

Annual Review 2023

fmni



family
mediation

NORTHERN IRELAND

...enabling the best outcomes for children when parents separate.

Activity 2022-2023

723

Individual Information & Assessment Meetings

2306

Mediation Hours Completed

598

Separated parents joint mediation Sessions (1.5 hours per session)

260

Wider Family mediation Sessions

65%

Mediation meetings via zoom

82%

of cases completed with full agreement or co-parenting plan.

9%

overall activity up from previous year.

88

individuals in this year assessed and advised that the facilitative model of mediation we offer is not appropriate for them at this time.

Foreword

In the aftermath of the pandemic and the continued repercussions for parental relationships, FMNI has had to contend with significant challenges, not least the funding landscape.

The pandemic has impacted on the daily lives of children, young people and their parents with the long-term impact remaining with us as a society for the foreseeable future. Interesting to note, that 18% of those who made contact, referenced 'Covid' as one of the reasons for the relationship breakdown.

Despite these challenges, which we faced together as a sector, FMNI staff, PPC's, Mediator Panel members and Board Members continued to be committed to the delivery of family mediation services, to help parents achieve positive outcomes for their children, as they move forward into the future.

All have given their time, energy, and talent to ensure we continued to operate. We want to thank every one

of you for your hard work. We have been through one of the toughest challenges and we will continue to work together to ensure more separated families do not default to Court but explore mediation as a way of making the best decisions for their children's future. A future whereby their children may move happily between two homes and enjoy healthy relationships with both their parents.

- Despite all the potential barriers, our service has experienced a 9% increase in demand and 82% of cases completed with full agreement or co-parenting plan. And 94% would recommend FMNI to family & friends.

- The testimonials from those who worked with us are the motivator for all connected to FMNI. Even those

for whom mediation was not the solution, provided positive feedback of their experience with us.

In this year we worked on the review of our Strategic Plan and commissioned an independent evaluation of our College of Mediators approved Family Mediator Foundation Training Programme. This is informing our service development, funding strategy and training calendar for the years ahead.

We continue to build relationships and partnerships with those who work with families in distress to raise the profile of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and the relationship between family breakdown and the high-rate male suicide.

However, we are conscious that without a devolved government, another year has passed and FMNI is concerned that recommendations from Gillen Review 2017, with regards

to wider access to family mediation are not receiving the attention they deserve. The UNCRC rights of the child that support a safe and healthy relationship between children and their parents post separation is an aspect of children's rights that remains of the radar here in NI. FMNI is working with Mediators Institute Ireland and the Irish legal Aid Board to gain further understanding on how together more people may understand and access mediation and to assist in the development of practitioner development.

We are pleased to present the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 and this review of the past year to you.

Joan Davis

Director

John Keers BL

Interim Chair





Hours on Helpline
4683
(not including repeat calls)

No of initial enquiries
2379
Phone, e-mail, website



Referral routes

Web/internet **20%**
From the other parent..... **16%**
Solicitor **15%**
other professional or service **11%**
Familiar with service..... **10%**



11%
of parents identified as member of an ethnic minority.

Breakdown of Enquiries by Health Trust

Belfast **18%**
Northern **23%**
South Eastern **16%**
Southern **15%**
Western **18%**
Outside NI **4%**
Unknown **6%**

Age of children whose parents use our service

Under 7 y/o **48%**
Under 3 y/o **24%**

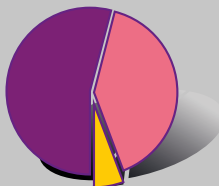


Age range of those entering service:

18-24 **2%**
25-34 **29%**
35-44 **46%**
45-54 **19%**
55+ **4%**

Entry to service

Self-refer **88%**
Court referral **2%**
Professional referral.. **10%**



Relationship status

of parents who availed of assessment appointment:
47% married
45% co-habiting
8%casual relationship

During assessment parents are asked for their

reasons for coming to mediation.

Top 3 are:

- To improve communication
- Establish parenting schedule & looking at the practicalities of co-parenting
- Establishing a co-parenting relationship.

Feedback from Parents

FMNI use the 'Goal-Based Outcomes Measurement Tool' to evidence the impact of the service. These goals are set and scored by participants when they enter joint mediation sessions.

These help to set specific measurable outcomes for the mediation. Mediators have reported the unintended consequences of this is that it helps to focus the parents on the issues and making progress.

The initial score provided establishes the baseline from which progress is measured. This is reviewed during each session with the participants.

They are rated from 0-10 and offer choices over specific areas relating to co-parenting.

Most commonly selected goals are:

- Improved communication between parents
- Enhanced co-parenting
- Agreements over scheduling time with both parents
- Improved relationships with children.

94% of parents made improvements across 1 or more areas of co-parenting.

60% of parents scored an increase of more than 50%.

Parents also provide anonymous feedback via evaluations & survey monkeys.

81% reported they made practical agreements about contact.

73% reported they were able to work together to co-parent their children.

69% reported they were able to communicate better.

78% reported their children benefited from their participation in mediation.

76% reported they feel they learnt new skills to resolve family situation.

94% would recommend FMNI to family & friends.

44% reported that others benefited from them engaging with FMNI.

