

- the difficulties inherent in unequal power relationships;
- the slow pace of mediation, particularly when there are many parties and issues involved. For some people this is frustrating;
- establishing and maintaining credibility with all key sectors;
- expectations of parties that cannot be met by mediation, for example, that mediators will 'sort the Travellers out' or lobby other parties, such as a local authority, on their behalf or that once people have entered into a mediation process and begun to talk to each other all the problems they have experienced will simply fade away;
- ensuring that the language used in mediation processes is accessible to all;
- publicising and sharing lessons from work that is often carried out discreetly because it is sensitive or confidential in nature.

### Conclusion

Much of the work of the Mediation Service involves patiently sowing seeds. There is evidence that some of these seeds are bearing fruit, for example, in:

- the increasing interest by Travellers and Traveller organisations in conflict resolution and mediation;
- requests by participants in previous mediation processes for the Mediation Service to consider new cases;
- relationship building initiatives taken by other organisations (both statutory and non-statutory);
- both representatives of agencies and Travellers taking opportunities to acknowledge and attempt to address some of the problems within their own sectors and communities.

The work of the Mediation Service frequently has added value and a multiplier effect. This can be seen, for example, in:

- a mediation process contributing to a more sustainable basis upon which other types of partnership work can be developed (for example, through the RAPID programme);
- mediation processes influencing a wider group of people than those directly engaged in the process, for example, tenants and residents joining a residents' committee which was set up during a mediation process; residents showing an increased pride in their area by painting their houses; etc.
- parties involved in mediation and other problem solving processes recommending them and transferring their own learning to other situations involving conflict between the Traveller and settled communities or within the Traveller

- community;
- parties involved in mediation going on to take training in conflict resolution and mediation themselves;
- other mediation initiatives seeking to learn from the experience of the Pavee Point Mediation Service;
- contributing to increased solidarity between Travellers in addressing difficult issues within the community;
- increasing awareness of the possibilities for problem solving through sharing examples of approaches that have been tried elsewhere.

*Initiatives providing opportunities for participation in problem solving and relationship building are needed now more than ever.*

It is clear that in the present context of conflict between Travellers and the majority population and also within the Traveller community, initiatives providing opportunities for participation in problem solving and relationship building are needed now more than ever.

Further information on the work of the Mediation Service can be obtained from the Co-ordinator by calling Pavee Point on 01-8780255 or sending an email to [mediation@pavee.iol.ie](mailto:mediation@pavee.iol.ie).



## Pavee Point Mediation Service

### 'Working with Travellers and Settled People to Build Better Relationships'

#### Conflict transformation and mediation

The relationship between the Traveller community and the majority population in Ireland is characterised by hostility, prejudice, discrimination and conflict. Within the Traveller community, conflict also takes its toll. The causes of these conflicts are often deep and complex and cannot often be resolved quickly or easily. However, conflict can also present opportunities to bring about positive change depending on our ability and willingness to handle conflict situations in a way that results in positive outcomes for all concerned.

Mediation is a specific approach that facilitates and empowers people to resolve their own conflicts. Mediators try to make space for people to talk and listen to each other in what can be difficult circumstances. The mediators do not take sides, but help people to clarify their issues and needs, to problem solve and, if the parties can find common ground, to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. Participation in a mediation process is voluntary. If agreement is found, the parties themselves and not the mediators decide what to put into their agreement. Mediation has demonstrated its potential to transform conflict between Travellers and the majority population and within the Traveller community.

While mediation of disputes has a valuable role to play in transforming conflict and improving relationships, it is located within a broader strategy. Creating the conditions for conflict transformation is another key dimension to the work of the Mediation Service. Any lasting improvement in relationships between the Traveller and settled communities, and also within the Traveller community, will require for all involved, amongst other things: equality; respect for diversity; an ability to empathise and see things from a point of view other than your own; a willingness to engage with others with an open mind; a recognition of your own responsibilities and the contribution you can make to change as well as the responsibility and contribution of others; having

access to and confidence in a range of agencies and systems that also have a role to play in managing conflict, including An Garda Síochána, local authorities and the justice system; and finally a vision that different and more positive ways of relating to each other are possible.

