

Let's Listen Let's Talk

May 2025

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Welcome to our May 2025 newsletter

Well I didn't think I would be saying this in May but we could do with a bit of rain ! It's almost as if summer has woken up early. Still it is a great joy to see all the blossom and bluebells.

So what's new? Our mediators have been increasingly busy and we have been steadily increasing the number of people we are helping. We have also been getting good feedback from both the people we are helping directly and from organisations that are referring cases, which is extremely encouraging.

We have started working with community groups in New Addington and St

Ethelburga's to develop community workshops, to help people better manage conflicts. This work has been enabled with the funding we received from Croydon Relief in Need; thank you.

Our finances though continue to be tricky but I hope to report better news next time as we have 2 more bids in the works and are hopeful of further support from our local council, who very much appreciate our work.

I hope you enjoy this packed newsletter.

So there is much to celebrate and I want to again pay a huge vote of thanks to all our mediators and trustees for their great work. Thank you as well to you for supporting our newsletter.

As ever if you would like to get in touch, meet for a coffee or if you have ideas about improving the service, my contact details are:

neilselby23@gmail.com or 07905 168285

I look forward to hearing from you soon

Neil



Interview with a Mediator

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to interview Freddie De Luca, the co-founder of Concord Conflict Solutions which specialises in workplace and family disputes. Freddie is also the Director of Training and Development at Calm Mediation, which focuses on family, workplace and neighbourhood disputes. You will find details of the training opportunities offered by Calm Mediation at the bottom of Freddie's interview.

Freddie De Luca

Please provide a brief background to your mediation experience:

My mediation career started after I was impressed with the outcomes, compared to the legal options. I trained in Australia, then in UK, and have been lucky enough to co-mediate with a range of superb mediators, across many sectors of mediation. My current specialist areas are workplace and elder mediation practice and the training and supervision of mediators. I am a strong advocate of mediation as an effective and cost-effective tool for long-term solutions.

Are there any key mediation skills that you had to work harder on and how did you go about improving?

Having been a lawyer, originally, it was a challenge to remember not to ask leading questions. That became much easier as I saw the wonderful creative solutions that clients



generated for themselves (which my direction would not have reached).

Do have any tips on how to encourage parties to generate solutions?

This is one of my 'go to' phrases "the past can't be changed, the future can" - encouraging clients to have a go at fresh approaches.

It's also useful to (re)open their minds to what's possible by saying "...but what if it could? What would that feel like?" which can re-energise discussions.

What are your views on the pros and cons of virtual mediation?

Do you have any best practice tips based on your own experience?

Online mediation is a useful option and many of our individual meetings are now online. For Joint Meetings we still feel that meeting in person gets the best outcomes but online joint meetings are sometimes necessary and can certainly lead to good results too. One suggestion I have is to ensure each client is in their own space, on their own wifi. I experienced a 3-household neighbour mediation where client 2's wifi failed, so they went to client 1's flat to join from their screen. That did not go well!

Do you have any phrases or questions that you commonly use in mediation to good effect?

There are some great phrases I have learnt, with thanks to the co-mediators I have learnt them from! My frequent favourites include:

-when I'm training new mediators, I enjoy the revelation they experience using "what makes that important to you?" as they learn to dig

underneath a client's position, to reach their need.

-trust the process" sometimes adding "we can't promise that it will be comfortable but we expect it to be effective for you both"

-"listening does not mean agreeing"

**"the past
can't be
changed,
the
future
can"**

Can you share an experience you have had in dealing with a particularly challenging client and explain how you handled the situation?

As a new mediator, it's common to be nervous about people getting very upset or angry, or walking out. In my experience, the most difficult clients are those who seem indifferent - they may not shout or cry but if they don't feel strongly about the issues it can be tough for them to commit to change. I'd prefer a 'walk out' any day - that's someone who feels strongly and will work to meet their unmet need!

Do you have any general advice about mediating where mental health issues are a consideration?

