

## **MEDIATION REPORT**

**September 16, 2019**

After the membership approved the formation of a mediation panel process using Past President's as trouble-shooters, I began the process of setting up criteria for such a meeting if and when it ever took place. My first step was to request the updated Operating Policy document from President Valerie Lawlor, which I did in early July. Before there was any chance for this to be completed and sent to me, I received a formal request from Bev Pride for a meeting with a mediation panel to discuss concerns regarding Valerie Lawlor's presidency. The request, which came by email on July 12, 2019, was on her own behalf, and on behalf of seven other members: Jeremy Heynen, Faith Hurd, Elizabeth Drummond, Warren Johnson, Ashley Chodat, Adam Beggs and Roger Monk.

It was unfortunate that this request came in before the Past Presidents had had a chance to meet and discuss criteria, so this became something of a test case. However, we all resolved to make our best effort to deal fairly with both parties and to try to settle down the crisis that had erupted at the very first Board meeting. Valerie was notified of the request and both groups were asked to name Past Presidents who they would be comfortable with serving on the committee. Bev Pride continued to act as the spokesperson and liaison for the group who had submitted a list of grievances, although the members of her group put in individual written testimonials.

Both Bev and Valerie were told that the goal of the committee would be to mediate with the goal of resolving the conflicts and enabling the groups to work together. It was made clear to Bev that the ongoing club business and transition to the new board was not to be delayed by the mediation process. It was also made clear that any non-confidence motions as to Valerie's leadership would have to be handled at a general meeting and could not be addressed by the panel. Both groups were asked to keep as low and discreet a profile as possible over the upcoming meeting, since the time for involvement of other club members would only come into play if the issues could not be resolved and the matter came before a general meeting.

A panel was formed with Miles Lavkulich, Julie Atchison and Dwayne Campbell as the three Past Presidents who would mediate the meeting. Elizabeth Elwood had the task of coordinating with all the people involved in setting up the meeting, taking submissions and passing them on to the mediators and the parties involved in the dispute, and ensuring that all parties had the necessary information they needed, along with the help they needed in preparing for the meeting.

A concern was raised when Valerie Lawlor's submission included 25 letters of support from other club members, since the meeting was not supposed to be assessing blame, but simply trying to resolve differences. A decision was made that any letters that were simply people's opinions should not be considered, and only specific, provable items that related to the specific issues under review would be taken into account.

The meeting was held on July 30, 2019 at the Bernie Legge Theatre. In attendance were Bev Pride, Valerie Lawlor, Julie Atchison, Miles Lavkulich and Dwayne Campbell, who chaired the meeting. The panel came up with a series of extremely practical recommendations designed to enable the two parties to continue working within the club in a way that was parallel, rather than inter-connected, and the initial response from Bev and Valerie seemed positive.

Unfortunately, after further contemplation of the way the process had evolved, Bev and the group she represented chose to resign and withdraw from the club, with the exception of Warren Johnson who has remained on the Board. It may be that the aggrieved parties felt that their concerns would still not be met under the proposed recommendations. However, there were some indications in the letters of resignation that it was the 25 letters from other members included in Valerie's submission had caused Bev's group to feel that the membership had turned against them and that they would only meet hostility if they remained in the club.

There was some difference of opinion among the panel members and others involved in the process as to whether these letters really had any impact on the final decisions of the members who resigned. Therefore, one of the criteria that should be reviewed is whether or not a first meeting between conflicting members should contain any verbal or written input from any members other than those directly involved, or whether the panel should hear first from the people involved, and then can assess where input from other members might be necessary and seek that out for a subsequent meeting.

I am very sorry that we are losing a group of talented and hard-working members, and hope that at some point in the future they will return to the club. In the meantime, it is important that the Anti-bullying recommendations of the Mediation Panel be implemented right away, and during the fall, I will be in touch again with the Past Presidents so that we can review criteria and create a template for the process that will serve the club well in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Elwood

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## PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

**Meeting: Tuesday, July 30, 2019, Bernie Legge Theatre**

The Mediation Panel of Julie Atchison, Dwayne Campbell, and Miles Lavkulich met with Bev Pride and Val Lawler on Tuesday, July 30th at the Bernie Legge Theatre to discuss strategies for improving the working conditions at Vagabond Players. The following recommendations for communication and trust were arrived at by all parties present and are to be proposed to the Board by Val and Bev. It is hoped that these measures, used in the past at Vagabond Players and used in arts groups generally, will offer a way to begin anew.

**First – First Vagabond goal.** The writing of the Bullying and Harassment policy will be the Club's first priority.

**Second – Transparency and group cohesiveness.** There should be no meetings except general meetings. There should be no side meetings excluding the other group, and no Executive Meetings where the members of the club feel they are excluded. Each Board member will be expected to provide reports at each meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting and the proposed agenda for each future meeting will be provided for publication prior to the next meeting.

**Third – Respect.** The monthly meetings will be held in the house with adequate lighting to offer easier communication by attendees. The president and secretary should sit in front of the stage, and Board members should present their reports from the front of the house. Roberts Rules of Order will be in effect.

**Fourth – Accountability.** There should be a division of responsibility on the Board. The President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary will be responsible for business matters, and the Members at Large will be responsible for artistic production. Liaison should be timely and reasonable.

**Fifth – Stability.** Budgets for all of the shows will be decided at the beginning of the season. For this season, one of the mediators will be present at the budget meeting. Budget procedures as outlined in Vagabond Policies will continue to be in effect.

Hopefully with a transparent board and meeting setup, as well as people working with some autonomy, achieving and receiving acknowledgement for their work, both groups can work together in the future to create a happier theatre club.

Respectfully submitted,

Miles Lavkulich, Julie Atchison, and Dwayne Campbell