

Annual Report 2014



Promoting a Child Focused Approach to Mediation



Front Pictures:

Left: Janette Leckey Chairperson of Lloyds Foundation presenting a donation to FMNI Director Joan Davis.

Centre: Helping Families Through Change' symposium held at Long Gallery Stormont, hosted by Minister for Health, Edwin Poots (photo from left, FMNI Mediator John Mullin, FMNI PPC Eimear Hayden, Director Joan Davis, Minister for H SSPS Edwin Poots, Guest speaker Dr Barbara Wilson and CES Researcher Dr Helga Sneddon.

Right: Founding member Sheena Bell retirement presentation by Pip Jaffa OBE.

Chairperson's Foreword

As an organisation which believes passionately in the important role that family mediation has to play in society it has been most encouraging, in the last year, to see FMNI gaining wider attention and achieving a greater than ever volume of contacts.

The Board were delighted that FMNI secured the HSCB tender for 2013 - 16 for all five Trust areas, reinforcing the regional basis of the organisation. While there may be gaps in people's understanding about the purpose of family mediation and how it works, nevertheless it is essential that the service is accessible to all potential users, and with a remit to deliver services across Northern Ireland the organisation has increased its visibility.

The growth in demand does present challenges around capacity and given the limited number of staff who have to manage the complexities of operating a family mediation service within finite resources, it is remarkable that the team has continued to achieve so well. However, the Board is

very aware of the difficulties that the lack of sufficient human resources present to the Director. It is the aspiration that funding can be identified for additional staff to be appointed to take responsibility for administration and financial tasks.

FMNI is acutely aware that there can be no compromise in service delivery when it comes to standards and FMNI sets a very

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high bar in relation to ensuring that their work reflects the established ethics and codes of conduct of MII and College of Mediators UK. With the appointment of two Professional Practice Consultants in year we now have a compliment of three, whose responsibility is to support mediator's practice development, ensuring standards

are maintained and monitor quality of service delivered to the public.

To maintain the numbers of mediators needed to keep abreast with the demand for the service FMNI has delivered their Foundation Training Programme again this year. Of the successful participants a proportion of them remain with FMNI with the rest using their training in other settings. This raises the possibility that some of those mediators may be working without appropriate support and supervision, a concerning thought given that the work can have significant impact on people's lives. In order to uphold standards FMNI would welcome that all family mediation offered operated within a recognised regulated framework. In that way the individuals wishing to use the service, referrers and professional could have confidence in the quality of the practice.

As we move into another year when there are likely to be stronger strategic government initiatives to encourage separating couples to use mediation, I feel confident that FMNI

can play a key role. We know that individuals benefit from the service, we know it is value for money, and we know that the service empowers parents to make decisions that benefit their children.

These certainties are the motivating factors that drive the organisation to continue to lobby for the service to be adequately resourced so that the needs of separating couples can be met and that the lives of children and young people are not overshadowed by the fall-out from their parents' mismanaged separation.

At the last AGM we were delighted to welcome new Board members, all of whom have taken an active interest in the work and have shown great commitment to the task of being Directors. Sadly, two active members retired from the Board, Victor Coleman who ensured the financial systems were effective and transparent since 2009 and Muriel Orr a founding member and former mediator whose enthusiasm and belief in the service helped drive it forward.

My thanks to all Board members and to the Director Joan Davis, who continues to competently lead the team, and to the staff and to mediators who should be proud of their many achievements throughout the year.

Pip Jaffa OBE
Chair

Director's Report

Family Mediation NI as the lead specialist agency providing mediation services to separated families across NI continued throughout 2013-2014 to experience increased interest and demand for services.

This report draws attention to some of the highlights of the work of FMNI over the past year.

We are privileged to be once again in receipt of the NI wide tender from the HSCB to deliver the service free to pre-court separated parents across all five Trust areas. 85% of service delivery is provided under this tender and we appreciate the support from the HSCB that enables families to access this valuable service.

Access to the service was provided in Out Centres across NI and the now well respected Foundation Training Programme was rolled out for the 7th year with additional bespoke three day training programmes provided by request to the Western, Northern and Belfast Children's Court Officers. FMNI training is approved by recognised bodies in Britain and Ireland,

the service adheres to codes of ethics and maintains standards by supervised practice, monitoring and evaluating the service. It is therefore, a continual cause for concern that there is as yet, no regulation for this profession in NI.