The opportunity to offer effective mediation where mental health issues are part of the situation has grown significantly in the past 5 years. I find that clients are generally more open to share their challenges as part of exploring what hasn't worked and to build a strengths-based agreement that is sustainable for both (or all) the clients for the future. It's important for the mediators to establish good rapport with the clients in the individual meetings, so that they feel safe to speak openly about their issues. That gives the mediators the information needed to facilitate the best outcome from the joint meeting.

It's not easy though. The only mediation I have ever had to abandon involved two neighbours with mental health issues. Their first joint mediation session went well, partly because they realised they shared some similar mental health challenges. However, our next meeting deteriorated and we had to stop - later it became clear that one client's medication had changed and they were not responding well to that, which impacted the mediation.

It's also crucial for mediators to be self-aware - "we don't know what we don't know" - and not make assumptions or slide into stereotypical thinking about particular mental health conditions.

In a workplace mediation I did last year there were two clients who had the same diagnosis but it impacted on each of them very differently - one wanted significant adjustments from her colleagues and the other did not want to be 'treated differently'. There was

hurt on both sides, arising from previous responses, and it took a lot of exploring to find a way that felt realistic for both clients.

Do you have any tips on how to best prepare clients for the joint meeting?

Guiding clients about meeting 'content' is, of course, important, which as encouraging clients to use the 'observation, impact, need' tool when putting points across to the other person. I find that practical aspects are also important to prepare for - e.g. suggesting that the clients wear layers, as venue temperatures can feel variable. This seems like a small thing but having a cold or over-heated client does not contribute to a good session.

Do you have any views on the use of visual tools e.g. flip charts, stress balls, hourglass timers during mediations?

One of the things I have learnt through training mediators is how many variations of learning style there are. So yes, I'm an advocate of tools to assist with understanding and engagement, whether those tools are visual or otherwise.

In contacts with each client, it's important to check how they might absorb information (for example, no assumptions that they can read the flip chart - they may be embarrassed to mention they forgot their glasses or may have English as a second language etc).

In extended family mediations, one useful tool is the 'empty chair' which can represent a deceased or missing family member - this is very effective in adding an extra

layer to the participants' thought processes.

Are there any books, articles, YouTube videos etc that you would recommend to help us develop as mediators?

I have been delighted to see an increase in podcasts about mediation which are well worth a listen. The most recent is:

-Conflict Stories by Sam Hardy and Scott Dutton in Australia. Find it on Spotify or via LinkedIn

Do you have any advice on how to effectively co-mediate?

We use co-mediation for most of our work, (neighbour, workplace, peer, extended families), and find it to be the strongest model. The key is preparation time with a co-mediator. We also use a mutual feedback routine after every case, which enables every mediator to grow, from the newest to the most experienced - it's a marvellous tool.

Freddie is the eleventh mediator we have interviewed for our newsletter, and she is a welcome addition to the list of experienced professionals that have kindly devoted their time to help develop the knowledge of our team of community mediators.

Our back catalogue of interviews serves as a valuable knowledge hub for mediators of all levels of experience as well as those with an interest in managing conflict. You can access the previous interviews through the following links:

Gary Webber
June 2022
Laura Kirkpatrick
September 2022
Dr Mike Talbot
December 2022
Gerry O'Sullivan
March 2023
Emma McAndry
July 2023
Tara West
October 2023
Aled Davies
December 2023
Andrew Goodman
May 2024
Susanne Schuler
November 2024
Clare Fowler
January 2025

Training Opportunities

Below is a list of the upcoming training Freddie is offering through Calm Mediation. Links have been included where they have been confirmed, otherwise just keep an eye on Calm Mediation's website or contact Freddie directly training@calmmediation.org 020 7603 4014.

