

Mediation *Matters*

The newsletter of Mediation Hertfordshire, exploring conflict, its resolution and the uses of mediation

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10th
Anniversary

Pilot Project
for Herts
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Mediation Matters
is sponsored by



Highdown Praetorian
& Churches
Housing Association

10th Anniversary celebrations are a big success!



From left to right; Paul Bridges, Harriet Bailey, Jackie Minter, Maria Kraithman, The Right Worshipful the Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Kate Morris, The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Dacorum, Cllr Brian Ayling and John Gunner, newly-elected Chair of the Mediation Service.

January 2008 saw us celebrating the 10th anniversary of the founding of Mediation Dacorum, and we decided to celebrate in style by inviting two Lord Mayors, the former Manager of the service, Paul Bridges, and the Director of the Restorative Justice Consortium, Harriet Bailey to our Annual General Meeting.

This event was also an opportunity to unveil a celebratory DVD, Mediation Hertfordshire-the first 10 years, which had been filmed and edited by two volunteers. The DVD shows founder members of Mediation Dacorum, such as June Street and Keith White, referrers to the service, including Housing Officers and Police Community Support Officers, volunteers and clients. The audience reaction was positive and reinforced the energy and hard work that had gone into setting up a service which now offers help to many thousands of Hertfordshire residents.

Reflecting on challenges for the next 10 years, contributors were universally encouraging whilst recognising that the policy and social climate will be changing for our services. It is vital that we build on our achievements and the commitment of volunteers and staff, whilst actively seeking new opportunities to offer mediation in different contexts and in new areas of the County.

The forgiveness Project

“We live in a predominantly punitive culture”, so says Marina Cantacuzino, founder and Director of the Forgiveness Project. “It is expected that settling scores will make us feel better.”

Marina has written about the work being done in prisons, such as Holloway and Grendon Underwood, exploring forgiveness with prisoners through the experience and testimony of others. She refers to stories of victims of terrorism who have made friends with the terrorists, parents who have forgiven their child’s killer and survivors of violence who have not tried to retaliate.

The prisoners, however, have real difficulties in confronting a subject that they are scared to visit because it is so full of pain and regret. For them, self-forgiveness can be the hardest thing of all. These are not soft stories and forgiveness does not provide a magical route to serenity. Marina describes it as “difficult, painful and costly-but also potentially miraculous.”

She describes the experience of Marian Partington, whose sister was murdered by Fred and Rosemary West. Marian’s attitude changed dramatically after she went through a process, described as follows;

“Forgiveness began with murderous rage when I realised-in a moment of intense anger-that I too was capable of killing and that therefore, at some profound level, I was no different from the Wests.”

The son of one of Peter Sutcliffe’s victims, now a motivational speaker and writer, also went through a process of forgiveness, having himself experienced a tough childhood and having served a prison sentence. Prisoners can relate to what he describes, realising that the difference between their lives and Richard’s is that he made different choices.

This work in prisons, with victims and perpetrators, is called Restorative Justice. Cantacuzino explains that the Forgiveness Project does not sell forgiveness, tell people to forgive or offer a number of steps to forgiveness. What it does do, as described by one prisoner taking part in it, is “it allows you to come to terms with yourself, so that you can come to terms with what you’ve done to others.” It gives prisoners the chance to face up to the harm that they have done, and the harm that has been done to them, to the point where they may be able to let go of the harmful patterns of behaviour.

A dramatic case history illustrates what can happen when restorative justice successfully transforms someone’s strongly-held beliefs. A Canadian woman, who witnessed the murder of her father, spent many years campaigning to keep the schizophrenic murderer behind bars. “The longer he was locked away, the greater the value of my father’s life.” She was offered the opportunity to meet the man who killed her father at a restorative meeting, which was a turning point for her. “In that one hour 40 minutes, my 16 years of misery just dissolved. My forgiving him had nothing to do with the fact that he was mentally ill. It was all down to seeing him across the table as another human being.”

Cantacuzino refers to this process as “looking at crime and violence through a different lens. If empathy connects us as human beings, then the testimonies (in the Forgiveness project) give insight and understanding into the lives of those who have been harmed, as well as those who have harmed others.”

Based on an article appearing in Resolution 27, the newsletter of the Restorative Justice Consortium. More information on the Forgiveness Project can be found at www.theforgivenessproject.com

Mediation Hertfordshire and Parentline Plus awarded a Tender by Hertfordshire County Council

We have recently heard that our tender to Herts County Council to provide a mediation service for parents and schools, where there are issues relating to the handling of bullying incidents, has been accepted and we are now working closely with our partner organisation, Parentline Plus, to lay the groundwork for this new service, due to be launched in September 2008. For more information on this project, please contact the Mediation Service or Parentline Plus (01707-630100) and refer to our website www.mediationherts.org.uk for updates.

