

PREVENTING ESCALATION IN A PRISON

"If further disputes arise we would happily return to the Dialogue Road Map process and not let it lead to violence."

BACKGROUND

Kyran* came to Dialogue Road Map (DRM) facilitators because he was in dispute with a fellow prisoner on his wing and didn't want the situation to escalate.

This situation had not been going on long and the dispute was over certain language used, and a debt between Kyran and the other party, James*.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

We learnt that prior to the dispute there was a friendship between Kyran and James. A tit for tat situation had developed, with a serious power imbalance due to the debt involved. Kyran just wanted his money back and to remain civil with James in the future.

James couldn't pay back the debt because he had no money and was not earning enough. He was worried the situation would lead to violence. James also mentioned to facilitators he was receiving homophobic comments from Kyran, and their friends were not helping the situation. James initially had concerns about mediation and was worried he would not be listened to by Kyran during this process.

ASSESSMENT

The power imbalance due to the debt was evident. However it was also felt that, with the right guidance, the former friendship between James and Kyran provided common ground for the dispute to be resolved. This would require a number of one-to-one sessions with each party in a safe environment before bringing them into the same room. We felt the best approach in mediation was to focus on an agreement between James and Kyran regarding the debt before working on the friendship.

OUTCOME

Both parties felt towards the end of three joint sessions that they were heard and had a better understanding of how each other felt.

The mediation came to an end when James agreed to a payment plan option from Kyran to repay the debt slowly. They both also agreed that if any further disagreements or disputes were to arise they would both happily return to the mediation process with DRM facilitators and not take the conflict elsewhere within the prison or let it lead to violent behaviour.

REMEDY

We explained the mediation process and the steps needed in order to ensure safety and fairness throughout. We had two one-to ones individually with James and Kyran focusing on their respective needs in this dispute, always checking in at the end of a session to ensure that what was discussed with DRM facilitators was not taken back out onto the wing, and what they should do if they felt unsafe or that things were going to escalate. Both James and Kyran eventually agreed to a joint mediation process.

Before each joint session we asked James and Kyran to come at different times so we could have five to ten minutes to make sure they were ready before putting them in a room together. We agreed to having as many sessions as it took to resolve the dispute, ensuring James and Kyran would never take this conflict elsewhere in the prison. At the beginning of each session James and Kyran were both given uninterrupted time to speak to a facilitator so the other participant could hear clearly how they felt. Both James and Kyran expressed feelings of being offended by one another and agreed they were both in the wrong. We focused on their common ground of needing some space from each other and not enticing other friends to get involved.

The need for understanding from James was strong, and Kyran needed respect in regards to the debt and the friends around them, both of which we worked on together.

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

©2021 The Centre for Peaceful Solutions

Registered charity no. 1117611