



## East Lothian Community Mediation

### Annual Report 2007/2008

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## > **Sacro's Vision**

Our vision is for a safer Scotland, able to resolve conflict constructively and to deal effectively with offending and its consequences.

## > **Sacro's Mission**

Our mission is to promote safe and cohesive communities by reducing conflict and offending.

## > **Sacro's Values and Principles**

We are committed to working to the highest ethical standards. These include: integrity; recognising and valuing diversity; promoting equality of opportunity and probity in the use of public funds.

Our practice is guided by the belief that all should be shown respect and be empowered to take personal responsibility, acknowledging their capacity for change.

Our key principles are that we acknowledge:

- > conflict is most effectively resolved through informal, facilitated resolution which assists those involved to identify their own lasting solutions
- > offending and its consequences are most effectively dealt with through an emphasis on community disposals and sentencing, other than where there is an overriding need to protect society.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



## Introduction

East Lothian Community Mediation this year reached the end of its five year contract with East Lothian Council. Looking back, it has been an important year for the service and the team, a year which saw us providing mediation to more neighbours than ever before since the service began in 1999, largely due to our working more closely with East Lothian Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

We hope to continue this fruitful partnership in a new contract to provide a neighbourhood mediation service for East Lothian Council from April 2008. We are currently awaiting news on our bid.

We have recently had the opportunity to use mediation involving larger groups. A dispute between staff from a local sports centre and a group of young people is described below in a case study, which shows how mediators working alongside a local youth worker were able to use a different approach to help resolve conflict in the community.

We continue to benefit from the enthusiasm and commitment of our team of 12 volunteers to support the work of our staff mediators, and assist neighbours to re-open communication with each other as a first step to understanding and beginning to address the difficulties they are experiencing.

This year sadly saw the end of the Homeless Service, despite some very positive results and interesting work which are detailed further in this report.

Another aspect of the work we do is Workplace Mediation, and in our first year of accepting referrals we have dealt with three complex and longstanding workplace disputes. As a result of our input in one of these, we were asked to go back and work with the whole staff team on team building. We received very good feedback from this session, with everyone who participated saying they would recommend the training to others.

We pride ourselves in the quality of our work and we actively encourage neighbours and others in difficult situations to provide us with feedback through questionnaires, or via our complaints procedure, to help us to strive to ensure the service we provide is of the highest standard. In the next year we will be aiming to have the service accredited through the Scottish Community Mediation Network's new Accreditation scheme which is due to be launched in June 2008.

# Taking a slightly different approach to anti-social behaviour

2007/2008 has been an eventful period as an increasing percentage of our referrals have come via the Anti-Social Behaviour Team. There has been a far greater recognition locally that mediation has a lot to offer in difficult situations. The service has built up strong links with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and we will be continuing to work alongside them offering mediation as an option to members of the community to help reduce the levels of conflict which can lead to anti-social behaviour in East Lothian.

The service is delighted to see that residents and tenants throughout the community have chosen mediation to help sort out their neighbour problems. The service has been encouraged to see local people embracing the use of mediation as a different approach to conflict and those involved have been encouraged to find out that Mediation is entirely voluntary; it treats people fairly and allows people to have their say.

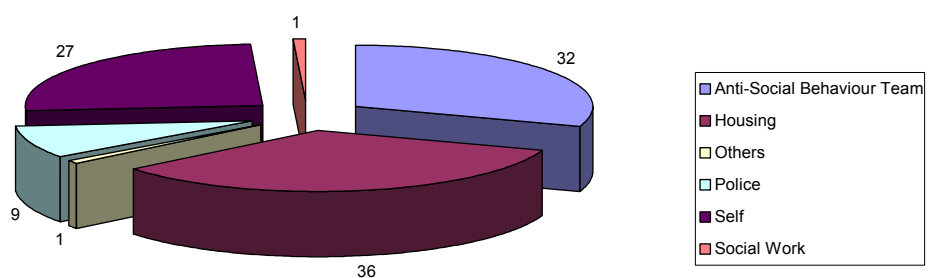
Through mediation, local people have opted for opening up channels of communication with their neighbours and taken the time and energy to look beyond the rights and wrongs in the past and focus on what needs to improve for the future.

