters provided at times complex information in very clear terms. Their delivery was respectful and engaging. Participants were allowed to ask questions and the whole process was interactive”



Results

The increase in participant competency is the strongest indicator of the success of the program, the amount of networking achieved also proved to be a strong avenue from which participants capitalized on. The table above indicates self-defined participant competencies before and after the SJMI Training.

92% of participants left the SJMI training feeling satisfied in the skills and knowledge they gained.

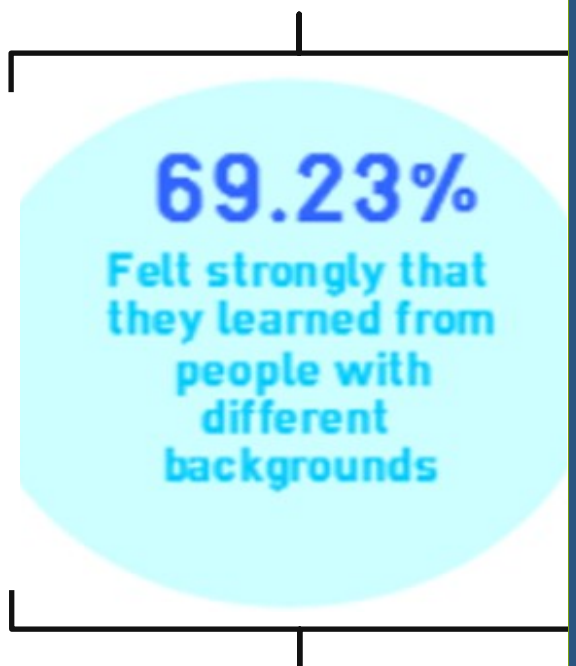
Community Connection

A fundamental component of the program was the ability for participants to interact and learn peer-to-peer. Peer-to-Peer interaction also gave participants a strong outlet to speak with people from other communities, to share their own interest and knowledge. A participant said that *"I enjoyed the opportunity to network with community leaders and develop relationships with others who are doing excellent work to improve our communities."* The importance of these connections cannot be understated. The implications for these connections affect the professional, personal and communal lives of all the participants. The diversity of cultural experiences amongst participants served as another learning tool which would not typically be accessible in other models of mediation.



Concerns

- More practice needed for participants,
- Pre-training materials,
- Diversify video footage,
- Facilitators used too many tools



Future Direction

There is significant potential that the SJMI program has for the Vital Village Network and its partners based the self-evaluation by participants, the SJMI provided them a venue of learning, networking and safety. By tailoring future trainings to suit the needs of other communities, we can adequately address issues of agency and mediation; the skills developed in the SJMI fostered active engagement in participants from in their personal, professional and community lives.

The current SJMI model is effective in fulfilling a gap in community services however there are areas that could be improved upon. There was little inclusion of male voices in this training and as a result a portion of the community missed out on an opportunity to sharpen a crucial skill set..



"I came to learn and that is exactly what happened. My original notions of fairness and justice were challenged- for that I am grateful."

Vital Village Network

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