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On average 13,350 young people (16 -24) become homeless in Scotland each year. 45% of these have left their family home due to conflict. Scottish Government statistics year on year identify relationship breakdown as the greatest single cause of homelessness. Angry words are thrown, bags are hurriedly packed and doors are slammed; potentially never to be opened again.

It is logical and beneficial to target preventative intervention here, at its cause, in order to prevent young people beginning the inevitable downward spiral that accompanies homelessness.

Mediation is a method of resolving disputes through the involvement of an independent third party, the mediator, who helps people to agree a solution. The mediator helps parties work out what their issues and options are, then use those options to work out an agreement. The mediator does not take sides or make judgments. Mediation is a voluntary and confidential process in which the parties in dispute are in control of the solution. The mediator will ensure that both parties get a chance to state their case, hear the other side, work through the issues that are important to them and make an agreement. It is a flexible process that can be used to settle disputes in a whole range of situations (definition taken from Scottish Mediation Network website). Mediation is increasingly used in a diverse range of conflict situations: from neighbours in conflict over a noisy dog in Strathclyde to military factions in conflict over political liberty in Libya.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Homelessness Task Force commissioned social researchers Lemos and Crane to investigate the use of mediation for the prevention of homelessness. At that time, only one team in Scotland was found to be practicing mediation in this context (Lemos and Crane: 2001). Following the Task Force’s subsequent recommendations, the decade 2001 – 2011 has seen an explosion of 43 pilots and projects, as well as significant developments in homelessness policy. Despite this, there remain many questions surrounding this type of work and a wide variety of models being practiced with greater or lesser success. The development of policy over the past decade has placed mediation on the table as one of the measures that can be used to prevent homelessness.

This report looks at the different ways government recommendations have been interpreted across the country, using evidence from 23 services representing 27 mediation projects for young people and their families to prevent homelessness. Detailed interviews were conducted across Scotland between September 2010 and July 2011. Putting this valuable information alongside research and policy developments from the last decade, this evidence consolidates the learning that has been gained across the country both in theory and in practice. The dissemination of this information aims to raise awareness of the benefits and limitations of mediation in this context. It is hoped that it will positively influence the development of good practice and promote efficient and effective models of delivery.

Ultimately, through encouraging improved understanding and practice we expect to bring direct benefit to young people at risk of homelessness, promoting the strengthening of family communication and relationships through the use of mediation.

Over the last decade, the Scottish Government has introduced policy and guidance that has fundamentally shifted the way in which homelessness is perceived and addressed. Scotland now has a far more extensive statutory safety net than anywhere else in the UK (Wilton and Fitzpatrick: 2010). The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 legislated that by the end of 2012, categories of “priority need” are to be phased out across Scotland. Previously only those who were intentionally homeless with a local connection and in priority need would be eligible for settled accommodation. Following the removal of priority need, however, settled accommodation must be provided for all intentionally homeless people. This target of providing accommodation to a much wider group of people has placed significant pressure on local authority housing departments and has contributed to the growing focus on preventing homelessness. The increasing adoption of dedicated Prevention Teams by local authorities and the introduction of Housing Options Hubs in 2010 both focus on preventing people from becoming unnecessarily homeless if an alternative route is available. Mediation is one of these options.

INTRODUCTION

The key questions this report seeks to address are:

1. What have been the recent key developments with regards to mediation in the Scottish context?
2. What are the current models of mediation for young people and their families in Scotland?
3. How are mediation services in Scotland being accessed?
4. What are the main barriers to accessing mediation?

DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF MEDICATION

Mediation is a process that takes place outside the court system. Instead of having a judge decide who is right and who is wrong, in mediation the parties are always in control of how the mediation is conducted and what happens during the mediation process. Mediators help the parties to work together to reach an agreement that is acceptable to all parties involved. Mediators do not impose solutions on the parties; instead they help the parties resolve their own conflicts. Mediation can be helpful in respect of young teenagers and there are examples of practice where earlier intervention led to successful outcomes for young people and their parents.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Over the last decade, the Scottish Government has introduced policy and guidance that has fundamentally shifted the way in which homelessness is perceived and addressed. Scotland now has a far more extensive statutory safety net than anywhere else in the UK (Wilton and Fitzpatrick: 2010). The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003 legislated that by the end of 2012, categories of “priority need” are to be phased out across Scotland. Previously only those who were intentionally homeless with a local connection and in priority need would be eligible for settled accommodation. Following the removal of priority need, however, settled accommodation must be provided for all intentionally homeless people. This target of providing accommodation to a much wider group of people has placed significant pressure on local authority housing departments and has contributed to the growing focus on preventing homelessness. The increasing adoption of dedicated Prevention Teams by local authorities and the introduction of Housing Options Hubs in 2010 both focus on preventing people from becoming unnecessarily homeless if an alternative route is available. Mediation is one of these options.

KEY DOCUMENTS


2002 - Homelessness Task Force report. "Many people affected by homelessness would welcome the opportunity to rebuild previous personal contacts. In such situations, mediation may provide a forum for communication and possible resolution of the conflict. This is particularly relevant to the local authority homelessness prevention policies.

2005 - Code of Guidance on Homelessness. "It may be possible for the authority or another service to intervene to prevent family breakdown and resulting homelessness. Local authorities should consider whether it is appropriate for them or another agency to provide relationship counselling or mediation services. Even where the family ceases to live together, these measures can help prevent homelessness by enabling family support to continue. This support is particularly important for young people leaving the family home."

2007 - Evaluation of Homeless Prevention Activities in Scotland. Provides a review of homelessness prevention services in Scotland at that time and looks at two case studies. The report identifies the variation in models and some of the issues around mediation in the prevention of homelessness.

2009 - Prevention of Homelessness Guidance. "Intervention in the form of family mediation has been found to be particularly helpful in respect of young teenagers and there are examples of practice where earlier intervention led to successful outcomes for young people and their parents."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mediation and Homelessness Prevention in Scotland: A decade of mediation between young people and their families

FOREWORDS

"With 2012 fast approaching, homelessness prevention is at the top of the agenda and mediation has been proven to play a significant part in helping people secure a sustainable and appropriate housing outcome. This research provides a useful resource for practitioners wanting to positively influence the development of good practice and to learn from past experiences. It will also assist local authorities and other commissioners to further develop homelessness prevention services."

IAN McDONOUGH, CHAIR
Scottish Centre for Community Mediation

"It is little wonder, then, that family relationships sometimes run into difficulties. When these difficulties grow so severe that the young person feels unable to stay at home, the consequences can be drastic. Mediation can very often help to repair damaged relationships and assist in re-establishing the support young people so desperately need, whether they return to their original home or find a different one.

Mediation between young people and their families is less established and less prevalent than mediation between neighbours which is now tried and of major significance in resolving neighbourhood conflicts. This report has huge value in making communication and relationships through the use of mediation. Most important of all it asks us all to respond to the challenge of helping Scottish families function as effectively and positively as is possible, to help them keep their young people safely and suitably housed in an appropriate and supportive environment."

IAN McDONOUGH, CHAIR
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"It is logical and beneficial to target preventative intervention here, at its cause, in order to prevent young people beginning the negative downward spiral that accompanies homelessness."

An IAN McDONOUGH, CHAIR
Scottish Centre for Community Mediation

INTRODUCTION

"WE TALK LOADS MORE AND BOTH LEARNED TO COMPROMISE NOW. SHE NO LONGER TREATS ME HORRID, SHE TREATS ME WITH RESPECT WHICH IS NICE."

- 15 YEAR OLD GIRL, EAST LOTHIAN

"It is logical and beneficial to target preventative intervention here, at its cause, in order to prevent young people beginning the negative downward spiral that accompanies homelessness."

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"Most important of all it asks us all to respond to the challenge of helping Scottish families function as effectively and positively as is possible, to help them keep their young people safely and suitably housed in an appropriate and supportive environment."
The journey into homelessness begins long before most young people are asked to leave. Families can face a noxious cocktail of difficulties, such as unemployment, health problems and trouble at school, which, when combined with strained relationships can lead to a young person being asked to leave or running away. Where those potentially at risk are identified a mediator can assist the family to come to a peaceful agreement, before the disagreement escalates and relationships are beyond repair. If the conflict has reached a stage when the potential consequences of family conflict are clear and homelessness has been threatened, mediation can assist people to explore alternative outcomes. Where a situation seems hopeless and homelessness seems inevitable, working with a mediator can offer hope that there is an alternative path available. Mediation can make the difference between leaving in an acrimonious, unplanned way and retaining positive relationships and support from their family, with a safe and realistic plan.