## Increased referrals in 2007/2008

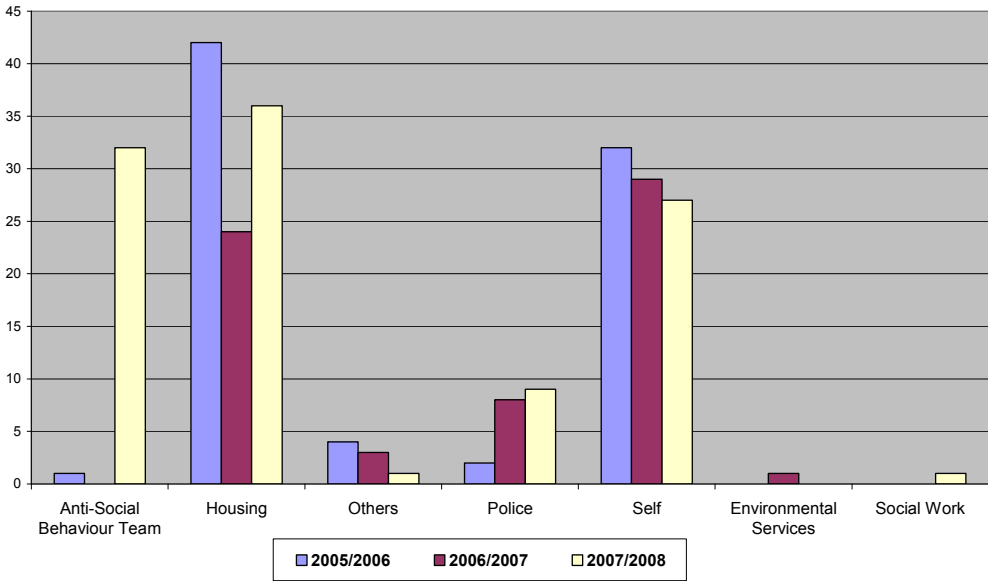
Ever since the service began in 1999, we have had around 80 referrals per year, some from neighbours themselves and other from agencies mostly from East Lothian Council Housing Area Teams, but also from Housing Associations, Environmental Services, and the Police.

This year we have received over 100 referrals and many of these have come from the ASB team via the newly opened ASB helpline, as illustrated in the following graphs.

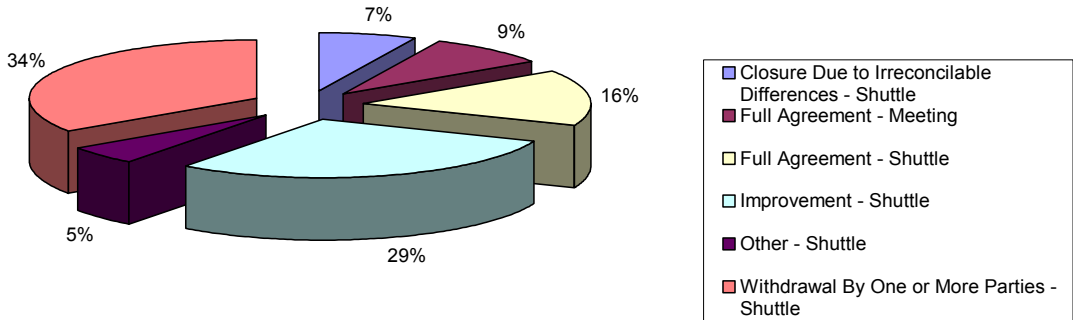
## Referral sources. April 2007 – March 2008



# Comparison of referral sources over three years. April 2005 – March 2008



# Outcome of cases that went to mediation. April 2007 – March 2008



In terms of outcomes, a greater proportion of people we see are proceeding with mediation – last year 45% of cases closed due to a withdrawal by one or more party, this year only 34% withdrew before mediation was concluded.

