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COMMUNITY



NEWS PHOTO CHARLES LEFEBVRE

Linda Hancock has been appointed chair of the Alberta Family Mediation Society. Her goal is to raise awareness of the option of mediation to resolve conflict.

Hatter appointed chair of mediation society

GILLIAN SLADE

gslade@medicinehatnews.com
Twitter: GillianNews

Mediation can mean the difference between a protracted legal battle and learning to communicate in order to reach a consensus and the Alberta Family Mediation Society recently appointed Linda Hancock, a Medicine Hat registered psychologist and mediator, chair of the society.

"I want to raise public awareness of the options that are available, so that people can have a say in what happens, without a situation going to an extreme," said Hancock whose term is expected to be two years.

She says a big part of mediation is communication and her focus is on bringing people together in the same room to resolve issues and move forward rather than assign blame.

"It's not about he said, she said," added Hancock. "It's about finding solutions."

A report is written following the mediation and submitted to the judge for a court order. The report indicates what has been agreed on and if there are any outstanding issues that could not be resolved.

Mediation in Alberta is not regulated. While Hancock is a registered family mediator with the Alberta Family Mediation Society, and has cases referred to her from the courts, there are numerous types of mediation including specializing in separation and divorce, general family, parenting specialty, family business and financial mediation.

In some cases the court will pay the costs of mediation if a child is under the age of 18 or if one person earns less than \$40,000 a year, said Hancock.

One of Hancock's favourite books to recommend to those she's working with is *Tug of War* by Justice Harvey Brownstone who hosts the Family Matters Online TV program.

"He was a guest speaker at our AFMS annual conference and the proceeds from his book go to the Children's Wish Foundation," said Hancock.

AFMS is made up of about 135 members across the province and receives about 50 calls a week from people seeking information about mediation or looking to hire a mediator in their region.

Additional information is available online.

<http://www.afms.ca/index.p>