

Resolve: ASL Mediation Service

Background

Resolve: ASL Mediation Service is an independent mediation service that has been managed by Children in Scotland since it started operating in 2004. It is for parents and carers of children and young people with additional support for learning needs. Resolve offers a child centred approach to resolving conflict in education with the core aim on building trust and understanding to restore effective relationships and good communication. The service also offers training and consultancy opportunities to enhance and embed conflict resolution across education departments in Scotland.

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended places duties on local authorities to provide access to independent mediation for resolving disputes with parents of children and young people with additional support needs. Resolve: ASL is currently the largest service of its kind in Scotland operating in fifteen Local Authority areas.

Sometimes despite the best efforts of all involved, disagreements over a child or young person's education needs do arise leading to a breakdown in communication and relationships and cause conflict. Mediation brings people together to work respectfully with each other to resolve disagreements. Mediation is impartial, voluntary and confidential.

The types and number of disagreements varies each year within the schools and education departments in Scotland.

What we are hearing from families and professionals

Since lockdown was put in place in March 2020, Resolve: ASL Mediation has continued to offer a service which includes telephone and online mediation options to address communication issues and ongoing disputes. There has been a steady stream of contact from parents and local authorities and while not identifying any person or area our service users have shared some of their experiences regarding the questions posed by the Committee.

- Two local authorities have a range of vulnerable young people and children with complex needs attending their hubs and report good communication with the families.
- One authority said they have 96% of the places offered in their hubs in use, mainly by key worker children.
- Another authority reported very little uptake from the families with children and young people with complex needs they had directly contacted in regard of using the hubs. Families had been worried about health risks for their children and wanted to keep them at home.
- There was also a general concern from parents and carers that some children and young people had found the sudden lockdown change to be overwhelming and then to return them to hubs which was not their usual school, peer group, teacher etc could cause more stress and upset.
- All the authorities the service has had contact with said there had been more interest in hub places as the lockdown progressed and they were expecting further uptake in following the announcement that schools would not be open to pupils until August.

- The service has heard from parents who have had a very good level of communication directly and regularly by phone from their school, however one parent who received their first contact from their school by email 5 weeks into lockdown.
- Issues reported from families include those with multiple children and only 1 or 2 mobile phones in the house which the adults are relying on or one laptop/computer/tablet which parents need to use for work purposes.
- IT technology problems, lack of access, internet problems and costs are key topics continually brought up by families.
- The strongest message heard from staff and families is that there are different responses and practice in each area, and within each area and it seems to be dependent on individual school management styles and communication as to what families are receiving or not.

Sandra Mitchell, Mediation Manager

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