



Oxfordshire Family
Mediation

Positive solutions for separated families

SUPPORT
for thousands of
separated families

**A LEADING
REPUTATION**
for family
mediation

AWARD-WINNING
training programmes
for professionals

**INNOVATIVE
PROJECTS**
for children



Review 2009-2011

Mediation: caring for children by caring for adults

Approximately one in three marriages ends in divorce and many more unmarried couples break up each year. Around 35% of children are estimated to be no longer living with both parents by age sixteen. Research indicates conclusively that parental conflict has a negative effect on children's performance in every area: when hostilities escalate, all members of the family suffer.

Mediation helps ease distress by providing a safe space for resolving issues such as childcare, property and finances, supported by mediators who make sure people make well-informed decisions. It keeps the needs of children at the forefront, recognising the grieving process they experience and the social and educational impact. It helps families avoid the court and prevents escalating conflict. It significantly reduces costs by around half (National Audit Office, 2007). Mediation protects clients' legal rights and complements advice given by solicitors.

How mediation helped Rose's family find a way out of conflict

Rose was a ten-year-old caught in the crossfire of an acrimonious battle between her mother, who wanted to move away for work reasons, and her father – anxious that Rose should stay nearby. In mediation the parents explored both options. Rose's father was reassured about her mother's commitment to on-going contact and voted for Rose to stay with her. A plan was made for Rose's regular visits to her father.

“ Talking both scenarios through in detail freed the parents to think about the situation from Rose's point of view and enabled them to make plans that were realistic and met their objectives. Both were very happy with the outcome. ”

OFM mediator



Why Oxfordshire Family Mediation?

“ OFM’s mission is to provide all-round support for the children of separated families. Family mediation has always been our core activity, helping stressed parents to find a basis for moving forward. We also work with schools, and train other professionals working with children. Since 1989 our service has helped over 20,000 children. This is why our mediators, children’s workers, trainers and staff work with such passion and why the professionalism of our mediators is paramount. ”



Marion Stevenson

Marion Stevenson, OFM Director (2003-2011) and mediator

Quality mediation that families can afford

All OFM mediators are fully accredited by the Legal Services Commission to deliver publicly funded work – the ‘gold standard’ in the field. We are committed to ensuring access for all, offering affordable fees according to clients’ income and a bursary fund for those in particular need.

In the last two years OFM has:

- helped nearly 2000 separated parents to make plans for their families’ future
- devised new programmes for children, parents and professionals
- won a major award for its training programmes and a government contract to design a programme for Children’s Centre staff throughout the UK
- been contracted to deliver a separated parenting programme for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

What OFM clients say

- 82% say mediation helped them resolve matters themselves
- 72% successfully reach agreements
- 70% say mediation helps them focus on the children
- 91% would recommend OFM to someone else.

“ Mediation got us to think about what’s important to the child. There were no points scored against each other. We learned to get on with each other, share our daughter and get on with our lives. ”

OFM Children's Services

In 2009 three-year funding from Children in Need enabled OFM to invest in its Children's Services by recruiting Martha Beale as Programme Manager.



Martha Beale

Family Plus – more support for more children

Family Plus is now OFM's support service for the children of separated parents. It gives children space:

- to talk about the changes they have experienced within their family
- to understand what has happened
- to think through their concerns
- to identify ways to cope and to voice their wishes and feelings.

The children and young people who use Family Plus tell us how much they value it.

*“ Thank you so much for helping me feel happier about my life . . .
I am really sad this is my last time with you. ”*

*“ I am writing to thank you for the sessions in which you talked to me and
my sister. Things are getting on better now. It's nice being able to talk
to mum without feelings overtaking and I feel as if I've let you take the
weight for me. ”*

The Family Plus Appeal

From October 2010 to June 2011 Family Plus has provided over 80 sessions to 28 families. In the year beginning October 2011 we expect to deliver 200 sessions. (We now offer six sessions to each family). We aim to raise £100,000 over two years to secure the service and run the *Walking on Eggshells* project.



Walking on Eggshells – empowering children through drama

This innovative project offered by Family Plus uses drama and movement to explore separation issues with pupils in primary and secondary schools. The name reflects the ‘conspiracy of silence’ around the subject that can make children of separated families feel isolated. *Walking on Eggshells* lifts the taboo and fosters a supportive school environment.

In the academic year 2010-2011 OFM partnered with WhatMatters Theatre Company and four primary schools in Headington, Oxford. Two hundred Year 5 and Year 6 pupils were given the opportunity to explore their perceptions of family breakdown in drama workshops. Some took their ideas further in writers’ workshops, from which Writer in Residence Susie Stead developed *Walking on Eggshells – a Quartet of Short Plays on Family Separation*. Twelve children staged five performances, reaching 200 pupils and 150 adults.