The Mediation Service was launched in 1999, initially with financial support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Since 2000 it has received financial support from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Service works with both Travellers and settled people to address conflict whether it occurs between the members of the two communities or within the Traveller

community. It has a small in-house team of three mediators from both the Traveller and settled communities. Referrals come from a variety of sources including Travellers and Traveller organisations, settled people, agencies (e.g. local authorities, health boards, An Garda Síochána) and businesses.

The Mediation Service began in 1999 by taking referrals from across the country. Given the complexity of many of the cases and the distances involved, it became apparent that for this type of service to be sustainable it would need to be available more locally. Although the Mediation Service at present focuses its mediation interventions on the Greater Dublin area, it documents cases

signalled from outside the Greater Dublin area in order to build up a clearer picture of conflict around the country and contribute to the development of wider conflict transformation strategies. Time is also spent with the caller exploring options and providing information where necessary. The need, and increasingly the demand, for mediation interventions around the country is great and the Mediation Service

endeavours to establish links with existing and emerging mediation services in order to ensure that Travellers and settled people in conflict can access appropriate services available in their area.

*At the outset, relationships between the parties were characterised by fear, mistrust, anger and apathy. Following an intensive process of trust building between the parties, agreement was reached on ways of dealing with many of the issues.*





### A Case Study

One lengthy mediation process

brought together Travellers living on a housing estate, the local authority, the local Traveller support group, the Health Board, An Garda Síochána, the Department of Education Visiting Teacher for Travellers and a Youthreach worker. Although the initial presenting issue was the withdrawal of local authority maintenance services from all tenants on the estate due to safety concerns, numerous complex issues emerged and were discussed during the course of the mediation process. At the outset, relationships between the parties were characterised by fear, mistrust, anger and apathy. Following an intensive process of trust building between the parties, agreement was reached on ways of dealing with many of the issues. At the time of signing off on agreements, outcomes from the process included:

- the resumption of maintenance services to tenants and agreed mechanisms for dealing with problems that may arise in the future;
- a newly formed residents' committee on the estate;
- a noticeable increase in positive energy amongst residents, evident in the work of the residents' committee, regular clean-ups of the estate by residents, residents painting their houses, etc.;
- a major clean up of the estate by the local authority with the support of residents;
- an agreement to hold regular meetings between the residents' committee, the local authority and other organisations and agencies as appropriate to keep channels of communication open and work through outstanding and newly emerging issues;
- a reduction in the number of Garda interventions on the estate;
- consultation by the local authority with residents on how they would like to see the area develop and the consequent development of the green and grotto;
- the planning of a horse project with young men on the estate;
- a request by the local authority for cultural awareness training with its frontline staff and commitment by the Residents' Committee to a



workshop on how a local authority functions.

While trust remained a fragile thing and progress was not always as quick as people might have hoped for, the parties reached a stage where they were satisfied that they could continue to work together without the intervention of mediators. Among the most significant outcomes identified in evaluations of the process by parties was the extent to which the relationships between them

had improved, facilitating co-operation in other partnership initiatives, and the extent to which agreements reached in mediation had contributed to greater empowerment, participation and communication for Travellers living on the estate.

### Working with key sectors

Mediating at a micro level can be limited if inequalities at the heart of the wider social system continue to sustain conflict relations. Structural changes at a macro level are also required and it is to this end that the Service works with key sectors, encouraging and supporting them to play a role in improving relationships through bridge building and problem solving initiatives. The Service has been involved in many initiatives with An Garda Síochána, the Church, trade unions and local authorities, some instigated by the Mediation Service and others by the key sectors themselves.