“ Much more work and investment is required to ensure that separated parents are referred away from the legal adversarial system that is not equipped to assist on a long term basis with the ongoing emotional trauma of separation. ”

Professional Practice Consultants provided a number of CPD training days and group supervisions sessions to our Panel of family mediators to ensure regular training updates and professional support is offered on areas of practice development. This is additional to supervision sessions and dedicated accreditation supervision. I am delighted to report a further two mediators

have achieved accredited status through the College of Mediators following two years hard work. Congratulations to Polly & Rosalind. With two other mediators almost completing their portfolio for submission, that will raise our number of accredited mediators to eleven, with eight others working towards this qualification. A further nine trainees completed the FTP successfully in December 2013 and most have now completed their 10 hours supervised practice, some may embark on a service level agreement with FMNI to enable work towards accredited status.

In September, we were delighted to be hosted by the Minister of Health, Edwin Poots, at the Long Gallery Stormont to further highlight to a wider audience the issues that arise as a result of family breakdown. The symposium examined the growing evidence of the negative impact on children of poorly managed parental separation. There is a growing body of evidence on the world stage that engaging in family mediation as an early intervention

tool can achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. However, there is a worrying lack of knowledge within some sectors of the connection between parental breakdown and the devastating impact on children's health & wellbeing of sudden separation from one parent.

In this year also we hosted an Intern from the Golden Gate University in California, Erin Elliott completed a significant piece of work in three short months, delving into the Court referred case load and analysing outcomes and drafting a report that will be launched later in 2014.

Change continues to be evident in NI with respect to how we support those experiencing family breakdown and we are heartened to note that the family policy unit within the DHSSPS continue to keep this issue at the heart of policy review and note that cross departmental work that includes the Department of Justice, will begin to keep this important societal issue at the top of the government agenda to support families throughout their lifetime.

FMNI continued the ongoing work to galvanise all those agencies who work with parents, children and young people to ensure that the right service is accessed at the right time to support parents find an agreed way forward to co-parent effectively in their new circumstances as separated parents. We have therefore continued to build working relationships with other agencies and Professionals who work in the family arena, including Sure Starts, Contact Centres, family solicitors, the Judiciary and Parenting NI. We contributed to the Separated Dads project lead by WEA and supported the launch of the briefing papers associated with raising the profile of Separated Dads. We continue to lobby for an increased focus on NI based research that may better inform future family policy fit for the 21st century.

We acknowledge the establishment of family support hubs that can further the process of ensuring that all those who work with families have knowledge and access to services. Much more work and investment is required to ensure that separated parents

are referred away from the legal adversarial system that is not equipped to assist on a long term basis with the ongoing emotional trauma of separation. To that end we continue to call for a greater effort across all sectors to change the way we think in NI around options at the time of separation and beyond and how we may all best support both parents to take responsibility for the future well-being of their children.

It is a privilege to be Director of FMNI and to work with professionals who strive daily to make a positive impact on the lives of children. I extend my sincere thanks to the mediators, supervisors, staff and the Board of Trustees, enthusiastically led by Pip Jaffa OBE, for their commitment to the service and its future development. The wealth of professional quality work delivered by a relatively small team is impressive and the feedback from service users confirms the positive outcomes behind the statistics.

Joan Davis
Director

Coordinator's Report

As the lead family mediation service in NI, FMNI's reputation continues to grow as does the demand on the service. The statistics show the service has experienced its busiest year to date. The demand on the service is due to a number of factors; the reinforcement of protocols to solicitors to encourage early referral of their clients to mediation first rather than commence

“ Mediators work to actively empower parents ”

protracted and costly legal proceedings, a well-managed publicity campaign, a greater awareness among professionals generally, combined with the topic of mediation being discussed in the media highlighting the benefits of family mediation.

Co-ordination of the appointment system and case management present daily challenges. Changes in the Mediator Panel has resulted in greater urgency to ensure

newly trained mediators have the opportunity to gain experience by co-working with accredited Mediators to increase their confidence and improve their skill set. Other Professionals have indicated that they want to refer their clients to FMNI because our Mediators work to actively empower parents, helping them to navigate a poorly managed separation with the focus on the needs of the child. Professionals recognise that FMNI Mediators are particularly skilled in influencing parents, building parental confidence and skills to manage future conflict in a productive way and therefore improve the lives of children who are stuck in the middle of the parental conflict. Those professionals who repeatedly use FMNI do so because of the positive outcomes achieved by parents when they have fully engaged with the process. Our Mediators have achieved a record number of Mediated Agreements this year which highlights the commitment clients make to the process and the dedication and skill of their Mediator.

