

MEDIATING BETWEEN TEENAGE BOYS IN A POSTCODE CONFLICT

*“They agreed to leave all postcode wars at the gates
and to ensure all their friends were informed”.*

BACKGROUND

Peaceful Solutions intervened in a youth conflict between excluded boys to assist with their return to school. The head teacher requested support with ‘back to school’ interviews with Year 11 boys who had been excluded for fighting. We agreed to invite the boys for Dialogue Road Map (DRM) mediation on a voluntary basis and to extend the invitation to their parents.

There had been two separate, unconnected fights, therefore two separate mediations were required. The boys and their parents all agreed to participate. On the day a private room was allocated in the school building and the mediations were run in succession. Two DRM facilitators were present.

FIRST MEDIATION

At first the two boys were detached and silent. The Dialogue Road Map facilitators did not put pressure on them to talk, instead engaging with the parents. The parents were from different religions, cultures and backgrounds. Dialogue soon revealed their common concerns for their sons’ futures and frustration at the futility of postcode battles being fought on the streets between youths.

Hearing their parents speak caused a noticeable energy shift between the boys. Seeing their parents’ engagement had a positive effect and one of the boys told the other that he liked him and didn’t have a problem with him but got mad when he heard him ‘diss’ his ‘endz’.

Building on this the Dialogue Road Map facilitators encouraged the other boy to respond and he apologised for his behaviour. The meeting concluded with all parties agreeing to move on from the postcode war and allow friendship to reign whilst in school.

SECOND MEDIATION

The boys were keen to put their points across and default to blaming the other. By remaining empathetic the facilitators were able to help each boy take responsibility for his part in the fight. The parents were fully engaged in and supportive of the process. At one point the parents tried to insist that the boys shake hands. The facilitators explained that they should only do this if they felt fully able to and should not feel under pressure to ‘perform’. It became clear the reluctance was about who made the first move.

The parents were from diverse cultures but had in common a long-term residency in the area. The Dialogue Road Map facilitators took the pressure off the boys while they spoke with the parents, who expressed true commitment to the community and living in peace.

The mediators then checked in with the boys who said they were ready to shake hands. The mediators brokered the handshake so that they both stood up and came forward at the same time. They agreed to leave all postcode wars at the gates and to ensure that all their friends were informed. They would tell everyone that the matter was over and not up for discussion.

OUTCOME

The staff immediately reported a change in the boys’ behaviour towards each other and subsequent check-ins have shown the process to have been successful. Six months had elapsed at the last check-in and the agreements have held. The school has decided to adopt restorative processes and Peaceful Solutions is embarking on a staff, student and parent consultation.

The parents’ participation facilitated the collaborative, non-judgmental process and had a deep, lasting effect.

OVERCOMING INNER DEMONS, MAKING A CHANGE

"The client has been able to gain stability in his life and a real sense of focus, purpose and composure".

BACKGROUND

Client came through Peaceful Solutions founder Maria, who had supported Andy* for some years as he worked to get back on his feet financially after years of drug and alcohol abuse which had led to serious debt problems. Andy is a gifted artist and works as a graphic designer in the advertising industry.

He has struggled to re-establish his art since coming off drugs and continues to work in advertising, although he finds the advertising world increasingly at odds with his value system. He suffers from low self-esteem and lack of confidence and has a strong drive to succeed, as well as fear of 'failure' when measured against his high standards of what constitutes 'success'. As a child Andy was a gifted sportsman, pushed by parents and abused by coaching staff.

Support offered was for three Dialogue Road Map (DRM) facilitators to work with him, with the initial brief to offer DRM listening and lots of empathy. 'Contract' with the client was that support would cease if he started using again. With a couple of relapses, Andy remained clean for the entire support period.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

The DRM facilitators found that Andy could initially talk at length without pause; whatever his current story was in each session it was very present for him. From the start he confirmed feeling heard and understood; he found the DRM listening and empathy helpful, and feedback and support were introduced later. Over time he became more comfortable with exploring the feelings and needs associated with his story, the sense of lurching from crisis to crisis lessened, and there was more dialogue about what progress and change looked like both in the past and in the future.

Specific references to his childhood traumas only surfaced occasionally during our sessions, but crises in his life 'sent him back' to a sense of failure and judgement familiar when he gave up sport and when he hit rock bottom financially. We talked extensively about blocks to returning to making, exhibiting and selling art. There was a strong underlying need to be creative again.

ASSESSMENT

Facilitators recommended two sessions a week initially, moving to one session a week and less frequent in the final three to four months. The DRM facilitators began by taking it in turns to listen within a single session and as relationships were established took turns to lead, a session at a time. All three facilitators were present for all sessions.

Andy was used to DRM listening having had sessions before, and was open and honest about what was present for him and whether feelings and needs that we identified had 'landed for him' and were useful. As the trust between the DRM Facilitators and Andy strengthened, feedback was introduced which helped Andy to see what progress he had made towards meeting his immediate financial and other 'security' needs, and to work on strategies for planning and implementing changes.

OUTCOME

The client has been able to gain stability in his life and a real sense of focus, purpose, and composure. He has met his need for connection by finding a partner and is meeting his needs for financial security through a full-time job.

He is also managing to negotiate relationships in the workplace more successfully without running away from difficult situations.

He can envision a time in the future where he will be able to leave advertising and have a fulfilling life as an artist, although he still becomes frustrated when he achieves a major milestone and finds he's not 'fixed' but that there is still work to do!

REMEDY

We learnt that feedback and support sessions were helpful in providing him with a safe space to not only vent his frustrations, but also to unpack his immediate and deeper needs and develop successful strategies for meeting them. Recovery times following crises shortened dramatically during the period. The DRM Facilitators have worked with this client for just over a year and are now working through a process of ending this phase of support.

*Names have been changed and do not relate to any person/s of the same name

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