

MEDIATING BETWEEN TEENAGE BOYS IN A POSTCODE CONFLICT

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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.