

Relay Hang-ups? Try Mediation!

On a cold Sunday evening last winter, my wife asked me to call for a pizza. I decided to call Ledo, our favorite pizza place. On my computer, I turned on my EasyTTY(software and made the call through Maryland Relay. The operator dialed the number that I requested and told me that the other party hung up on me and added that she was rude. I called back again hoping I would receive someone else - hung up again! Now I was mad and asked the operator to redial, this time asking for the manager. Again the lady told me to call back two hours later when they weren't so busy and abruptly hung up on me for the third time.



Since Ledo wasn't interested in me as a customer that night, I ordered from their competitor. Ledo sells homemade pizza and their prices were reasonable. My wife and I wanted the best pizza, but we were forced to settle for less. I investigated Ledo on their website and found that all the restaurants in the chain had received training from Maryland Relay, thus becoming a Relay Partner. I had serious doubts on their commitment to serve people with disabilities.

I decided right then to file a formal complaint with the US Department of Justice (DOJ). I wrote them a letter and included a copy of my TTY conversation. (Instructions on filing a complaint can be found in "Enforcing the ADA" on page xx__xx of this GA-SK) Two months later, I received a response from DOJ agreeing that I had been discriminated based on Title III of the ADA. DOJ sent me a packet of information about the ADA and offered me an opportunity to have this complaint referred to Key Bridge Foundation for Mediation. I signed the forms and waited another 8 weeks.

Mr. Lewis Dabney, Associate Program Manager at Key Bridge contacted me by e-mail and asked me about my preferences with the case. He explained that Key Bridge Foundation is a non-profit organization under contract with DOJ to provide mediation services for complaints related to the ADA and IDEA. They have a network of more than 580 professional ADA mediators around the country. A mediator is assigned to a complaint near your home or workplace. The mediator is a neutral party whose job is to bring the complainant and the respondent together to discuss the issues and work out an agreement. The mediation process is entirely voluntary, and both parties must be willing to participate. Either party can back out at any time and then the case would be sent back to DOJ for further investigation and possible action. The complainant is free to seek an attorney at any time.

Ms. Patricia Laird, a disability consultant was the mediator assigned by Key Bridge on my complaint against Ledo Pizza. She arranged for an interpreter and we met at the local library. The owner, Mr. Scott Taggart apologized for what had happened even though he was not at the restaurant that night in February, and the two employees who rejected my relay calls had been dismissed. He affirmed his philosophy and avowed, "I want to develop long-term relationships with all of my customers." Even though it is not required, Mr. Taggart also suggested that if anyone gets involved in a similar situation to contact the owner or the manager of the establishment first if possible. In most cases, that meeting can resolve the problem immediately, and it could be an opportunity to turn a

negative experience into a positive community relationship.

My wife and I discussed our perception that Ledo was not concerned about their commitment to customers with disabili-



From the Desk of the GA-SK Editor

James D. House

“Voluntarily coming together and a willingness to work out a common solution is key to a successful mediation.”



Bridging Differences to Achieve Success

CENTER FOR MEDIATION
Key Bridge Foundation

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information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) through a toll-free ADA Information Line. This service permits businesses, State and local governments, or others to call and ask questions about general or specific ADA requirements including questions about the ADA Standards for Accessible Design.

DA specialists are available Monday through Friday from 10:00 AM until 6:00 PM (eastern time) except on Thursday when the hours are 1:00 PM until 6:00 PM. Spanish language service is also available.

For general ADA information, answers to specific technical questions, free ADA materials, or information about filing a complaint, call: 1-800-514-0383 (TTY) or 1-800-514-0301 (Voice)

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ities. Mr. Taggart promised to improve training for his employees, especially on relay calls. He encouraged us to call through the relay and report any problems to him at his home. Furthermore, he also agreed to write a letter to Ledo corporate headquarters suggesting that they furnish large-print menus in addition to their Braille menus, and to caption their TV commercials. He also mentioned that Ledo is a small company and the franchise owners enjoy the family-type relationship with the corporation.

This situation was very successful because of several reasons. First of all,



I researched the company to see whom I was dealing with. I came up with reasonable solutions. Mr. Taggart acted promptly as soon as he heard about the complaint. Both Mr. Taggart and I developed some solutions. He agreed to let me

write this article as an educational tool. "Voluntarily coming together and a willingness to work out a common solution is key to a successful mediation", says Ms. Patricia Laird, Disability Consultant and Mediator.

Mistakes can and will happen, but by focusing on the solution instead of the problem, we were able to change one business at a time. **SK**

Coming in the next issue of the GA-SK:

Emergency Notification Systems

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