

# Community Mediation

A long running and bitter dispute with neighbours had turned the Schiavone family's life in the Fife village of Lochgelly into a living nightmare.

Most weekends they packed up and headed out of the neighbourhood to try to avoid further tension with their neighbours. They dreaded the school holidays when they knew arguments would start among the children of the respective families and would eventually spill over to involve the adults.

"It had gone from arguing to actual physical violence", recalls the father of the family, Joseph Schiavone. "The police were getting involved nearly every week. It was getting ridiculous. Any chance we got, we took the kids away from the street because we were just fed up with the arguing."

That lasted for four years until both families agreed to try mediation to resolve their differences. Mr Schiavone said the results were almost instantaneous. The hostility between both families drained away as the trained mediators from Sacro's Fife Mediation service helped the families talk through their problems.

"The first meeting only lasted an hour but the difference between the beginning and the end was like night and day," said Mr Schiavone. "At the start it was difficult for us to sit in the same room as them and I'm sure it was the same for them, but by the end, we walked out together. We only had three meetings and everything was sorted out. The mediators made us realise we could sit down and talk through things like adults. There was no trouble after that."

The improvement was so rapid that Mr Schiavone even gave the other couple a lift in his car to attend the third mediation session. "This was two families who, previously, could not stand to be in the same street as each other," he said.

"We were not blameless in all of this. My kids were probably just as bad in winding the others up. During the mediation we found out that one of our kids was being rude to the other woman involved. I marched him across and made sure he apologised. We started to talk to each other like normal human beings."

Mr Schiavone was full of praise for the skill of the mediators in defusing the anger between the families and getting them to concentrate on developing workable solutions. "It needed to be handled in the right way because tempers were flaring. That is what the mediation service did. They were able to defuse matters and allowed us to talk. I would recommend it 110%."

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