The Mediation Service is involved in a Crosscare pilot initiative to improve relationships between the Traveller and settled communities within a parish framework. It hosted a round table discussion with trade unions in 2001 on 'Equality in Service Provision'. Participation by the Mediation Service on the ICTU Anti-Racism Task Force resulted in the inclusion of Travellers' experience and needs relating to mainstream employment in the research and recommendations presented to ICTU's Biannual Conference in July 2003. The Service has been involved in numerous policing initiatives. Most recently, it organised two meetings between Travellers from Pavee Point and Guards from Finglas, Coolock and Clondalkin in October 2003 and March 2004. The first meeting gave Travellers an opportunity to get to know Guards working in their

local areas and information about a wide variety of services provided by both An Garda Síochána and Victim Support. The second meeting allowed both Travellers and Guards from the same three areas to identify the barriers to inclusive and effective policing and steps that could be taken to improve relationships between Travellers and Guards at local and national level.

Arising from interagency discussions which had been prompted by violent incidents on one Traveller site, the Mediation Service invited Dublin City Council and Traveller organisations to meet in order to discuss issues arising in relation to the provision, design, allocation and management of Traveller accommodation within the local authority area. This led to the formation of a working group comprising of representatives of Dublin City Council, the Dublin Accommodation Coalition with Travellers (DACT), the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) and the Mediation Service with the task of developing a pilot letting scheme for Traveller accommodation in the Dublin City Council area. The letting scheme will be piloted for two years from January 2004 and its implementation will be monitored by the same working group. It is hoped that the learning from this pilot initiative will be of benefit to local authorities and tenants of Traveller specific accommodation in other areas.

### Capacity building with Travellers

One of the aims of the Mediation Service is to enhance Travellers' capacity to develop different ways of dealing with conflict in their lives. The Mediation Service has produced a training manual, which explores what happens in conflict situations and introduces skills that are helpful in dealing with conflict. 'We Can Sort it Out' was developed for use by Traveller organisations, Traveller Training Centres and other Traveller groups and is available from Pavee Point.

Conflict within the Traveller community is a complex and sensitive issue that is of great concern to Travellers and Traveller organisations. Navan Travellers Workshop and the Mediation Service jointly invited a number of Traveller and settled members of Traveller organisations to begin to explore this sensitive topic in 2001. Various Traveller organisations are trying to develop their own responses to conflict within the Traveller community.

Many issues recur in conflict between the Traveller and settled communities and within the Traveller community. In some instances, both communities

*Mediating at a micro level can be limited if inequalities at the heart of the wider social system continue to sustain conflict relations.*

share similar concerns, for example, in relation to illegal dumping and copper burning. However, Travellers have tended to express their concerns on a range of issues privately in one to one conversations with people they

trust rather than collectively. Within the Traveller community, people can be fearful of speaking openly about issues that may bring them into conflict with other Travellers. Space needs to be made for difficult issues to be discussed collectively by Travellers so that they can get useful information and develop their thinking on these issues, which in turn puts them in a better position to engage with agencies that also have a role in tackling these issues. Much effort has been put into creating such spaces for discussion within Pavee Point on difficult issues relating to accommodation, policing, dumping and drugs. Although such discussion remains sensitive and tentative, there is clearly increased confidence and solidarity between Travellers within the organisation and respect for expressing different opinions.

### Challenges

The work of the Mediation Service throws up many challenges, not least of which is the sheer scale of the task involved. The level of need exceeds the capacity of the Mediation Service alone to respond. Another of the principle challenges faced by the Service is the difficulty of getting all key parties to agree to engage voluntarily in mediation and other processes to try to resolve problems and improve relationships, and once engaged keeping them engaged. Other challenges include:

- the fact that many problems are deep rooted and structural and cannot be neatly resolved in one go. Change is often gradual and incremental and involves many ups and downs along the way;
- overcoming feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness to change the situation and an inability to imagine a better alternative;

