

Community Mediation

Case Referred By: Local Councillor

Parties A, B & C: Three families whose children were fighting with Party D's children. These families feel they represented about 10 other families who were also affected by D's children's behaviour.

Party D: A family with six children previously involved with Children's Panel, receiving ongoing support from Social Work.

Case Information:

Visits to complaining parties revealed intense anger towards perceptions that various agencies involved with the family were not able to 'solve' problems on the street. Parties A, B and C felt problems were primarily caused by D's inability to discuss childrens' issues as had been the case before D moved into the neighbourhood. Mothers all felt that of course there were problems with all of the childrens' behaviour but they had always sorted out things by going to each other. D denied there were any problems with her children and that they had become scapegoats for all of the neighbourhood problems. Parties A, B and C felt they would soon take matters into their hands to discipline D's children themselves. Party D felt victimised and isolated from the other parents.

Mediation:

First of a series of meetings involved four girls – two from 'Party D' sorting out their dispute successfully, coming to satisfactory agreement (including not telling tales to parents) and requesting a similar meeting for parents to sort out the problems the way they had. Their issues involved name-calling and loss of a borrowed jacket. They felt very pleased that the meeting had gone so well and that they had all participated in the meeting with a realistic and fair agreement.

Meeting of the Mothers:

Two mothers were spokespeople for the larger group. Party D brought her Social Worker to the meeting, as she felt she needed support. It also meant that any agreement would be realistic. Party D began by saying that she was blamed for everything. The others found it hard to listen but understood they needed to hear the other side of the dispute. After almost two difficult hours all agreed a strategy for discussion about the issues that the children generated. It was very moving that strong bitter feelings, once out in the open, could be discussed and that real support for the Party D developed. Much of the agreement involved a neighbourhood self-support system that was robust for dealing with the play and interaction of the large number of children involved. Monthly meetings were requested with help in getting started from the mediation service

This case became an exemplary example of agency liaison; mediation and social work. It highlights the role mediation can have in situations where social services are effectively working with one family yet there is still the need to repair the relationship or communicate with neighbours.

Edinburgh Community Mediation Service