For many young people moving into their own tenancy is the golden moment they have had their eyes set on through months or years of family strife. However, such independence presents many challenges. A large number face problems of isolation and retaining positive relationships and support from their family, ties. A briefing by Shelter surmises that the rebuilding of family relationships and contexts. It can encourage self-determination and empathy, equipping people with problem solving and conflict resolution techniques that will help them in other areas of life. Safe in the City, a large-scale action research project in London, found that tackling emotional difficulties and family problems assists change in other areas without further intervention, for example young people’s engagement with education and the wider community (Dickens and Woodfield: 2004).

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**THE NEED FOR MEDIATION**

- ‘Prevention is better than Cure’ found that one in three respondents who left because of family disputes mentioned that reconciliation with parents might have been useful. (Randall and Brown:1999)
- The Children’s Society Study ‘Still Running’ found that the most common thing cited as something that may have prevented leaving home was family support and mediation services. (Safe on the Streets Research Team:1999)
- 32% of interviewees in the ‘Significance of Family to Young Homeless People’ study thought that mediation would have been useful before they left home. (Monfort:2009)

**THE UNIQUE ROLE OF MEDIATION**

It is relatively common for those working with young people and their families to try to facilitate some form of temporary or longer term reconciliation. Professionals will use skills in common with those of mediators: many will have received training in ‘mediation skills’. These skills are good and helpful; most mediators would advocate everyone using them. However, it is essential to recognize mediation as distinct and different. An analogy may be helpful. A man may have football skills, may even have received a little training at some point and sometimes has a kick-around. However, he is not a footballer who trains regularly, studies the skills and gives his life to the excellent practice of football. A mediator is a trained professional, expert at helping people to resolve their conflicts. To become registered with the Scottish Mediation Register a mediation service must adhere to a Code of Practice, which promotes accountability and transparency in line with Best Practice to ensure high quality mediation is delivered.

**DECISIONS THAT STICK**

Voluntary involvement by both parties is held highly as a principle by almost all mediators. Contrary to popular belief, however, such independence presents many challenges. A large number face problems of isolation and loneliness. Young single people are amongst those most likely to presented for mediation on repeat occasions through being unable to sustain their tenancies (Scottish Homes:2001). Where a young person’s relationship with their family remains broken and they feel that they have ‘burnt their bridges’, mediation can help families to re-establish communication and to restore family ties. A briefing by Shelter surmises that the rebuilding of family relationships and wider social networks through mediation may provide a possible route out of homelessness and prevent its re-occurrence in the future (Shelter:2005).

**SAVINGS**

The human costs of homelessness are numerous: there is often damage to health, employability and self-confidence to name but a few. In a time of tight budgets it is also prudent to consider the financial savings of mediation. Prevention of homelessness has been consistently demonstrated to save local authorities money although estimates range widely. This is due to the interaction of significant variable factors including costs incurred by someone being assessed as homeless, locally available accommodation, the support needs of individual cases and the mediation service model design. Whatever data you use, the costs of homelessness are high. Case studies suggest that a typical example of homelessness in Scotland costs around £10,000 with a more complex case costing up to £35,000 (Scottish Government: 2000). De Paul UK claims that a youth prevention service including mediation saved an English local authority an average of £3,229 per young person (Innsley Consulting: 2011). This report would welcome research in Scotland that calculates the current average cost saving of prevention activities, including mediation. It is clear from these figures, however, that if a mediation service prevents even a relatively low number of young people from becoming homeless each year, it can be financially beneficial.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MEDIATION?**

