

Case Study

Typical Neighbour Mediation 2

Party One – Mr and Mrs Patel

Mr and Mrs Patel have 3 grown up daughters.

Mr and Mrs Patel had a long term neighbourly relationship with their neighbour, Mr Smith. Their respective children grew up together and they lived in harmony sharing food and help in each other's houses.

Mr Smith's son had become a difficult adolescent and on several occasions he racially abused Mr and Mrs Patel

One of the daughters was very angry at seeing her parents so hurt by this name calling, she called the housing office.

Party Two – Mr Smith

Mr Smith had enjoyed a close relationship with the Ali's.

Mr Smith got divorced and his son went to live with this ex-wife. His son came over to see him some weekends.

Mr Smith received a letter from the housing department telling him that there was a serious problem with the Patels which could affect his tenancy.

Mr Smith did not know what the problem was. He approached Mr Patel but Mr Patel told him everything was OK and they shook hands.

Mr Patel heard from the housing dept that the problem was his son and that action could be taken.

Mr Smith felt angry that Mr Patel did not speak to him directly.

Conflict escalated between them played out in abusive exchanges and petty revenge.

Our Observations

Mr Patel felt embarrassed to speak directly with Mr Smith because their culture is one of peace.

The daughters felt powerless at their parent's hurt feelings and frustrated at their passivity so they took action by calling the council.

Mr Smith had lost trust in the relationship because he couldn't understand why the Patel's couldn't speak directly to him and give him an opportunity to sort it out particularly as it involved his son.

The Patel's knew that the son was living away and did not want to interfere in Mr Smith's relationship with his son.

The tone of the letter from the council to Mr Smith was intimidating.

The mediation

Once we could establish an understanding by the daughter that calling the council made matters worse rather than better, we were able to start to unpick what had happened and put the relationship back together.

Mr Smith expressed that he would have preferred an opportunity to deal with his son himself and was hurt that the Patel's did not trust him enough to talk to him.

Mr and Mrs Patel wanted to have peace that their religion calls for.

They all agreed to put the matter behind them and re-establish the friendship. There were offers on both sides.

Our observations

The problems started with the council's response to the complaint.

The daughter is frustrated because she sees this passivity as an invitation for people to take advantage and she has cast herself in the role of defender. She called the council because she felt powerless. A better intervention would have been to help her deal with her feelings and help with communicating with the neighbour

Using a 'quick fix' strategy of sending an ASB letter escalated the dispute.

