

# NEIGHBOUR MEDIATION SERVICE REPORT

*The latest news and updates from Calm Mediation.*



IN THIS ISSUE

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## **NEW HELPLINES OPERATING NOW**

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## **MERGER ANNOUNCEMENT: STRONGER TOGETHER**

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## **CASE STUDY: SMOKING CONFLICT**

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## **ANNUAL SERVICE FIGURES**

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## **NEW HELPLINES OPERATING NOW**

*by Dave Walker, Director of Mediation*

During the lockdown I feel we have gone further than just coping, we have stepped up and changed to meet the challenges this pandemic has thrown at us all. We, as mediators, have had a major role in supporting our communities that have been put under such pressure. It has allowed us to fine-tune our coaching and mediation skills via phone and Zoom and given our volunteers new areas of development. We have gone a long way to spread the word that mediation is a positive option.

Our colleagues in local government [councils] and housing trusts are under immense pressure; having to field calls from residents struggling to cope with Covid-19 restrictions. We are dealing with people who have lost income, jobs or family and professional support. Feelings of loss and insecurity

can spill out as frustration, which can be read as anger by their neighbour or landlord. Helping stressed and angry people is what we are trained for, so it was an easy decision for us to step up and offer a helpline to talk to the residents for the Housing, Noise Team and Anti-social Behaviour Officers. The feedback we are getting, that having an experienced mediator/conflict manager to talk to, helps. In this new normal where local officers are unable to make home visits as easily as they could before, they have a mediation service they can direct residents to, allowing them to focus on trickier cases. You can direct your clients to [calmmmediation.org/community-mediation-service/helpline](https://calmmmediation.org/community-mediation-service/helpline) for more information.

As we know our residents' problems are diverse, we wish to draw your attention to another helpline that is offered by our Family Mediation service. It offers support for separated parents who may be having problems with child arrangements within the new normal. Similarly, they can find all the information they need on our website: [calmmmediation.org/family-mediation-service/helpline](https://calmmmediation.org/family-mediation-service/helpline)

## **Bigger and Stronger Together**

*by Corinne Rechais, Director.*

Calm Mediation and Southwark Mediation Centre are now one. We have been working collaboratively for a couple of years, but our formal merger is now complete. The merger will help us reach more people experiencing conflict. It will provide more flexibility in style and an expanded range of services to the London community. You will notice we have left our Hammersmith office in order to work more closely with the team in Southwark office (the building is pictured on the previous page).

Now as one organisation we offer 5 different forms of conflict resolution, all in line with our overall mission to support and repair relationships across the London community. These include Restorative Justice (helping people move on after a crime has taken place), Family Mediation (helping couples after a relationship has broken down), Youth Mediation (teaching young people to be ambassadors of skilful communication and to practice conflict resolution amongst peers), Community Mediation (to support colleagues, housing estate bodies, and other disputes that involve large groups) and of course Neighbour Mediation, which you already know about which helps neighbours resolve disputes in order to have a better home life.

By having these under one roof we hope to be able to offer a faster response and a more holistic approach to our clients.

# Annual Service Figures 2019-2020

by Corinne Rechais

This was a busy year for us as reflected in the figures below. With our practitioners up to date and engaged, we have been running 6 skills' development sessions for continued professional development, seasonal socials as well as regular group supervisions. We have the capacity for more referrals, and you are our essential front-line partners in this mission. We are currently adopting our awareness training to the online format and will be looking forward to sharing it with more organisations. It is a short and engaging workshop, covering how to manage difficult conversations with clients (decreasing stress at work, which is especially useful in the current climate) and how to promote mediation as an option. If you think this would be useful for your workplace, please get in touch with us for more information.

