

SUBMISSION FROM EDINBURGH CYRENIANS

Background to Submission

Since 2006 Edinburgh Cyrenians Amber Mediation Service has been delivering mediation and support to young people at risk of homelessness. Amber is the largest and longest established dedicated homeless mediation service in Scotland. To date we have worked with around 350 families in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Amber was cited in the 2009 Prevention of Homelessness Guidance. In 2011 we published a detailed research report based on a mapping exercise of mediation projects in Scotland that have worked for the prevention of youth homelessness and a review of recent relevant literature. The full report and extracts, including a summary of all services can be downloaded at:

http://www.cyrenians.org.uk/what_we_do/amber/research.aspx.

This submission will draw on the evidence as collated in the report.

How Mediation is used in the Prevention of Homelessness

On average 13,350 young people (16 - 24) become homeless in Scotland each year. 46% of these are due to relationship breakdown with parents leading to being asked to leave the family home. In 2010-11 this equated to 6,010 young people. Angry words are thrown, bags are hurriedly packed and doors are slammed, potentially never to be opened again. It is logical and beneficial to target preventative intervention here, at its cause, in order to prevent young people beginning the negative downward spiral that accompanies homelessness. Following the Homeless Task Force's recommendations to tackle this issue, the decade 2001 – 2011 has seen an explosion of 43 mediation pilots and projects. However, there remain questions surrounding this type of work and the process varies greatly in different locations, achieving greater or lesser success.

Mediation is a method of resolving disputes through the involvement of an independent third party, the mediator, who helps people to agree a solution. A mediator will contact and meet with both parties involved in a dispute separately – sometimes on a number of occasions – before bringing them together for a 'face-to-face' meeting. They help parties work out what their issues and options are, then to work out an agreement. The mediator does not take sides or make judgments but encourages the strengthening of relationships and the improvement of communication. Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process in which the parties in dispute are in control of the solution. Mediation cannot impose outcomes, but as relationships are strengthened, often families find that a young person can stay at home or even return home. The follow demonstrate its relevance to youth homelessness:

- 'Prevention is better than Cure' found that **one in three** respondents who left home because of family disputes mentioned that reconciliation with parents might have been possible.

- The Children's Society Study 'Still Running' found that the **most common thing** cited as something that may have prevented leaving home was family support and mediation services.
- **32%** interviewees in the 'Significance of Family to Young Homeless People' study thought that mediation would have been useful before they left home.

Mediation can be appropriate at all three main stages of prevention described in the Scottish Government/ CoSLA Prevention of Homelessness Guidance 2009:

i) Early intervention.

'Where those potentially at risk are identified and services provided to support the person and their environment before incipient problems or disputes escalate beyond repair.'

Mediation works with the interconnected nature of an individual at risk of homelessness and their environment, i.e. their family, to build more positive relationships. The above definition of prevention recognises that there exists a period 'before... disputes escalate beyond repair'. Where those potentially at risk are identified, by guidance teachers, youth workers or other frontline professionals or family members, a mediator can assist the family to come to a peaceable agreement, before the disagreement escalates to the point where homelessness is threatened.

The report, "Homelessness Prevention: Can we afford not to?" monitored De Paul's Reconnect service, offering mediation and support. They found that homelessness is prevented in 90% of clients who are helped before they leave home, compared to 64% of clients helped after they leave home. However, of 2010 - 2011 applications closed and assessed as threatened with homelessness or as not homeless, only 5% (350) were recorded as having been offered services such as mediation or counselling. This suggests a significant underuse of mediation as an early intervention in Scotland.

ii) Pre-crisis

When the potential consequences of family conflict are clear and homelessness has been identified as an approaching threat, mediation can assist to explore alternative outcomes. Where a situation seems hopeless and homelessness seems inevitable, working with a mediator can offer hope that there is an alternative path available.

Some of the models of mediation that have been developed in Scotland over the past decade have focused on mediators working in crisis situations, when a young person has already approached the local authority. Mediating in a crisis situation is, in the majority of cases, less effective than mediating at other stages of conflict. Indeed, as the 2009 Guidance acknowledges, 'although crisis response services are valuable and necessary it can still be difficult to actually prevent a homeless presentation at such a late stage'.

iii) Prevention of recurring homelessness

Living at home is not the best option for some young people. For example, where relationships have become abusive. In other situations, there may be 'irreconcilable differences' - the relationship has broken down beyond the point of repair. If a young person is going to move out, it is imperative that they leave in a safe and planned way, instead of running away or being forced to go hurriedly in acrimonious circumstances. If they do so a young person could find themselves at great risk, sleeping on the streets or in unsuitable, unstable accommodation. Mediation can help a family to agree in advance how they will retain links and support once the young person has moved out. It may also mean that the young person will not need to rely on supported housing or resettlement services, or may only need to receive a minimal service.

For many young people moving into their own tenancy is the golden moment they have had their eyes set on through months or years of family strife. However, such independence presents many challenges. A large number face the fundamental problems of isolation and loneliness: young single people are amongst those most likely to present as homeless on repeat occasions. The loneliness and vulnerability which young people felt in their homes has been identified as a major factor in tenancies being unsuccessful. Where a young person's relationship with their family remains broken and they feel that they have "burnt their bridges", mediation can help families to re-establish communication and to restore family ties. A briefing by Shelter surmises that the rebuilding of family relationships and wider social networks through mediation may provide a possible route out of homelessness and prevent its re-occurrence in the future.