## Case Study:

### Engaging with young people in the community.

Our service was contacted by the Community Liaison Team in October 2007. A youth worker had been working in a town in East Lothian and was in contact with a group of young people and a sports centre. There had been a range of difficulties and conflicts that both the young people and the centre had been experiencing. The youth worker was a very positive influence and had built up trust and mutual respect with the young people. She had also been building up links with the centre staff and working closely with Community Development. The youth worker initially had planned just to arrange a meeting and bring all the young people and centre staff together and asked if we would attend. Once allocated to mediators and initial assessment was made it was suggested that a more staged and planned approach could lead to a more productive outcome.

Our work began with separate meetings with all those involved to identify issues, hear opinions and concerns. The meetings were facilitated in different ways as there was a large group of young people to work with. Initially there was a commitment by all those involved to use mediation. Plans began to take place for a mediation meeting and information began to be exchanged to allow for preparation. The main issues and concerns were drafted in advance and the mediators shared these in pre-mediation meetings. The group of young people were also asked to consider who they would like to represent their views, as this would be far more effective than everyone trying to speak at once. The young people selected their representatives and they volunteered to continue working closely with all those involved. The sports centre staff were also given an opportunity to prepare their views and their responses, these were collated by the Centre Head who was involved in the mediation process throughout.

In the January 2008, a mediation meeting took place. Everyone who came along had taken time to prepare and plan, and positive changes were already underway. The mediation meeting took place at a neutral venue and provided everyone at the meeting with an opportunity to be honest and open about what they felt the main problems and difficulties had been. They also considered what they felt contributed to the past and current situation and how people were feeling. Everyone took time to speak about how the situation had been affecting the young people, the staff and other people in the community who used the centre. The focus then shifted to the future and what could be done to improve and/or resolve the current situation. There was a very positive discussion on options, ideas, resources and ways forward. A mediation agreement was eventually reached and channels for future communication agreed and a two month review period was agreed.

In conclusion, the positive outcome from using mediation can be seen to have a ripple effect. New positive relationships have been fostered and new developments underway.

***“Over all going to the sport centre has been better since the meeting”.***  
*(Young person’s view)*

***“A great bit of work”***

***“The service provided by E L Mediation helped young people’s voices to be heard within their community. Thank you for your assistance”***

***“Communication streams have opened up regular contact & dialogue is taking place between myself, sport centre staff & young people”.***  
*(Community Development & Youth Worker)*

## Volunteers connecting with their communities

The service continues to compliment its mediation work with the support of twelve volunteer mediators. Giving time as a volunteer mediator helps connect people from all walks of life who are living across the county of East Lothian. Mediating encourages volunteers to think more about the ways in which people relate both to each other and to the issues and difficulties that create conflicts. Being in dispute and dealing with conflict can have an immense impact on neighbours and our volunteers assist people to safely begin to consider a new way forward.

Our volunteer mediators have been drawn to the work they do for all different reasons.

*“I joined the Mediation Service as I was interested in learning about and developing my communication skills and abilities to try and help others. I am a great believer in communication and all too often situations can arise because there has been a breakdown in communication. By using mediation we can help break down barriers, open up communication and resolve situations before they become serious or intolerable.*

*Verbal communication is something that we use in day to day life, however sometimes situations arise and it seems like the least obvious way to try and resolve difficult situations. If nothing else we can highlight this to try and help people in difficulty.”*

*(James McCallum-Browne)*

The journey to develop as a mediator is continuous and each case brings new challenges. Due to the complexity of many of the cases volunteers work mainly with staff as co-mediators. Time is taken to discuss and prepare for cases, with on going, continued personal development, mentoring and support and supervision.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to them all for their time, patience and commitment and for striving to develop their skills as mediators.

