

Case study

Community – Police dialogues

Lee was an officer on the Safer Neighbourhoods Team for five years. The Centre for Peaceful Solutions has assisted Lee in helping with his relationship with local community leader and nightclub owner, K. During police operations in High Street, Harlesden, K would often challenge and video their actions resulting in more police being called to manage the resulting crowds. This led to an ongoing conflict which was time consuming and costly, while K became increasingly frustrated at the actions of the police. The Centre for Peaceful Solutions was asked to mediate between Police officers from Harlesden and K.

A mediation was held at The Centre for Peaceful Solutions offices. Five constables and two senior officers were present while K attended with other community representatives who had been nominated to attend.

“The first mediation was the opportunity for the parties to say what the issues were and what the problem was. There was a lot of misunderstanding about who I was and what I was trying to do, not just as a police officer but also as an individual. That opened K’s eyes a bit and it has certainly made it easier for us to interact now,” says Lee. The situation had become personal but the mediation provided me with the opportunity to give a rationale and genuine reasons why I had done things.”

“I have no problem explaining what we’re trying to achieve but at the same time I need to be able to get on with it. I can’t stop every ten seconds to say “I’m doing this because...”. I have no problem with people videoing me but a camera right in my face while I’m dealing with a suspect is a safety issue among other things.”

Did things improve after the mediation? “I wouldn’t say that we did mediation and things were then great but they were certainly better. **Once you have attended the mediation and have sat there listening to the other person and the other person has sat there and listened to you, you can’t, in good consciousness, go out and be aggressive with the person. So all of a sudden you find yourself saying, “K, how you doing everything going ok” Because you’ve attended the mediation, you can’t go back on the**

promises you made, to draw a line under the issues you had previously experienced. There’s a change in the relationship...it’s almost like you’ve agreed that there is going to be a change in the way you are going to behave to each other on the next encounter.

“I’ve been made a sergeant now so have been overseeing what other people are doing, so having the understanding of how K feels about things; I try and incorporate that with other officer’s behaviour as well and sometimes I can see where he is coming from. I may not agree with it but I can appreciate K’s perspective.

“Recently we had some Special Constables supporting Harlesden Town Centre Team and K felt they were being intimidating by standing opposite the club while customers queued to enter the premises. The officers were there to provide reassurance, however their decision to remain on a static post was causing intimidation and without causing any detriment to policing operations I instructed the officers to walk around and patrol the whole block so more people can see them, reducing the feeling of intimidation by those queuing to use the club.”

CPS facilitated two other mediation sessions between K and the police. Lee was present at both.

“At the second and third sessions I had a deeper understanding of the community issues and what K had been through in the past. I guess I was a bit of a role model for the other officers and assured them that mediation can work. If these are the officers that K is encountering every day then it makes sense for them to go and do the process.

“I have to see it as a success if the mediation can facilitate a positive interaction with K, if I can communicate with him in a style and fashion that he feels is suitable for that sector of the community, then I have to see the process as a success. From my perspective if I can obtain the same result without the conflict and in half then that has to be a success! Why spend 25-30 minutes arguing about it when I can have a civil conversation and get it done in five minutes then that’s happy days isn’t it?”