

Kluwer Mediation Blog

The Geneva Association for neighbourhood mediation: an example of local community mediation

Christophe Imhoos (Esprit d'entente) · Saturday, July 7th, 2012

What is the association

The Geneva Association for neighbourhood mediation ("*AsMéd-GE*", see website, in French, www.mediation-de-voisinage.ch) was created in 1994 in Geneva, Switzerland, by people from various social movements: neighbour and community associations, parents of students, social services, non-violent movements, political parties, justice... Its goal is the promotion of mediation for disputes involving neighbours. The association currently counts about seventy members and more than three hundred supporters.

AsMéd-GE has, from its inception, been based upon the choice of a voluntary and free citizen engagement, without excluding compensation and financial participation. It provides to people living a situation of neighbourhood's conflict a support in the search for resolution of their problem. This militant commitment finds its place alongside other professional structures.

AsMéd-GE is member of the Group Pro-Mediation ("*GPM*"; www.mediations.ch) whose goal is the promotion of mediation in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and includes partners in five French-speaking cantons.

Activities and structure of the association

The activities of AsMéd-GE are based on three complementary axes: assistance (listening, mediation) training and information. About twenty active members ensure the functioning and development of the association in three main bodies: a Mediation Centre, a Committee and a Training Group.

AsMéd-GE seeks to register in a proximity network: neighbourhood, community, public transport associations, tenants associations,... These partners are relays with the population and contribute to the awareness of AsMéd-GE and its activities to interested persons or to those faced with a neighbourhood conflict.

Vision of the conflict

AsMéd-GE believes that conflicts are part of the experiences of life. They have a meaning, they are legitimate and necessary. Accepting them represents a first step towards resolution. Conflicts can find a peaceful expression. Tensions increase when conflicts are not expressed. It is therefore

useful to promote communication and direct expression of the conflict between the parties. Conflicts involve an individual and community responsibility which can be borne directly by the persons concerned in the local communities, and not transferred to State bodies or professionals.

Vision of the mediation

AsMéd-GE seeks to promote the autonomy of the people. The commitment in the process of conflict resolution is voluntary. The parties thus remain actors in their history. With the support of mediators, they will establish or re-establish communication between them, and then build their own solutions. This process belongs to them. The role of AsMéd-GE is only to make it possible; to offer the skills of its mediators, to provide a place, a time and availability to people in conflict. The approach proposed by AsMéd-GE is therefore based on the confidence in the ability of any person to take its responsibilities, as well as to open to change and greater listening and acceptance of the other.

Process

Conflicts treated in the Mediation Centre are generally problems of neighbourhood. As a first step, AsMéd-GE is contacted through its permanent telephone hotline by one of the parties involved in a dispute (the party “A”). The preliminary task of the person following up the phone calls received or messages left (the contact person in charge) is to listen actively which, often, suffices. This allows the person concerned to take some distance in order to see things from a new perspective. The latter may eventually decide to contact him/herself the other neighbour(s) concerned. If Party A wishes to enter into a mediation, AsMéd-GE contacts the other person involved in the conflict (the party “B”) and transmits the proposal of mediation after having explained the process and its principles. The contact person also makes active listening with that party. At that stage, most of the exchanges take place by telephone. If both parties agree, AsMéd-GE organizes a mediation session: two or three co-mediators within the pool of mediators of the association are designated and a neutral venue is determined; two hours of availability, renewable if necessary, are fixed.

Limits of the process

There are situations that cannot be treated. For instance, when Party B is not clearly identifiable or cannot be represented. When a party does not accept the process of mediation or what it implies. Or when a party is not sufficiently autonomous to negotiate.

Training requirements

Asméd-GE sets up every year a diversified program. Basic training: such a training begins with a day of “awareness” and is addressed to anyone interested. It continues with a forty hour ground training. A certificate of attendance is issued at the end of such a training. This training is essentially based on personal experience, role play and exchange of views on real situations.

Training is an integral part of the active involvement in the association. It offers the opportunity to question, to confront other point of views, to improve listening attitude and to strengthen skills. It allows persons engaged in the association to better understand, to integrate newcomers in the group, to establish mutual trust and confidence and to continue to build together the neighbourhood mediation project in Geneva.

Accreditation

An accreditation procedure allows active members to point on their commitment to the association, to verify if they may well work with other people involved in the group, to confirm this commitment, and to be fully recognized in their duties. Relying on two internal documents, the “Charter” and the “Common Values and Specificities”, this certification process is also used to ensure the association’s own ethics.

Statistics

In 2010-2011, AsMéd-GE dealt with 66 demands for mediation whose 6 actually took place.


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