

## PRESS RELEASE

**For immediate release – 2 December 2011**

### **Leeds MP makes a noise about crucial need for early intervention mediation in neighbour disputes**

Greg Mulholland MP has just left Mediation Leeds after meeting with ex service user, Jenny, volunteers and staff. Jenny told Greg about the 5 years of misery she endured after new neighbours moved in next door. Following Police involvement, numerous complaints to her housing officer and years of maintaining a noise diary and the accompanying emotional stress, [and that is only her experience of the dispute], Jenny's case was finally referred to mediation. Like thousands of people before her, she was not totally convinced that talking to strangers could help, but Jenny and the people next door, whilst not quite bosom friends, now enjoy a more neighbourly relationship and a better quality of life. 'I can't believe it took 5 years and all that grief to access a service where both myself and my neighbour were able to share our frustrations and explore practical ways, that suited us both, to live our lives without impacting negatively on each other'.

Greg left Mediation Leeds with no doubts about the value of the services it provides: 'Mediation Leeds clearly plays a crucial role in resolving disputes and ending misery for countless numbers of people throughout Leeds. Early intervention is key to nipping these situations in the bud before they escalate to the point where the quality of life is unbearable for those involved and multiple services like the Police, healthcare services, housing providers and local MPs, like me, to invest valuable time and taxpayers' money dealing with the fallout. It's vital that all front line staff are aware of the service that Mediation Leeds provides and that they are empowered to refer suitable cases on at an early stage.' Greg was disheartened to hear that Jenny, in desperation, had to resort to stamping her feet so loudly that, finally, a senior member of staff at the housing office got involved with the case and realised that mediation was the best way forward. Fortunately, much has been done to raise awareness of the service in recent times and housing officers are quick to call on mediation services.

Director of Services, Steve Edwards, told Greg how the City's ALMO's and anti-social behaviour team recognise the value of mediation in restoring harmony in the community. Under difficult financial constraints they continue to refer appropriate cases to Mediation Leeds, as do several of the city's Housing Associations, ensuring that their tenants continue to access the service free of charge at source.

## PRESS RELEASE

'The most disappointing casualty of local government cutbacks has been the termination of our contract with Environmental Health Services' said Steve. 'Since streams of money from grants and other funding dried up and we have been forced to charge for our services, our contract with Environmental Health Services was our final means of providing mediation free of charge to owner occupiers. These people are often unaware of mediation and, presented with a bill for several hundred pounds, often feel the best way forward is to resort to legal services.'

Volunteer mediator, Oretha, who recently featured in Sky 1's documentary, 'Next Door Nightmares' described how one neighbour in the series had lost the home she loved by taking that very route – and all because she and her neighbour chose not to talk with each other about ways to resolve the parking difficulties they were experiencing. Through surgeries in North West Leeds, Greg knows only too well that there are always two sides to a story. There can only be one winner when a case goes to court and it isn't always the party you might expect. Mediation aims to achieve a win for all parties concerned.

Greg's final words as he left Mediation Leeds were that: 'The city should be proud of the mediation service that has continued to deliver increasing success in conflict resolution for almost 25 years for countless numbers of its people. Keep up the good work!'

[Last summer Jenny, along with 100 other previous participants of mediation, was invited to attend a series of free effective communication and conflict resolution skills courses, funded by Scurrah Wainwright. The skills she acquired were so beneficial in her personal and professional life that she decided to enrol on Mediation Leeds Community Mediation Skills course which concluded last month. Jenny successfully completed the course and is now working as a volunteer mediator for the service].

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Photographs: pdfs attached.

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Notes to Editor –

Mediation Leeds has long held a vision is of a 'Big Society' where people deal with conflict through communication, co-operation and agreement and hopes to work toward that end through the variety of services it offers. With over 21 years experience in engaging trained volunteers to help neighbours in

## **PRESS RELEASE**

dispute, the organisation has also evolved to provide mediation between people in the workplace, tenants and landlords and also provides a quality accredited training service and consultancy service.

Mediation Leeds retains its recognition as an Investor in People and also an organisation that is Positive about Disabled People. It is the first mediation service in the country to add the **Social Enterprise Mark** to its repertoire.

[www.mediationleeds.org.uk](http://www.mediationleeds.org.uk)