93

Active Practitioners trained in Neighbour Mediation

144

Neighbour Referrals Received

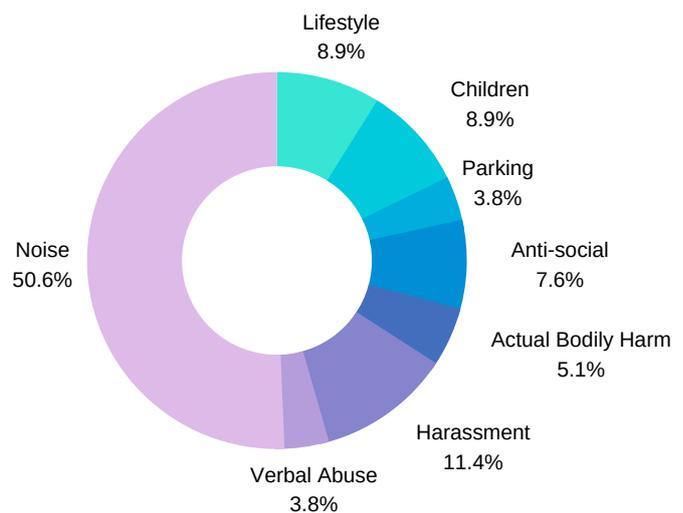
4,860

Case Events Logged

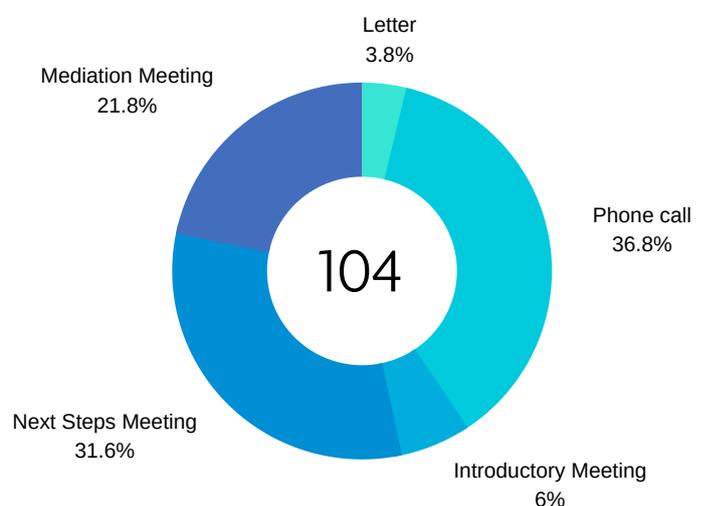
76%

Mediation Meetings Reached Agreement

## Nature of disputes



## Cases closed at the following stages



# Smoking Conflict, a Case Study

by Heather Loebel. Full version is available on our website.

## How we got involved

Karen and her boyfriend Paul (downstairs) had been living downstairs in a house conversion for three years when Glenda and her partner Graham with their two young children moved in upstairs.

The couple in the downstairs flat smoked at home and wanted to carry on with their routines and way of life. However, the smell and cigarette smoke provoked some fiery exchanges between households, and this triggered immense anxiety for Karen.

As soon as they moved in, Glenda and Graham (upstairs) started contacting their housing officer to complain about the smoking and the impact on their children. They were ringing her on and off most weeks. The calls were mostly short and often ended with Glenda threatening to make a formal complaint and slamming the phone down.

This continued for 6 months as the housing officer tried to speak to Paul and Karen about minimising their smoking, but the couple felt they weren't doing anything wrong.

Glenda and Graham thought that the housing officer was on their neighbour's side, since the smoking hadn't stopped. However, smoking wasn't a breach of tenancy and so the housing officer was not able to take any enforcement steps, but this didn't satisfy the residents and make the problem go away.

In this case, the housing officer hasn't heard from these residents since the mediation has taken place.

## How mediation changed things

Before bringing everyone into the virtual Zoom room together, the mediators had a short private meeting with each household to ensure they were feeling comfortable to proceed. This was going to be the first time they had seen each other since the start of lockdown and so were quite apprehensive.

Each side had a chance to speak about the situation from their perspective, without anyone interrupting. The mediators then skilfully moved the conversation forward from past issues. Slowly, once they felt heard, the individuals were able to speak about the future and discuss what could be done so that they can both live as neighbours in peace.

The mediators wrote down points in an agreement:

- Both parties acknowledged that the construction of the house meant that smells spread around easily.
- Everyone agreed that during and after lockdown, rather than knocking on each other's door when there is a problem they would text instead. Karen and Glenda felt they would like to be the ones to do this and exchanged numbers.
- Graham said he could lend Paul and Karen his work ladder so they could seal some holes in the ceiling, left by the previous tenant, in case it was allowing smoke upstairs.
- A valuable point came out in the meeting that Glenda and Graham didn't know - Karen and Paul were already considering replacing their smoking with vaping but having been so anxious about the situation instead they were smoking more cigarettes. Now on better terms with their neighbours, Karen and Paul felt in a better place to review their decisions on their own terms.
- Both clients gave their consent for Calm Mediation to send a copy of the Agreement to the housing officer.