In 2009-2010 nine *Walking on Eggshells* performances were staged, reaching 688 pupils, 299 of whom participated in post-performance workshops.

“ I think [Walking on Eggshells] is a wonderfully creative and effective way of [helping] children and young people to cope with the impact of family conflict, separation and divorce, and a very powerful way of ensuring their voices are heard . . . Thought provoking and inspiring. ”

Gerry Byrne, Clinical Lead, Family Assessment and Safeguarding Service

Planning for the future

In the year ahead Family Plus aims to:

- take *Walking on Eggshells* to a new area of Oxford
- deliver 200 Family Plus sessions
- launch new Children’s Services initiatives.



Caring for children by caring for adults

Separated Parents Information Programme

To protect their children, separated parents need support in managing the changes in their family. The Family Court provides for this by court-ordering the *Separated Parents Information Programme*, funded by the Department for Education through CAFCASS, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services.

From December 2008 OFM has been contracted to deliver this programme. It helps parents learn more about the challenges of post-separation parenting, including the effects on children of on-going conflict. It provides advice on how to help children and enables parents to take steps towards their own solutions. Most parents find it invaluable. Oxfordshire Family Mediation is the sole provider in Oxfordshire.

Since 1 January 2009, 250 participants have benefited from the programme, and we are now extending it to Oxford, Banbury and Didcot. We have presented the work to the local judiciary, the Thames Valley Family Justice Council Annual Conference (2010), the Family Mediators Association Annual Conference (2010), and others.

Award-winning training programmes

OFM has acknowledged expertise on separation issues, the impact on children and how adults can best support them. We share this with schools and other agencies through a series of training workshops. Our training programmes were awarded The Avril Reid Award for Innovation in Mediation in 2009. In 2010 we designed a programme which was purchased by National Family Mediation for a bid to the Department of Education and subsequently delivered to 55 Children's Centres throughout the UK.

Money Matters

Where the money goes ...

OFM strives to minimise infrastructure costs, though we know that delivering professional services depends on efficient back-up.

Our excellent administration team of three, led by our Head of Operations, spends 75% of its time working directly with clients. 96% of our clients find our efficiency, timeliness and information-giving very good or satisfactory.

Strategy and development, policy, liaison with policy makers and government, networking with agencies, tendering for contracts, budgets, fundraising, marketing and PR are handled by the Director.

Our mediators are all qualified, paid professionals: this is essential for the level of service required in this complex and highly sensitive area.

... and where it comes from

Mediation itself is funded by the Legal Services Commission for the few who are eligible for legal aid. 'Private' clients pay fees. In order to provide concessionary rates for those in financial need we must raise £40,000 a year. Securing the Family Plus service requires a further £100,000 over two years. Our training programmes are self-funded and the *Separated Parenting Information Programmes* are paid for by government.

Can you help?

- £45 could support a child to attend one Family Plus session
- £75 could give someone access to mediation at a concessionary fee
- £270 could sponsor a child to access the whole Family Plus service
- £400 could support one person to access free mediation
- £500 could support one dramatic performance from a *Walking on Eggshells* project
- An 'unrestricted' donation is invaluable in giving us a healthy financial basis, enabling us to grow our services.

The OFM team

A new patron for OFM

“ I am honoured at the prospect of becoming a Patron of Oxfordshire Family Mediation. As the child of divorced parents I understand the devastation that family break up can have upon the children. I still experience the repercussions 51 years after my parents divorced. I therefore fully endorse the vital work of OFM in supporting children through the trauma of family break-up. ”



David Astor, CBE, Deputy Lieutenant for Oxfordshire

Patrons

Sir Hugo Brunner
Mrs Penny Richards, MBE
Rt Revd Bishop John Pritchard
Lord Filkin, CBE
David Astor, CBE, DL

Trustees

Rodney Mann (Chairman)
Martin Wilkinson (Treasurer)
Margie Charnock (Secretary)
Dr Rob Mather
Sarah Brammeier McCrisken
Christine Plews
Nigel Spawton

Team of ten mediators and two trainees, led by

Marion Stevenson (Director 2003-2011)
Martha Beale (Children's Services Programme Manager)
Kerry Williamson (Professional Practice Consultant)
Theresa Duggan (Head of Operations)
Julie Koretz (Mediation Services Manager)
Jen Lynch (Mediation Coordinator)

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Oxfordshire Family Mediation, 125 London Road, Oxford, OX3 9HZ Tel: (01865) 741781
Fax: (01865) 744393 E-mail: admin@ofm.org.uk www.ofm.org.uk



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