95% reported a positive experience with FMNI.

Testimonials

“ Very helpful & fair. Helped us make logical decisions and remove the emotional thinking so best decisions could be made. ”

“ You met us at an emotional and relational crisis in our family. I was so worried that it was being expressed by our child. Just having space to have that aired safely with respect was worth its weight in gold. Thank you! ”

“ The service has completely changed my life for the better and I couldn't recommend it enough. ”

“ Amazing, professional service, has saved a lot of stress and ultimately made all our lives better. ”

“ Choosing mediation deterred us from going the legal route and potentially hindering my son from a relationship with his father. ”

“ Great help for me as a father, especially as I felt somewhat abandoned by this system. ”

“ FMNI were excellent and went to every effort to support us in mediation. Our children definitely benefited because I could be open and clear about each step that was agreed and they appreciated that. ”

“ Mediation meant learning to be in the same room as my former partner and try to work with him. This has been a huge advantage of mediation and our boys can see we communicate much better. ”

“ Family members such as grandparents have benefited as there is less stress and animosity overall. ”

“ Mediation gave me the space and the outlet where my voice was actually being heard. ”

“ Early intervention when you split up is something I'd recommend to any of my family/friends if they had a family breakdown. ”

Maintaining Standards & Mediator Practice Development



Internal CPD Hours	22
Group Supervision Hours.....	24
1-on-1 Supervision Hours.....	125

Internal Continuous Personal Development Programme for Mediators 2022/23

- 6th May** 'Suitability Assessment' for the facilitative model - linked to screening and 'Option generation' (L Bramwell)
- 29th November** ASD awareness and further access information (E McKernin)
- 24th January 2023** Raise awareness and understanding of CIM and the FMNI processes for ensuring safe delivery. (P Rowan Hamilton)

Collaboration, Engagement & Awareness Raising

- Dept. of Health & SPPG • Dept. of Justice, 'Enabling Change'
- Courts & Tribunals Service • Court Users Group
- College of Mediators • Co3 • Fermanagh House
- NI Human Rights Commission • NICVA
- Action Trauma • All Party Group for Older People
- Shadow Justice Family Advisory Group • La Dolce Vita
- Lord Chief Justice's Office • Contact Centres
- Mediators Institute Ireland • Solicitors Associations
- Parenting NI Dads Project & Parenting Forum
- The Law Society of NI. • NHSCT. • The Well.
- Mental Health Champion
- Mediation NI
- Irish Legal Aid Board
- MLA's/Councillors

Social Media campaigns help raise awareness of this specialist service, what it delivers, how it works, how you can prepare to mediate and the training available for family mediators. We are continuing to work on our series of Podcasts that further inform and educate.

Family mediation and children's mental health



Child focused

Family mediators help families to reach agreements about arrangements for their children that are in their best interests. This can provide stability and security for children and places them at the center of all decision making



Minimising Conflict

Family mediation provides a safe and neutral space for parents to discuss their issues and reach agreement on arrangements for their children, reducing the amount of conflict and stress that children are exposed to.



Improving Communication

Family mediation encourages open and constructive communication between parents, helping them to understand each other's perspectives and find mutually-agreeable solutions. This can improve relationships between parents and reduce the negative impact of separation on children's mental health.



Encouraging Cooperation

Family mediation promotes cooperation between parents, which can help to reduce stress and anxiety for children. By working together, parents can establish positive and constructive relationships that benefit their children. It also teaches children how to deal with conflict constructively.

#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek



Children who are routinely exposed to stressful and traumatic experiences or events during childhood can...be vulnerable to poorer outcomes which can last well into adulthood.

Exposure to these experiences (ACEs) can impact on the development of a child, their ability to trust and form social relationships and to focus and learn.

When necessary, services [should] intervene early to respond to childhood adversity and provide children, young people and parents with advice, support and protection, building the skills they need to cope with and mitigate the effects of adverse experiences.

NI Executive Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030



#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek

familymediationni.org.uk

L to R Emma McKernin, Coordinator
Pat Mooney, Helpline Assistant

FMNI Staff

Director: Joan Davis

Coordinator: Emma McKernin

Helpline Assistant: Patricia Mooney

Mediator: Polly Rowan Hamilton

Mediator: Carol Blackwell Smyth

Training Team

Davina Clements

Rosalind Dunlop

Polly Rowan Hamilton

Sheena McGrellis

The Mediator Panel

April 2022 to March 2023

Aedin Bradley

Gemma Bird

Davina Clements

Jane Carney

Janice Ferguson

Pauline Knight

Ilona Kupp-Lieck

Laura Doran

Mary McNulty

Maura Ruoppolo

Nicola Carruthers

Patricia O’Kane

Rosalind Dunlop

Sheena McGrellis

Shirley McCafferty

Tina Gregory

Emma Mullan

Professional Practice Consultants

Polly Rowan Hamilton

Rosalind Dunlop

The Board of Directors

Interim Chairperson: John Keers (March 2023)

Honorary Treasurer: Marie Cavanagh

Company Secretary: Joan Davis

Board Members:

Catherine Cairns

Dr LEEANNE O’HARA

Pip JAFFA OBE

Paricia GORDON

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