### Volunteer Mediators 2007/2008

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Heather Bruce  
Anne Milne  
Jasmine Reavley  
Adrian Stott

James McCallum-Browne  
Melodie Peters  
Anne Gallacher  
Karen Turner

Anne-Marie Gray  
Rosie Hunter  
Kiki Schwartz  
Dorothy Weatherley

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## Providing mediation as part of the bigger picture to help reduce homelessness

The Mediation Homeless Service has had a long history in East Lothian, stretching as far back as 2000 when it all began as a pilot project. This service was aimed at 16 year olds and over who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless due to difficulties with their family or people they live with.

In 2007-2008 this service moved into its final stage. While the service initially worked very successfully with a number of young people and their families, unfortunately the anticipated numbers of referrals were not forthcoming in the longer term, despite extensive service promotion to potential referrers. However a range of training was designed and delivered to the following audiences in East Lothian:

Working closely with young people:-

- > Delivered an 'Anger Management Techniques Session' to a small group living in New Horizons
- > Delivered three 'Communication & Conflict Resolution Sessions' to young people who were involved with the Bridges Project. A young person sums up what it meant to him - "*She helped us to work out how to handle these situations better*"

Working closely with Referring Agencies and delivered Training to members of staff:-

- > E.L.C Homeless Unit
- > New staff Mill Hill, New Horizon, Weymes House
- > Bridges Project

The service ceased in March 2008 and a final report was prepared for E.L.C. Evidence from the work undertaken showed a clear improvement in communication between young people and their families. With this in mind East Lothian Community Mediation Staff would like to thank everyone who participated in accessing or delivering the service for there commitment. We also send our best wishes to all the young people and family members we worked with over the previous years.

***"Working with Sacro East Lothian and Lesley has helped Bridges Project develop a group of young peoples skills in resolving conflict, and through her input into our conflict resolution video, will hopefully help many other young people learn how to deal with conflict more constructively"***  
(Lora – Homemaker, Bridges Project)

***"Having Lesley around helped the young people think about things (conflict) much more and consider their actions"***  
(Robert - Project Scotland Volunteer)

## Monitoring and Evaluation

We seek the views of those who use our service through client questionnaires which go to everyone who we see during the course of mediation. These forms can be returned anonymously but often people are happy to sign the forms. This initial questionnaire is to ascertain what neighbours think about our service and the results have been consistently extremely positive even from those whose neighbours do not agree to proceed with mediation. For those who are able to open up a line of communication and reach an agreement with their neighbour, we send up a follow-up questionnaire, usually after three months, to find out how the agreement is holding and what communication is like

In order to help us find out whether the service is accessible to anyone in the community, since October 2006 we have been asking everyone who uses the service to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form, indicating their gender, race/ethnicity, disability and age. We do not ask service users to sign the form, as the information provided is anonymous and used for statistical purposes only. A report after the first full year of the monitoring in October 2007 showed 42% of those who responded described themselves as disabled.

## Feedback from service users

*From client questionnaires:*

**Were you given enough information about the service?**

*“Everyone was very helpful and informed me of how everything worked”.*

**Were you treated with respect?**

*I found both (mediators) to have the right amount of caring, sympathy and respect at the first meeting.*

**Has mediation changed how you might deal with new problems?**

*“Yes, I would use the service again”.*

One service user took the trouble to send us a Thank You card – He wrote:

*“Thank you for your help. You’re so very kind!”*

*From three month follow-up survey after mediation session:*

**How well do you feel the agreement you reached is working?**

*“Very well”*

**What is communication like now between you and your neighbour?**

*“No communication because everything is fine - however I know I can communicate with them if I need to”*

*Thank you for helping to resolve the situation amicably”.*

*“Limited communication which suits all I think.*

*Thanks for all the support through this process. Impartiality was appreciated and good humour and positivity throughout”.*