



Spotlight: Collaborative Law Practitioner Kathleen Gleeson

For attorney Kathleen A. Gleeson, it comes down to a simple concept. “We always say ‘first, do no harm’, and we try to leave our clients in a better place than when they came to us.” This belief has led Gleeson from law school, to family practice, then to mediation and now, since 2008, into collaborative law.

Collaborative Law is an interdisciplinary approach to divorce which offers the services of not just attorneys, but mental health providers and financial planners. The professionals pledge not to litigate, but instead to sit down with the couple in a series of conferences in an effort to find solutions that work best for the whole family.

According to the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals (IACP), this form of ADR was created in the early 1990’s by Stu Webb, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, a lawyer who had been practicing traditional family law. The practice next spread to California and then beyond over the next several years. Other professionals like psychologists and financial experts soon became involved. The IACP was formed by Webb and several others in the late 1990’s.

Gleeson joined her law firm fresh from Albany Law School in 1994 and became a partner at Kerker & Gleeson P.C./Family Mediation Services in 2005. But her interest in ADR came much earlier. Gleeson and her law partner, Valerie Kerker, took mediation training in 2002 and opened Family Mediation Services. “We then took collaborative training as part of the first association of collaborative divorce practitioners in the Capital Region in 2008.”

Why this particular area of law? “We were already practicing family law and this is the area in which we were experienced. We were seeking a better approach to helping families restructure after a divorce or separation. It’s nice to be able to give options to our clients; we can offer the traditional legal path, mediation or collaboration, depending on the needs and comfort level of our clients.”

Gleeson says that it is these options that make collaborative divorce such a positive avenue. “It is rewarding to help others find their own way. It is so harmful to families when couples cannot work out their own issues. Leaving decisions to a court can leave both parties, and any children that are involved, feeling utterly disgusted and hurt. A court decision, or one made in haste or because you are on the eve of trial, can be disappointing to all involved and may not be a result that anyone wanted or anticipated. I

think that, given the proper tools, most couples can resolve their issues in a way that suits their mutual needs rather than coming away with a cookie-cutter settlement. We offer them a safe, comfortable environment and the time needed to explore all of their options.”

Like many lawyers, Gleeson credits her law partner for helping her reach her goals. “I was lucky enough to have a mentor in my life. I came to work for Valerie Kerker as soon as I finished law school and have remained here. Valerie was instrumental in showing me the ropes and helping me to establish myself in the practice of law. I think I was drawn to ADR because of my own personality and my belief that families should create their own destiny. They are the ones who will have to live with a particular settlement for the rest of their lives so it should be tailor-made for that family.”

Speaking of family, Gleeson also credits strong support at home with making her work possible.

“My husband and family have always supported me in everything that I have done personally and professionally. Without that family support, I could not possibly be where I am today. I like to give my mediation clients flexible options for meeting times, including many evenings, and I could not do that without the support at home.”

Gleeson also has contributed her time and expertise to the emerging collaborative law field. “I am most proud of my accomplishments in helping Collaborative Law get off the ground here in the Capital District. I was a founding member of the [Collaborative Divorce Association of the Capital District \(CDACD\)](#) and I sat on the board of directors of CDACD for its first year. I am on the Marketing Committee and I chair the Committee on Forms and Standardization of Practice. I helped to coordinate a recent training for others who are interested in practicing collaboratively, many of whom later joined CDACD. It felt good to help bring other practitioners into the realm of ADR and for them to become a part of this really important movement.” A member of NYSDRA since 2003, Gleeson also tries to take advantage of relevant trainings, and in particular, the monthly eNews; “I do find the articles in the newsletters helpful.”

And what are Gleeson’s plans for the New Year and beyond? She has some very big goals. “I really hope that Collaborative Law becomes the norm here in the Capital District. It would be really great if our office had more collaborative cases than litigation cases. Educating the public on the benefits of Collaborative Law is a goal that I have for 2010.”

For more information on Collaborative Law, go to <http://www.collaborativepractice.com> or visit Kathleen's website at <http://www.kerkergleeson.com>.