**SAVINGS**

The human costs of homelessness are numerous: there is often damage to health, employability and self-confidence to name but a few. In a time of tight budgets it is also prudent to consider the financial savings of mediation. Prevention of homelessness has been consistently demonstrated to save local authorities money although estimates range widely. This is due to the interaction of significant variable factors including costs incurred by someone being assessed as homeless, locally available accommodation, the support needs of individual cases and the mediation service model design. Whatever data you use, the costs of homelessness are high. Case studies suggest that a typical example of homelessness in Scotland costs around £10,000 with a more complex case costing up to £35,000 (Scottish Government: 2000). De Paul UK claims that a youth prevention service including mediation saved an English local authority an average of £3,229 per young person (Innsley Consulting: 2011). This report would welcome research in Scotland that calculates the current average cost saving of prevention activities, including mediation. It is clear from these figures, however, that if a mediation service prevents even a relatively low number of young people from becoming homeless each year, it can be financially beneficial.

**WIDER BENEFITS**

Mediation also benefits those who take part in terms of strengthening their social networks and resilience to face further problems. Those who participate in mediation learn conflict resolution and communication skills that they can then use in other relationships and contexts. It can encourage self-determination and empathy, equipping people with problem solving and conflict resolution techniques that will help them in other areas of life. Safe in the City, a large-scale action research project in London, found that tackling emotional difficulties and family problems assists change in other areas without further intervention, for example young people’s engagement with education and the wider community (Dickens and Woodfield: 2004).

**PAUL’S STORY**

Paul is 16. He lives at home with his mum, step-dad and brother, Ed. Sometimes his step-sister, Sarah, who is 8, comes to stay. Paul and his step-dad had never really got on. Paul went to college for a while but dropped out because he didn’t like the course. It didn’t take long before he got into the habit of coming in late and not getting up in the morning because he was hung-over. Arguments with his step-dad became increasingly frequent and increasingly physically threatening. Paul was adamant that Paul should get a job. Paul’s mum and Ed wished that the shouting would stop and Sarah didn’t want to stay anymore. One day, things got really bad. Furniture got thrown across the room. Paul left, slamming the door behind him.

After a few days staying with a mate, his friend’s mum told him to go to the Housing Office to find out about getting a place of his own. At the Housing Office, Paul told the Advisor that he had been kicked out of his home and didn’t ever want to go back. The Advisor phoned Paul’s mum, who said that they had been worried sick about him and wanted him to come home. The Advisor asked Paul and his family if they would like to try mediation. After some thought, they decided to give it a try.

The mediator met members of the family individually over a month, helping them to think through what they were arguing about and how they each wanted things to change. He helped them to prepare for a face-to-face meeting at which they were able to come up with practical strategies that would make sharing living space workable and bearable. Paul has since found another course at college that he is enjoying and there are far fewer fights than before. Sarah has started to stay over at the house again now that the angry arguments have stopped.

**“[MEDIATION] HELPED US TO STAY CALM AND HELPED ME BY GETTING THINGS OFF MY CHEST. RACHEL AND I NOW HAVE A MUCH BETTER RELATIONSHIP, MY HOUSE IS NO LONGER A BATTLEFIELD.”**

– DAD, EDINBURGH
WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS?

DEMONSTRATING EFFECTIVENESS

To prove the efficacy of preventative interventions is a challenge. This is a particularly salient issue at a time of scarce public resources, when demonstrating Best Value is vital. Guidance published by the Scottish Government acknowledges this, "Assessment of the counter factual or what would have happened without the intervention is conceptually, practically and ethnically difficult". Among suggestions for addressing this issue is an avoidance of the demand for ‘proof’, with equal value given to qualitative as quantitative measures. There must be at the outset of a project agreement on what relevant outcomes are. (Sharp and Robertson: 2008) Around half of teams reported that outcomes are either not measured at all, or measured to some extent. (Lemos and Crane: 2001) For the mediators we interviewed the other benefits of mediation - repairing relationships, improving communication, empowering and equipping people to problem solve, meeting the emotional needs of young homeless people - were considered the primary focus of mediation.

