

Joining Forces: *Wilshire Community Services & Creative Mediation*

On July 1, 2009, the nonprofit dispute resolution and facilitation firm Creative Mediation officially became part of Wilshire Community Services, a division of Wilshire Health & Community Services. This organizational affiliation creates a unique opportunity to form a lasting partnership that will strengthen both organizations, while offering the community a broader and more sustainable range of conflict resolution and mediation services.

This affiliation presents a momentous opportunity in the midst of difficult economic times in San Luis Obispo County. Strategic partnerships and focused collaboration among staff and volunteers will open up new windows of opportunity for serving the needs of San Luis Obispo County residents and significant cost-savings will be achieved through consolidated administrative functions.

Jesse Sostrin, CEO of Creative Mediation, became the new Executive Director for Wilshire Community Services. In this role he oversees and expands the reach of Caring Callers, Senior Peer Counseling and Creative Mediation. “We are excited about the addition of Creative Mediation and we are especially pleased to have Jesse’s leadership to guide this expanded cycle of service at a time when the need is so great,” said Tricia Ritchie, President and CEO of Wilshire Health & Community Services.

When asked about the timing and rationale for the merger, Sostrin explained, “Creative Mediation’s programs, services and support from the community have never been stronger – this partnership gives the organization an even more durable foundation to build upon.” Over the coming weeks, community members will be re-introduced to the many ways that Wilshire Community Services is positively impacting San Luis Obispo County.

Who were the parties involved?

- Wilshire Community Services (a division of Wilshire Health and Community Services) and Creative Mediation

What need was met?

- Increase programmatic and operational efficiencies for long-term sustainability
- Leverage shared organizational development and growth efforts (i.e. grant writing, outreach and volunteer development, etc.)
- Consolidate leadership and increase volunteer capacity across programs

What challenges arose?

- The need to proactively communicate and plan for the details of the affiliation
- Maintaining the core vision/mission of the organizations while blending program goals and objectives

What did you learn?

- Formal collaboration between non-profits presents significant potential for local organizations
- Careful selection of partners (with matching interests) is critical
- The process can take time (from six to 18 months)

What general insights would you like to share?

- Designate point person from each organization for consistent communication
- Identify specific questions and schedule semi-formal information exchange interviews
- Seek early (easy) decisions that build trust and momentum for bigger decisions down the road
- Make room for diverse choices that represent a fair exchange of value (be prepared to give a little)
- Identify and address concerns with prospective partnerships early if (when) they arise

About Wilshire Community Services: Wilshire Health & Community Services, Inc. is a California not-for-profit, public benefit, operating corporation whose origins date back to 1947. The company was originally in the acute hospital business and presently provides a wide range of long term care services including home health, hospice and skilled nursing. Wilshire Community Services is a division of Wilshire Health & Community Services and includes Caring Callers, Senior Peer Counseling and now Creative Mediation.

About Creative Mediation: Creative Mediation was founded in 1991 to give San Luis Obispo County residents a low-cost dispute resolution alternative that could save people time and money, and improve safety within the community. Their mediation, facilitation and training programs broadly serve individuals, families and community groups and their mission is to help people have the difficult conversations that move them from conflict to resolution.