The Shape of Services in Scotland

Across the services interviewed, over 85% mediation projects have either been part-time posts, sessional workers or mediators who have dual positions i.e. split their time between the main duty of their job and homeless mediation. Services have been small with relatively few staff hours. Significantly, this will have determined the scale of impact that this type of intervention could have and the scope for development.

Mediation has been delivered in the following four organisational contexts:

Context of service		Number of projects since 2001	Number of projects at 11/2011
Family mediation (Relationships Scotland)		9	7
Community mediation (Sacro)		10	1
Voluntary sector homeless organisations		10	5
Local authority	Homeless staff using 'Mediation skills'	5	5
	Dedicated mediation staff	9	5
Total		43	23

Good Practice

In 2005, Shelter Scotland published a Good Practice Guide, which gave guidance to those responsible for designing mediation services. Cyrenians more recent research underlines many of the Shelter recommendations, with the additional finding that services which closely integrate support alongside the mediation model are particularly effective. In particular, information on the consequences of becoming homeless should be presented to both the young person and their parents. For service users, the impartiality of a mediator is often very important. For this reason impartiality should be considered in the design and commissioning of new services. This may involve the use of independent services or local authority mediation staff being placed outwith the homeless department. The following long-established successful services can be highlighted for demonstrating good practice:

- Time2Mend – Integration of support and mediation within local authority context
- South Ayrshire – Strong interagency model of mediation intervention
- Amber Mediation – early intervention and high prevention results

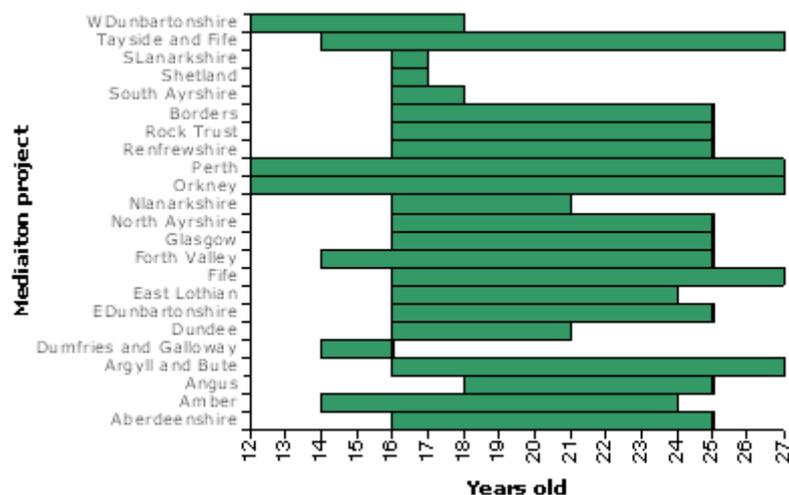
Gaps in Provision and Recommendations

Earlier Intervention

76% interviewees identified early intervention as the most effective time to mediate. However, this is currently the stage of the homeless journey least invested in.

There was fairly clear consensus amongst interviewees that mediating at the point of crisis is not the best time to prevent homelessness through mediation. Many mediators mentioned how chaotic a young person's life can be at the point of presentation; in crisis people tend to focus on their immediate needs. Others mentioned the amount of questions that are posed during a homeless assessment. A question about mediation – particularly where it is a foreign concept – can become lost amongst all of the other questions. However, several felt that there could still be value in mediating at this point and in some cases it can prevent homelessness. Services which have had the most success working with young people at the crisis point have integrated strong support structures into their service design and mediators have either been present at the presentation interview or worked closely with a designated youth homeless officer. Services should be commissioned that allow for working before the point of crisis.

Younger Teenagers



9,000 children under the age of 16 run away from home each year; 'problems at home' is the most common cause. 84% homeless 16 – 17 year olds previously ran away. There is a clear and strong connection between running away and later becoming homeless, with family conflict running as a consistent theme. However, as can be seen by the above graph, the majority of mediation services begin at age 16 and extend to early 20s. The clear line seen at age 16 represents the age at which a young person can be legally regarded as homeless. This is consistent with the finding that the 34 out of 43 projects have been commissioned by homeless departments or run in-house.

Mediation services should be available to younger teenagers, particularly 14 and 15 year olds. There is a clear opportunity here for partnership working between

'Children and Families' and 'Housing and Homelessness' commissioners in order that young people under the age of 16 can access preventative support and mediation.

Delivering Quality Mediation

One of the significant barriers for service commissioners and mediators across Scotland has been the lack of communication and cohesion between services and therefore little sharing of best practice. This has unfortunately led to mistakes being repeated. In 2010 the Scottish Community Mediation Network established a Homeless Forum that is open to all interested in this field. This may be one pathway to eliminating this problem.

Provision of mediation in Scotland has been inconsistent in terms of both availability of services and standard of delivery. This could be improved by increasing accountability, with all services being registered with Scottish Mediation Register. The Scottish Housing Regulator should consider monitoring this, alongside other youth provision, to ensure that high quality mediation is being delivered appropriately and consistently across Scotland. Budgets should allow for CPD, including specialist training

Conclusion

Mediation has expanded to become an accepted part of homelessness prevention in the ten years since the first projects started in Scotland. Its unique principles and practice lead families to their own solutions which are more likely to stick than decisions imposed by others. Even if a young person does move out, having the support of their family can be crucial in helping them to sustain their tenancy. Services across Scotland over the past decade have been small, scattered and varied. With increased cohesion, sharing of best practice and investment, mediation will prevent increasing numbers of young people from experiencing the trauma of homelessness.

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