

Community Mediation

This case was referred by the police and involved two couples living next door to one another in a residential and rather affluent area of the authority.

The parties had, in the past, been on very amicable terms, but relations had broken down over communal ground at the rear of the property. The situation continued to escalate with numerous disputes over a number of more minor matters. These included maintenance of fencing, cutting of grass, disposal of refuse, arguments about recycling, and parking. Both parties had engaged in verbal assaults and slagging matches over their different lifestyles. This eventually led to an altercation between the men and consequently, police involvement. This brought the whole situation to a head.

We visited Party A, a middle-aged couple with a son in his early 20s. They presented us with a comprehensive list of what they felt were the issues – mainly that the family next door had no consideration for others or for their environment. Many of these issues were concerned with the fact that the families share a large area at the back of their homes, and there had been several disagreements about the use of and the upkeep of this area, as well as problems of access if either party was employing builders to carry out specific pieces of work.

When we visited Party B, we established that the main issues concurred with those presented by their neighbours. However, this family's lifestyle was quite different to that of their neighbours – they had three young children, and two dogs, and both parents were employed in jobs with shift patterns. Therefore, their use of the common facilities differed substantially from their neighbours, as did their availability to sustain its upkeep. All of this was a bone of contention; but, as is often the case, both families were looking for broadly the same things, i.e. consideration, mutual understanding, and for the lines of communication to be re-opened in order that civil discussions could take place regarding the communal areas.

All four individuals agreed to sit down together, and so a face-to-face meeting was organised. It was, at times, difficult and volatile, with two individuals in particular demonstrating anger, frustration and anxiety. However, they were all very frank and open, and brought all of the issues to the table. This was most helpful as it resulted in each issue being fully discussed, with everyone having their say. At the end of the meeting, a seven-point agreement was reached. Three months later, this agreement is still holding. While acknowledging that they did not find the process easy, all parties provided positive and realistic feedback about their experience of being involved in mediation.

East Renfrewshire Community Mediation