Activity Overview

- Work has begun on the development of a bespoke database to streamline data collection, reporting mechanisms and monitoring.
- The FMNI information leaflet has been redesigned and launched in the Long Gallery with Minister Ford hosting and confirming his Departments support of early intervention and support for separated families.
- FMNI is represented on a variety of forums including ParentingNI's Parenting Forum, QUB CCCR Forum, NI Child Maintenance Stakeholders Forum , Belfast Court Users, West Belfast Locality Planning Group and Inner East Belfast Family Support Hub
- We have contributed information sessions to a variety of groups and agencies including Lay Magistrates, Solicitors Associations, Orana Sure Start, and Association of Contact Centres.
- FMNI has contributed to the Separated Dads steering group, a Man Matters project and supported the launch of the associated briefing papers.
- Internal case recording documents, Mediated Agreement templates and policies have all been subject to internal review

== Paid and unpaid PR across all media has encouraged an increase in interest both in accessing the service, referring to the service and also in other professionals seeking access to training. We are not complacent as much needs to be done to publicise the service. We are delighted that year on year we have enabled a greater number of separated parents to negotiate a mediated agreement that benefits their children and assists in avoiding protracted court cases.

== Strategically FMNI's plan is on track, that is to continue to develop mediators experience, to increase access to the service, to increase knowledge around negative impact of poorly managed separations on children, to highlight children's rights to access to both parents and to lobby for cross departmental cooperation to deliver joined up policy and funding to provide greater information and access to family mediation.

== During the year we used the services of NICVA to review and update FMNI's Memorandum & Articles of Association and registered these with the Charity Commission.

Staff changes:

During the year Tracy Cousins our Administrator left us and we recruited Etain O'Kane as a second Coordinator. Ken Cathcart, our employed mediator retired and was replaced by Polly Rowan Hamilton. Muriel Orr, a founding member sadly retired from the Board of Trustees. Margaret Fawcett, consultant and researcher with regards to direct child consultation also sadly resigned in this year. We have some changes within our sessional panel of family mediators, with some taking a break and new mediators signing up to a service level agreement. The common theme is that all associated with FMNI past and present are inspirational in their belief and enthusiasm for the service and support and commitment of all is very much appreciated. We know from the evaluation feedback that Separated families have benefited from engaging in the process facilitated by FMNI mediators.

Service User's Survey Comments

Separated Dads new partner, Omagh:

“ My partner A attended with B, the mother of his son as there was no contact at the time between A and his son J. Since the mediation, A has been having regular contact with his son and this has progressed to us having J one weekend a month. They have developed a great relationship and this weekend A is taking J to London for the FA Cup final! A and I were thinking of how far things have come, and how the Family Mediation service was so helpful in starting this process, so I thought it would be nice to let you know a positive outcome! Thanks for the help. ”

Dad in Enniskillen:

“ I found out about the service after being in the court system for 9months. It took a while for me to get my son's Mum to agree to give it a try....it wasn't what she thought it would be, she thought we would be lectured on parenting! But it opened our eyes to our responsibility, we would never have talked things out like that and made decisions. Definitely the winner is my son and that makes it worth it. ”

Newry Mum:

“ My solicitor told me to contact FMNI, I was reluctant as I didn't know what mediation was all about. I went for the individual meeting but my ex-partner refused an invitation to attend. But then about 6 months later he decided he might give it a try. We went from one afternoon per week contact arranged by text to being able to talk on the phone and at hand over about our children's lives. After four sessions we had a mediated agreement that ensures our children see more of their Dad. I feel relieved and more confident about communication now. ”

Grandmother Belfast:

“ ...was very distressed when my son's relationship broke down, I was trying to cope with his distress and my own about being parted from my lovely granddaughter. I saw an advert and contacted FMNI to get information on what was possible. I convinced my son to contact FMNI, he was not keen as he thought the only way was through the court to gain access. It took longer than we thought because his ex-wife would not have anything to do with it at first but her solicitor advised her to and then we all reaped the benefits. Now I see my granddaughter every weekend. ”

Dad Armagh:

“ It was hard work and I was surprised at how emotional I was... difficult sitting in same room with my children's Mum and trying to keep focussed on the children but mediator was very skilled and assisted us to move out of our stuck positions... would definitely recommend mediation if you really want what is best for your children. ”

Mum Cookstown:

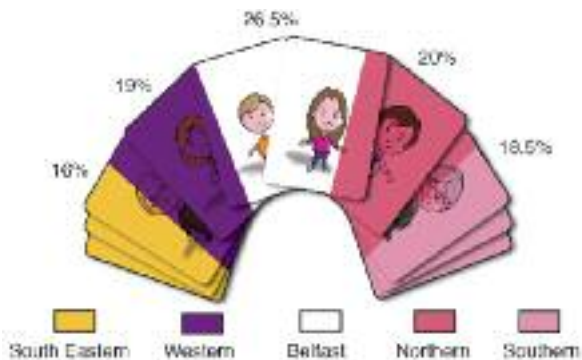
“ I was very sceptical , didn't think he would attend. It's really difficult to explain how this service has helped because it helped us all move forward and this can only be good for the kid's....a weight of my shoulders now, no more arguments over contact days. ”

Dad Lisburn:

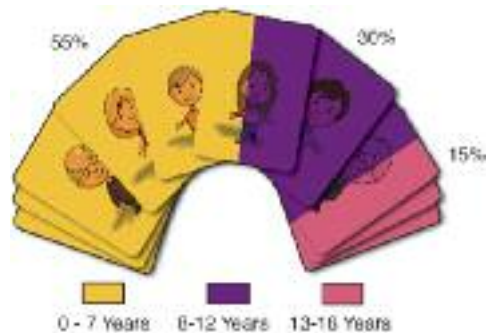
“ I had not seen my kid's for three months... then I found FMNI, it was a struggle because their Mum didn't want to know. But when she did eventually attend we were both surprised that just sitting in a room away from usual stresses and influences and really talking and feeling really listened too moved us to a different place. Mediator was really patient with us and didn't take sides, so we found our own agreement and we are more realistic about how we continue to be parents. ”

Statistics

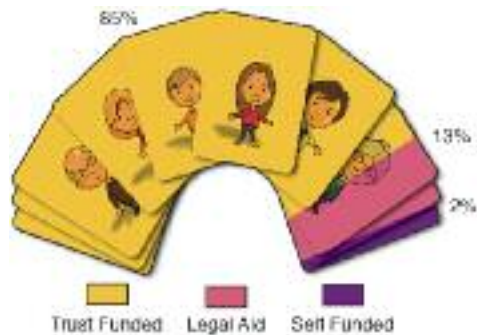
Access to Services Across Trust Areas



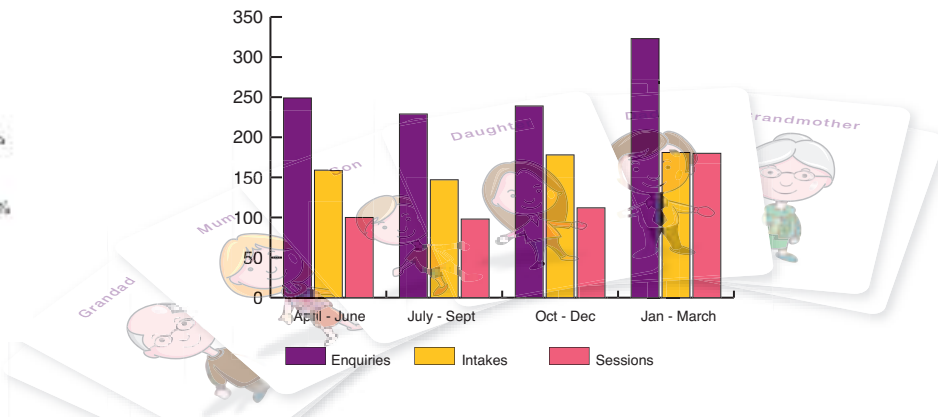
Breakdown by age of Children whose Parents engaged in the process



Breakdown of Funding Source April 2013 - March 2014



Pre-Mediation Intakes & Sessions April 13 - March 2014



FMNI Board Members April 2013 to March 2014

Chairperson: Pip Jaffa OBE
Treasurer: Tony Barclay
Company Secretary: Joan Davis

Board Members: Liam Mackle
Fiona O'Donnel
Glynis Mulholland
Clare Bates
Darren Magee

FMNI Staff: Joan Davis: Director
Polly Rowan Hamilton: Mediator
Diane Hammond: Coordinator
Etain O'Kane: Coordinator (P/T)

Professional Practice
Consultants: Aedin Bradley
Eimear Hayden
Janni Knox

Mediators: Davina Clements, Malachy Hagan, Patricia O'Kane,
Rosalind Dunlop, Jackie Sharkey, Carolyn Poots,
Louise Goodman, Ken Cathcart, Teresa Fallon,
Carmel McGilloway, Carol Blackwell-Smyth,
Eamon O'Connor, Gerard Maguire, Anne Miller,
Colette Forrester, Valerie Pattie, Mary McAnulty,
Liz McCorkell, Claire Edgar.



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