"GATEKEEPING" AND IMPARTIALITY

The most widely documented criticism leveled at mediation between young people and their parents is that it could be used as "gatekeeping" by local authorities: discouraging people from making homelessness applications as opposed to preventing homelessness from occurring. Some have suggested that mediation can be used by councils as a way of avoiding statutory obligations to house homeless people (Lemos and Crane: 2001). Wilcox and Fitzpatrick have suggested that in Scotland there is a governmental culture of avoid allegations of gatekeeping of the type that have emerged in England and Wales. They judge that the rolling programme of regulatory inspections of local authority homelessness functions in Scotland is less likely (Wilcox and Fitzpatrick: 2010). Indeed, of all 43 projects that this research found to have operated in Scotland over the past decade, the investigations for this report only uncovered one project in which it might be questioned whether mediation was being used as a method of gatekeeping.

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIATION

Research carried out by Centrepoint, a national homelessness charity, found that many of the young people they interviewed who had become homeless as a result of relationship breakdown either did not know where they could access mediation services or were not even aware that such services existed. Interviewees for the current research expressed a desire for national awareness of mediation to increase, including education about when it is appropriate. Embedding mediation in the school curriculum was repeatedly recommended as a potential way to achieve this. Others suggested that it is particularly important for those at a strategic level to become more educated about mediation and its benefits.

In the same way that people don’t phone the plumber until the pipes burst, despite having been aware that there were problems, people don’t engage with mediation until the conflict reaches crisis point... This is about raising awareness so that people can know about mediation and how it can be preventative.

~ Mediation Service Manager, Tayside and Fife

REDUCING THE DEMAND FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Mediation may lead to young people staying out of local authority accommodation. It may, however, not. Mediation at its core is the facilitation of discussion by a neutral third party. The mediator has no power to impose a settlement on the parties, who retain authority for making their own decisions (Marion Roberts: 2008).

Any prediction of outcomes is based on experience: mediation strengthens relationships and through this process subsidiary benefits are frequently witnessed, such as a young person remaining at home. In their 2001 report, Lemos and Crane state that: ‘the benefits of mediation with families are not to be denominated in the currency of reducing the amount of social housing needed for homeless people. Mediation with families is unlikely to exert any downward pressure on demand for social housing from homeless people.’ (Lemos and Crane: 2001) For the mediators we interviewed the other benefits of mediation - repairing relationships, improving communication, empowering and equipping people to problem solve, meeting the emotional needs of young homeless people - were considered the primary focus of mediation.

"MEDIATION GIVES ALL PARTIES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN THEIR SIDE OF THINGS. ALTHOUGH IT CAN’T FIX EVERYTHING, IT OFFERS DIFFERENT VIEWS ON HOW TO MOVE FORWARD... IT WAS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR ME AND MY SON.”

~ MUM, WEST LOTHIAN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIATION SERVICES IN SCOTLAND

Mediation for the prevention of homelessness in Scotland has been delivered in the following four organizational contexts:

FAMILY MEDIATION (RELATIONSHIPS SCOTLAND)

Some family mediation services, whose work is usually with separating couples, have been delivering intergenerational mediation for a few years, which sometimes includes housing issues, unfunded and uncommissioned. The services that were interviewed all had found that families were approaching them on an ad-hoc basis. Since around 2009, more services have formalized this work, either through commissioning by local authorities or accessing project specific trust funds.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION (SACRO)

Sacro services have been commissioned by local authority homeless services to deliver homelessness mediation services as an addition to their core work, particularly around 2005 – 2007. Often community mediation services have been the obvious choice for local authority commissioners as there is already a relationship with the housing department. Some services that were interviewed had found that families were approaching them on an ad-hoc basis, or issues within families were occurring as part of their community mediation caseload, prior to the work being formalized.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR HOMELESS ORGANISATIONS

Five voluntary sector organisations have run mediation projects. This has been both commissioned and uncommissioned, and funded by either local authority or independent trust funding. Three organisations trained staff in mediation and took on cases as they were referred alongside their normal work. The two other organisations employed already trained mediators to work within projects that also offer support to young people, or young people and their families. Other homeless organisations that are not included in this research are likely to have received ‘mediation skills’ training for use in work with families.

LOCAL AUTHORITY

Local authority delivery of mediation can be split into two distinct categories.

1) Homeless department staff, often with a remit for prevention, using ‘mediation skills’ in their work when a young person attends a housing options or homelessness presentation interview. This is a model initially used in Scotland by North Ayrshire who have widely published the success of their prevention workers in preventing young people from becoming homeless. In recent years this model has been taken on by other councils.

