

Community Mediation

By Matthew Humphreys, Department of Law, University of Surrey

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EC1 New Deal is a 10-year £53 million project funded by Central Government in central London, a part of the city administered by the London Borough of Islington. The New Deal for Communities programme, of which the EC1 New Deal forms a part, is a much larger Government initiative aimed at tackling deprivation through regeneration.

The UK has experienced a succession of regeneration schemes in the last 20 years. Different initiatives have linked regeneration to charity, asset redistribution and even 'planning gain' – the somewhat controversial requirement for a certain proportion of development costs to be allocated to the area surrounding the developed building(s). The New Deal for Communities scheme is thought innovative because it is founded on being 'Community-led'. Where other regeneration schemes have unquestionably been motivated by the interests of the locality sought to be improved, many failed by simply not taking proper account of what local people thought. The New Deal for Communities addresses this by putting those affected by the regeneration at the heart of the decision-making process.

Without doubt this makes for a complex structure. The governing Board of each New Deal scheme is made up of 'partners' from key agencies and community representatives. The EC1 New Deal Board has taken this premise to heart: it is genuinely community-led with two-thirds of the Board elected community representatives – a clear majority of the decision-making body.

EC1 New Deal focuses its delivery work in community engagement, crime and security, education, employment, environmental, health and neighbourhood management projects. There is much potential overlap between these themes, but budget allocations and delivery team staff exist for each separately.

An example of the type of work undertaken by the EC1 New Deal is the restorative justice project 'Community Mediation'. This scheme is a partnership project involving the Centre for Career and Skills Development at City University (City University is geographically located in the EC1 New Deal area), Islington Youth Offending Service and the EC1 New Deal. It seeks to draw upon volunteers already identified as interested in the work to fill a gap in local service provision – i.e. exactly the sort of thing the New Deal for Communities scheme should be about. The purpose of the project is to open a discourse between young people and adults resident in the EC1 area with a view to facilitating mediation between young people and adults, addressing the issues surrounding youth crime and anti-social behaviour, and offering access to personal development opportunities and career guidance to participants. Inherent in this

scheme's approach is the aim to make the project sustainable in the sense that it will be managed by the local community and continue after the initial funding allocation has been exhausted.

The Community Mediation project is made up of a series of smaller co-ordinated schemes, each involving somewhere in the region of ten young people and ten adults from the EC1 area. Each scheme has an activity with a focus – generally chosen to appeal to young people. Activities include go-karting, DJ/nightclub event management and a radio project. Both the adults and young people are set a specific task to complete, which they do in conjunction with training from qualified professionals working in the associated industry and with the assistance of student volunteers. The schemes are intended to draw on expertise that exists in City University, where courses on motor sports, music and journalism are run.

Mediation is at the core of each of these schemes. The schemes are designed to require negotiation between participants in order to fulfil the chosen task. In addition, each scheme includes a separate active mediation component consisting of sessions whereby young people and adults are encouraged to discuss issues of concern to each other. These sessions are based on the principles of restorative justice, and the principle aim of the sessions is to enable participants to come up with strategies for reducing identified concerns. The Islington Youth Offending Team deliver this element of the project, again drawing upon volunteers from City University and the local community.

During these sessions, the groups are asked to identify a community improvement project for members to own. Such a project is expected to be something it is reasonably easy to manage, and it could be something that develops specific skills to suit the community's needs. It could be such projects would involve painting a communal area or clearing some recreational space, but such projects are genuinely intended to be owned by the group so the criteria here are open.

All participants have access to the careers and skills development service at City University, and the focus of this access is intended to build the self-confidence of participants. Activities based workshops are offered and work placements are identified for individuals. Opportunities for further educational or vocational training are explored, with the focus on the individual.

Such schemes are complex to manage and require real commitment on the part of funders and participants. They do however offer real prospects of developing strategies for restorative justice, as well as empowering those involved to develop skills and find new opportunities.