

Mediation Service

Annual Report

April 2019 to March 2020

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“I am very pleased to be able to allocate funding from my Police and Crime Commissioner’s fund to continue this mediation service delivered by Catch22. If issues can be resolved through mediation without involving the police the outcome is better for everyone, so I fully support this. Successful mediation reduces the amount of police resources spent on neighbourhood disputes which makes this a good investment for me as Police and Crime Commissioner.”

Tim Passmore, Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner

Introduction

Aim of Service

Working with the Police, Local Authorities and Housing Associations to provide a skilled, practical, flexible service focussed on resolving community conflict, unhampered by the constraints the referring professionals face.

We aim to help service users to communicate safely and to facilitate the best possible conversation between them and their neighbours directly or indirectly. We also try to find ways they can manage conflict differently in the future as well to help those whose neighbours can't or won't mediate.

We strive to be as flexible as possible, offering face to face, shuttle mediations and individual support to manage conflict. This allows people to access our service who may not normally be considered suitable for mediation. The service helps people to find ways out of conflict that they cannot find alone while reducing demand on public services, by applying the skills and allowing the time that conflicts need to resolve well.

Outcomes of Service

This year our service has taken **156 referrals**. We have worked with over **300 service users** with over **70** children benefiting from the results. We have carried out **147 home visits**, conducted **33 mediations** and helped people achieve **55 positive results, even** without mediation taking place. In many other cases we have signposted service users to other sources of help, played a part in identifying safeguarding concerns for vulnerable people and offered ongoing support where it's helpful to reduce conflict.

“Although we did not reach mediation because our neighbour would not engage things improved quite a lot after seeing the mediator. Liz was very helpful and communicated well with us. I would not hesitate in recommending the service to others. Thank you” **Norwich Resident**

Impact & Challenges

Impact

While not always straightforward, the outcomes of community mediation can be lifechanging. Home should be a sanctuary from the outside world. People in dispute with their neighbours can feel unsafe in their homes, nervous to go in their gardens or leave the house. Conflict is often built on misunderstandings and overflowing frustration. Mediation can take the heat out a situation and ensure clear communication. It allows everyone to be heard and understood and helps people to make practical plans to avoid conflict in the future, reducing stress and allowing people to move on.

Referrers can waste large amounts of time on neighbour disputes where evidence is short and enforcement action is impractical or inappropriate. Referrers are rarely seen as impartial because of their enforcement role and they seldom have the time available that's needed to effectively resolve conflict. Having access to an independent mediation service allows them to offer the people they serve a way out of their situation that is voluntary, independent, confidential and solution focused.

Challenges

Community mediation can be messy and imperfect. People who use the service are often in long standing and/or complex circumstances, dealing with many other issues and are often involved with other services. Increasingly we are asked to intervene in situations where poor mental health is a factor. We strive to make the service as accessible as possible by being creative and flexible about how we offer and engage people in the service. Even when mediation isn't possible, we help people to manage their situation by liaising with other services and putting people in touch with other help, as well playing a key role in safeguarding vulnerable people. We sometimes support long-term, until the parties feel confident to manage the situation independently. Despite the complexity of needs and difficulty of the situation, we give parties the best possible chance at communicating effectively with one another.

Working in Partnership

After many years of working with **Norwich City Council** we have piloted and are now under tender to deliver a Self-Referral Community Conflict service across Norwich. Norwich residents refer directly via the council website, presenting a diverse set of problems that we work with the service user to find solutions to. This may involve a wide range of solutions that could include a mediation meeting, exchanging information, working with just one party to manage the situation or connecting them to other agencies that can help them.

Suffolk Police refer antisocial behaviour and neighbour dispute cases to us. We have built up good relationships with the police over the last 5 years with feedback showing that, despite the outcome of a mediation referral, the service has saved Suffolk Police time and been a very useful resource.

We have a longstanding relationship with **Clarion Housing** who have been referring neighbour dispute cases to us for over 6 years.

We are in our second year of working with **Ipswich Borough Council**, through which Ipswich Housing Officers can refer mediation cases for Ipswich tenants. We are also in co-development discussions regarding a self referral model in Ipswich.

We work with various other local authorities and housing associations on a **spot purchase** basis, providing mediation work and conflict resolution training.

“It was very helpful to me in my role to be able to refer to Catch22; it cut down on the length of time that I had to spend on dealing with calls from both parties, reviewing diary sheets, carrying out home visits etc. As there was no clear breach of tenancy there was no other enforcement action I could have taken, and mediation was successful in managing the complainants’ expectations of what action could be taken.”

Clarion Housing Officer

Does it work?

Co-producing solutions

Mediation is by definition a person-centred process that begins with listening and empathy. Our mediators don't expect a person to take into consideration another person's point of view if no one understands theirs. We work alongside service users to help them identify and then communicate their needs and concerns effectively, in most cases facilitating practical and long-lasting solutions.

We work together with each commissioner in a way that best suits the needs of their organisation, in order to make the service easy to use and supplying commissioners with the information they need. We attend multi agency meetings, Housing Officer team meetings and Police Safer Neighbourhood Team meetings to raise awareness of the service and help people to use it effectively.

Results

During the 2 year pilot of our Norwich Self Referral service, **60% of service users reported that their situation was resolved** after working with Catch22 and **80% said their situation had improved**.

During this year in our Suffolk Police service, **in 13 cases police staff were able to** avoid taking enforcement action due to mediation. **93% of service users reported a reduction in stress**, whether mediation took place or not. **100% of officers responding reported a reduction in calls**.

Across all our services, **100% of referrers responding found the service useful** even if the case didn't reach mediation. 88% of referrers said **the mediation service deescalated the situation**. **82% of complaints were closed** after intervention from Catch22. **All 300+ of our service users would recommend the service to others**.

"I Feel 100% better. I've realised what I needed to do and how much was on me and that wouldn't have happened without you"
Suffolk resident



“Everything about our situation has improved. We now talk to our neighbours again and we have even taken down our security camera as we no longer feel that there is a need for it. We always say hello to each other in the mornings. The best thing is that our young son is able to happily play in the garden again and he talks to our neighbour and he talks to him. This was what we really wanted and mediation was able to achieve it for us” **Suffolk Resident**

For more information please visit
our website:

www.catch-22.org.uk/services/mediation-service/

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“It has been very helpful to be able to offer the mediation service, as this has proven to be a positive follow up to our involvement, and encourages parties to take responsibility for their own situation, enabling ownership of the resolution, rather than deferring to police. This in turn will naturally lead to less repeat calls for the service” **Suffolk Police Constable**

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