2) Dedicated mediation staff employed by local authorities to deliver mediation. These have been situated in different departments: social work, community/housing mediation and homeless departments. Three projects have shown very successful close working between the homeless department and another department to deliver a combination of mediation and support. Across the country, these have been the projects with the greatest longevity.
### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Mediation and Homelessness Prevention in Scotland:**
A decade of mediation between young people and their families

### LESSONS LEARNED

**REFERRALS**

Homeless teams were identified by the most services as significantly more regular referrers than other routes. Social care, self-referral and the voluntary sector were also frequent referrers to mediation services. There was a wide discrepancy in number of referrals received by services. In particular, a number of projects for whom homeless departments were the sole referrer received a low number of referrals. Over half of services would like to receive more referrals from existing referrer agencies, the most commonly mentioned being homeless departments. In addition, 7 services would like to widen their referral routes, especially to include schools. Lack of referrals was the most commonly identified factor that prevents services from reaching their full potential, with 3 services not, in fact, having any cases through their duration. Significantly, factors connected to referral routes and referrers were identified as limiting the success of a service or any other area.

Relying on other people ‘selling’ mediation is a factor in the lack of uptake.

> Mediator, Forth Valley.

**CASES PROFILE**

Across the services interviewed, over 85% mediation projects have either been part-time posts, seasonal workers or mediators who have dual positions i.e. split their time between the main duty of their job and homeless mediation depending on the presenting case load. Services have been small with relatively few staff hours. Significantly, this will have determined the scale of impact that this type of intervention could have. Mediators delivering this type of work have come from a range of back- grounds, many of which – caring, working with homeless people, counselling – bring appropriate, specialised knowledge and understanding to add value to their mediation skills in working with vulnerable young people and their families. Some people commented how useful they had found these previous experiences in equipping them to take on homeless mediation cases. Half of services interviewed co-mediate, with two mediators always working together, and half have mediators working alone.

**TRAINING**

All mediation teams who deliver this type of work in Scotland have received training in community and/or family mediation with the vast majority training with Sacro or Family Mediation Scotland (since 2008 merged with Relate Scotland to become Relationships Scotland). 5 community mediation teams expressed how “different” they felt mediation with young people and their families for the prevention of homelessness was.

Although the process is the same as community mediation, it is different working with young people. The length of meetings and one-to-one meetings, and in some instances it is the success of those that results in a full mediation not being necessary as the conflict has already been resolved. However, this variation points to the significant need for sharing learning in order to improve practices that this paper hopes to address.

In discussing different options and attitudes sometimes positive change can occur such that a joint meeting no longer is needed.

> Mediator, Dumfries and Galloway

There is a concern that there is the general idea that any- one can mediate. There is a real danger of already dam- aged young people being further damaged by poor mediation delivered by inexperienced people. It can cause damage if not done well. Instead there needs to be trained, supported, experienced professionals, working not in iso- lation but with firm support networks.

> Mediation Team Leader, East Lothian

**SUPPORT**

The issue of support alongside mediation for young people and their families is mentioned by over 23 participants. As no direct questions were asked on the topic, this suggests that it was an important theme for the interviewees. Support was identified as important for a number of reasons. It was widely acknowledged that the large majority of people utilizing this type of mediation have support needs around issues that are impacting on their relationships. As summarised by a mediation team leader from Perth, these cases can be so messy and mediators alone can’t deliver all that services young people need. Too much can be placed at the door of the mediator.

The assumption behind this is that mediators have a defined role to operate within, including being a neutral facilitator. There is a concern that some services begin to offer wider support, their role as a neutral facilitator may be compromised. Five different models of using support alongside mediation have been used in Scotland in the last decade, employing support from both within and outwith the same organization as the mediator. In each of the situations, the support has had an impact, similar to the model, it has been considered a significant strength of the service.

There was consensus that mediation should be part of a wider support package around the needs of the young person and their family. Indeed, a mediation service manager from North Ayrshire went as far as to say, it is not effective when offered in isolation. A key role for the support workers, whether that is from the conflict department or from a voluntary organization, is to provide information about the reality of homelessness and to ensure the young person and their family are aware of all of their options.

