



## **Spotlight: Special Education Mediator Rebecca Price**

For Rebecca Price, making a difference is what keeps her focused and dedicated to her ADR practice, which is in some of the more challenging areas of the field. “I coordinate the special education, early intervention and VESID mediation programs for the [Safe Horizon Community Mediation Centers](#) (in Brooklyn),” said Price. “I do it primarily because it’s one of the few things I’ve done where I feel like I’m making a real difference, and because every case is a unique challenge and a learning experience. “

For those unfamiliar with these areas of ADR, Special Education Mediation offers parents and schools the ability to reach agreement regarding a student’s educational plan/program through the use of mediation. Early Intervention Mediation Program assists families of infants & toddlers with developmental disabilities and Department of Health Early Intervention Officials to agree on services needed for the child’s Individualized Family Service Plan. Vocational Rehabilitation Mediation Program (VESID) offers vocational rehabilitation program participants the options to resolve disagreements over decisions made by VESID officials that affect the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to them.

Price came to ADR after graduation from the City University School of Law at Queens College in 2002. “Though I wouldn’t have used the ADR label at the time, I have been working in ADR since 2003 when I started the Children’s Mental Health Project at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Inc. The most effective strategies developed to assist families in that program - facilitating cross-system communication, conflict coaching, and collaborative problem solving - were all methods of ADR. “ This experience in social work and civil litigation led Price to her current position.

She explained that her clients had particularly serious needs. “People with disabilities and their families are, very often, marginalized, neglected and subjected to the decision-making of others. Even in service providing systems, administrators and staff can function in this way because they think it is more expedient or are under the misimpression that the people they are working with can’t or don’t want to make decisions about their own interests. Since mediation is grounded in the concept of self determination, this process, in this particular area, truly supports the rights of people with disabilities to participate in decision-making about their own lives.”

Interestingly, Price credits many people, not just one, with helping and influencing her work. “Almost every client I’ve ever worked with influenced me in some way and helped me to get to this point in my career. So many of them share my frustrations with the limits of litigation. There are so many specific people I would like to mention but I’ll stick to those within the ADR community: Blossom Nicinsky, Michele Kirchbaum (Director of the Brooklyn Mediation Center), Beryl Blaustone (Director of the mediation clinic at CUNY School of Law), and John Van Winkle, whose early encouragement and enthusiasm started me on this path.”

While her practice is challenging, it has many opportunities for accomplishment. "I'm most proud of contributing to the continuing professionalization of this field and of providing a high level of service to people who need it. This program does a lot of good," said Price.

And what does the future hold? "In terms of the special education, early intervention and VESID mediation programs, I'd like to accomplish an increase in the utilization of the programs statewide so that use of mediation is on par with the use of the impartial hearing process. I'd also like to promote consistency and excellence in practice, and ensure payment for the dedicated volunteer mediators who are doing extraordinary professional work and should be compensated."

A NYSDRA member since her early days, Price credits the organization with helping her connect to others in the field. "I've benefited in two ways from my NYSDRA membership. The first is that Safe Horizon's membership enables me to coordinate this fabulous program. The second is personal - my membership in NYSDRA was one of my first steps in becoming part of a professional community of mediators."