

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #1 Transcript – Greg Abell

Marshall: So Greg, you've been with CADRE from the very beginning as a Senior Consultant and really, you know, someone that we've turned to frequently for advice and you've had a really rich career at Sound Options providing special education mediation. Are there lessons that you've, that you've particularly learned over the years?

Greg: Yeah, I think that the lesson, I was reflecting on that question. You know one of the lessons actually comes early, it's one we all know and I keep coming back to it, it's all about relationship. You know in '94 when we launched our system and we were going around presenting to all the states around this is a mediation system, this is how it works, how you access it. I was in the first meeting with a bunch of special ed directors and one of the first special ed directors raises his hand and goes 'oh okay I understand this program, but I need to make sure that all these mediators are attorneys,' he said, 'because like these are really complex legal issues', and before I could respond, I'm thinking 'how do I respond to that' and before I could respond one of our state department guys stands up and goes, 'you know I just need to correct you on that' he said 'fundamentally most of these disputes are not about the law, they're about relationships'. And I think that you know for me, what's been exciting about the work that we do is I sort of went into I think in the late '80s thinking I gotta do mediation and we do mediation but at a much larger scale. I think what we do is we really help people restructure their conversations about really critical issues and to me that's probably been the biggest reflection, that that's what we're about. It's like people need to engage around really complex high stakes issues and they don't know how to do that. And we come in and say, 'we've got some ideas on how to do that and we think we can help you do that, in fact we're actually fairly optimistic that you can do that'. And that typically serves us pretty well. So I think that as I reflect on it, my awareness of the importance and the relevance of our work has just become exponentially larger than we do this thing or provide this service called mediation, dispute resolution. It's really we step into other people's really, really gnarly conversations and say let's be with you in that time and help you have that in a different way. So, that's just been fascinating to me. People say, 'how do you do the work?' I go, 'I don't know I really love it, it's

really fun work to do.' It's honoring work I think, to do, to be with people in those times, so...