



London Borough of Newham

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When the London Borough of Newham introduced an internal workplace mediation scheme with the help of TCM in 2012, it was an immediate success. But, interestingly, it became apparent that many people still chose to take a formal route to deal with their issues. It was clear that people needed more encouragement to consider mediation in the first instance.

With the agreement of the Newham’s leadership team and the unions, a pilot was introduced to direct all complaints and grievances to the mediation co-ordinators in the first instance.

TCM trained and qualified nine mediators and provided support and consultancy services to help set up the original mediation scheme. Over the years the scheme’s mediators took part in many of TCM’s professional development events to refresh their skills, learn new ones and share knowledge and experiences with mediators from other organisations. Recently, to help with the increasing number of grievances diverted to mediation by the pilot, TCM provided training to help staff triage cases and determine their suitability for mediation.

The effect of the pilot has been remarkable. Of the 28 referrals in the first 6 months, 18 were either converted to mediations or resolved through conflict coaching or facilitated meetings.

Although it is, by definition, difficult to measure what hasn’t happened, potentially the mediation team has diverted 18 formal grievances or complaints. It is estimated that a formal grievance costs approximately £10,000, so the organisation may well have saved as much as £180,000 over the 6 months.

Catherine Anderson, Organisational Development Manager at London Borough Newham was drawn to mediation because she realised the grievance system in place at Newham until 2012 wasn’t serving anyone well, “At the end of a grievance process nobody came out kicking their heels saying ‘I’ve won!’ People were coming out not getting what they wanted anyway. The bad feelings and the conflict were much, much worse than at the start of the process.

It was a damaging and ineffective way of resolving conflict.”

The initial reluctance of some employees to go down the mediation route showed that people do have reservations about taking an alternative route to the traditional grievance procedure. But Catherine Anderson says she has seen people’s perceptions turnaround as they see the benefits of the new system.

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Participants often say that although it is not an easy process, it brings incredible results. As Catherine Anderson puts it, “You can actually make a difference to people’s lives in a day. It’s so powerful. You see people walk out and they look a couple of stone lighter, the world has been lifted from their shoulders. It is hard work for everyone involved but to see that difference is amazing”

And she says the benefits last well beyond the initial resolution, “I’ve seen people come out with a lot more confidence, it gives people permission to say how they feel and state what their needs are. It also really increases their ability to deal with future conflict too.”

With TCM’s help, the London Borough of Newham now plan to make the system they piloted permanent. Catherine Anderson believes it has the support of all the stakeholders and notes that many of the referrals they get now come directly through the union.

Why does she think mediation works so well? Put simply she says, “It’s getting back to basics. It’s about learning to talk again.”

If you would like more information on setting up a workplace mediation scheme, call today and speak to a member of the team.