**TIMING OF MEDIATION INTERVENTION**

As explored above, mediation can be appropriate at any stage of a young person’s journey towards homelessness. However, when asked what the best time to mediate is, there was a strong consensus towards early intervention being the most effective time to mediate.

**CASE WORK**

The major nuances of this type of work as identified by interview- ees can be divided into five categories:

1. Emotional intensity - This type of mediation can be emotionally demanding for mediators due to the intensity of the cases.
2. Building rapport - The mediator’s first job is to become a trusted adult whom the young person will be open with, which for many young people is a new experience.
3. Contact and communication – It is important to respond to referrals promptly and to keep the momentum of the case going.
4. Parental detail – Mediation often occurs before a formal venue, many services use community venues that are convenient and local.
5. Venues – As young people rarely have their own means of transportation this is more important. Many are put off by a formal venue, services use community venues that are convenient for young people in order to maximise engagement.

It is better if there can be intervention before this [crisis], but sometimes when people think there are no other options, mediation presents a positive option for them.

> Mediation Co-ordinator, South Ayrshire

The pilot indicated the need to reach young people at a younger age, around 14. The team found that if a young person had been given a house there was little motivation for them to return home... In the light of the pilot, there was a consensus among referrers and mediators that this benefit could be gained by finding a way of referring young people and their parents at an earlier stage, before they present as homeless... Earlier preventative work would be very effective in preventing young people from ever reaching the position where they are at crisis.

> Mediator, Dundee

Receiving referrals at the point of crisis means that for most people it is too late, what they are interested in is where they can get support tonight, not repairing long-damaged relationships.

> Mediator, Shetland

There is a “time at best” at all is debatable. In fact, someone mediating in the middle of a crisis, This is affected by your capacity to respond to a crisis, and whether the young person is at that time prioritising the issue of addressing their relationship.

> Rock Trust

There was fairly clear consensus that mediating at the point of crisis is not the best time to prevent homelessness through mediation. This is in concordance with paragraph C.9 of the 2009 Guidance, “although crisis response services are valuable and necessary it can still be difficult to actually prevent a home- less presentation at such a late stage” (Scottish Government: 2009).

Many mediators mentioned how chaotic a young person’s life can be at the point of presentation; in crisis people tend to focus on their immediate needs. In addition, if they have recently been asked to leave, then a young person is likely to be in a state of heightened emotion. Others mentioned the amount of questions that are posed at a homeless presentation. A question

![Number of services](image)

**Point of conflict**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

**Number of services**

- One thing that has been considered a significant strength of the service.
- A key role for the support workers, whether that is from the conflict department or from a voluntary organization, is to provide information about the reality of homelessness and to ensure the young person and their family are aware of all of their options.
- It is better if there can be intervention before this [crisis], but sometimes when people think there are no other options, mediation presents a positive option for them.
- There is a “time at best” at all is debatable. In fact, someone mediating in the middle of a crisis, This is affected by your capacity to respond to a crisis, and whether the young person is at that time prioritising the issue of addressing their relationship.
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Cyrnians' Prevention service, Amber Mediation was established in Edinburgh in 2006. It couples mediation with high quality support work for the whole family. Every year the team works with around 100 families to prevent young people becoming homeless due to conflict. The service works with a wide range of situations: from very early intervention with 14 year olds whose school work is being disrupted by severe arguments at home, to helping young people who are in their own tenancies rebuild bridges with their family. Amber delivers conflict resolution workshops to 53 and 54 pupils across Edinburgh and the Lothians, equipping young people to handle the inevitable disputes that accompany teenage years constructively. Amber delivers a range of specialized training programmes on mediation for the prevention of homelessness, including modules on supporting young people and their families.

The Scottish Community Mediation Network represents community mediation services from virtually all Scottish local authority areas. Different models of service provision have been developed, from independent specialist charities to in-house local authority mediation services. All models, however, share a basic requirement that mediators work with the public in a safe, effective and efficient way. Because of this, SCMN has introduced a comprehensive accreditation scheme for mediators, mediation services and training courses. SCMN has been accepted as an ‘approved body’ for the purposes of the Scottish Mediation Register.