10 June 2025 10.30 online (1 hour)
Croydon Voluntary Action 'Making conflict constructive'

12 Sept 2025 9.30 online (3.5 hours) What is mediation and how can it be a career?'

17 Oct 2025 (One day)

'Permission to Share' process where mediators deliver summaries of each client's perspective, in a joint meeting

28 Oct-6 Nov 2025 (6 days)

'Workplace Mediation Skills 2025' - become a workplace mediator

18 Nov 2025 (One day)

'WM Conversion' add workplace mediation to your mediation skillset

20 Nov 2025 (One day)

'CM Conversion' add community mediation to your mediation skillset

Calm also runs monthly 'mediation skills development sessions' The upcoming sessions are:

9 June 2025 (12-3pm or 4-7pm)

'Stage management: What happens when it all goes wrong?'

8 July 2025 (5-8pm)

'Self-awareness in Mediation'

23 Sept 2025 (6-8.30pm)

Mental Health in Mediation

22 Oct 2025 (6-9pm)

'Non violent communication in Mediation'

Spotlight on a Mediator

Our Spotlight Mediator is Charlotte Aye, who joined Croydon Community Mediation early this year. Welcome to the team Charlotte!

What is your Favourite Country?

I couldn't pick just one! One is Thailand, and another is Myanmar. I spent my honeymoon there and fell in love with the people, the history and the nature. I would love to go back one day and the problems the country is experiencing break my heart. And France feels like a second home because I lived there for several years.

If you could time travel, where would you go?

I have wondered what Rome was like at the height of the Roman empire, so maybe there, and it would be interesting to see dinosaurs, as long as I knew I could get back safely.

What's the weirdest thing you've ever eaten?

Jellyfish! I was in China and a lady at my table warned me it was an acquired taste. I should have listened because it wasn't very nice. In Zambia I ate crickets, which were delicious.

Who do you admire?

My grandma, a World War Two veteran who still lives independently. She is the toughest person I know.

Who or what would you take to a desert island?

My family and some kind of magic tea-making machine that doesn't need electricity.

What was your childhood nickname?

When I was really little my parents called me Cha-Cha and in



secondary school friends called me Charlie. They still do.

What do you do when not mediating?

I look after my children, who are 5 and 8, write reviews of children's books for an industry magazine, and I am trying to get better at running.

Why did you decide to start mediating?

I met Mararena Mata at a book event a few years ago and my interest was piqued. I then met Neil from Croydon Mediation and decided to go for the training myself. Mediation encapsulates so much of what is important in life, which is listening to others,

resolving conflict and helping others. Outside of community mediation, I am also a family mediator and recently completed the training in SEND.

Where's your next holiday to?

I am going to Crete with my family in May. I want to take my children to the Knossos Palace (my son is into the Greek myths at the moment) and I am sure we will spend lots of time at the beach, too.

What's your favourite book?

It is almost a cliché to say Jane Eyre but Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë is my most beloved novel. I have lost count of the amount of times I have read it.

Training Residents as Mediators



TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPERTS

We have joined forces with Tpas England to provide landlords an opportunity to put residents at the heart of their dispute resolution service by training them as mediators.

Resident involvement is viewed by the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service as an indicator of a positive landlord culture. Resident mediators also offer landlords an alternative, immediate and impactful pathway for managing conflict whilst providing relief on strained complaint handling services.

Accredited by the College of Mediators, this six-day course will equip residents with the skills

and confidence to resolve a broad range of disputes with a focus on reopening dialogue and restoring damaged relationships. Attendees will receive expert training from an experienced, accredited mediator and will gain an understanding of the skills required for effectively resolving disputes, such as:

- empathy
- reframing
- building rapport
- active listening
- summarising

The course will also cover conflict (and how people's behaviour influences this), the structure of the mediation process and the role of mediation and the mediator in conflict resolution.

Further details about the course and how to sign up can be found here:

www.tpas.org.uk/tpas-news/accredited-community-mediation-training

If you have any queries, please email our Chair, Neil Selby neilselby23@gmail.com.

The price

£1200 + VAT per delegate for Tpas Members

£1400 + VAT per delegate for non Tpas Members

The venue, dates and timings of the course will be confirmed once we have the required number of delegates signed up.

