



Portsmouth Mediation Service
Annual Report 2024/25

Trustees' Report year ending March 2025

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The Trustees present their report and accounts for the year ending 31st March 2025.

Structure Governance and Management

The charity is a company limited by guarantee.

The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law and who served during the year were:

Fiona Armstrong (appointed June 2015)

Philip Winchester (appointed December 2018)

Alan Davis (appointed November 2019)

Paul Hutchings (appointed January 2022)

Wendy May Jacobs (appointed January 2023)

Lisa Wills (appointed March 2025)



Some of the PMS Team & Trustees at a Strategic Planning Meeting.

Trustees are recruited from interested individuals, volunteer mediators and representatives of the community.

None of the trustees has any beneficial interest in the company. All the trustees are members of the company and guarantee to contribute a sum not exceeding £10 for payment of the company's debts and liabilities in the event of winding up.

The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

The charity is managed by the trustees who exercise all the powers of the charity. For the past year, the day-to-day operation of the charity has again been carried out by the Service Manager who reports to the trustees. All policies and strategies are decided by the trustees sitting as a group on a regular basis.

The Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS) operates for the benefit of residents in Portsmouth and for the benefit of social housing residents in the wider Portsmouth area. A substantial proportion of the work of PMS is with Portsmouth City Council.

The trustees have assessed and continue to assess the major risks to which the charity is exposed and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to major risks.

Public Benefit

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefits when reviewing the charity's aims and in planning future activities. The trustees refer to public benefit throughout this report.

Vision

PMS aims to operate as a 'Centre of Excellence and Influence' in seeing Portsmouth established as a Restorative City.

Mission

Through a journey of assessment, mediation, and restorative practice, we will partner with other envisioned people and organisations to help seek the peace and prosperity of a 'Restorative Portsmouth'.

Charitable Activities Achievement and Performance

As Chair of Portsmouth Mediation Service, it is my privilege to share an overview from the trustees of our activities over the past year. This has been a year of significant strategic development and consolidation, with our efforts focused on strengthening our organisational foundation while continuing to deliver vital services to our community.

Strategic Planning and Governance

A major achievement this year was the unanimous approval of our comprehensive Strategic Planning document, developed through extensive consultation with trustees, staff, and our strategic advisor Maureen Chaffe. This document provides a clear roadmap for our future development and establishes the four pillars of our strategic vision: Finance & Operational Stability, Partnerships, Widening Our Impact, and Training, Development, Health & Well-being.

The trustees undertook a dedicated away day in April 2024, where we engaged in restorative practices to align our vision and strengthen our collective commitment to making Portsmouth a truly restorative city. This collaborative approach has enhanced our governance and deepened our understanding of our individual and collective responsibilities.

Service Delivery and Staff Development

Despite facing the significant challenge of saying farewell to Tina after 18 years of dedicated service to the charity, we successfully managed the transition through careful planning and consultation, ensuring continuity of services while supporting staff through change.

Our expansion into Winchester (as part of the Solent Restorative Partnership) continues to develop positively, with new volunteers joining the team and strengthening our regional presence. This growth reflects our commitment to extending restorative practices beyond Portsmouth's boundaries.

Financial Stability and Sustainability

The trustees are pleased to report continued financial strength, with our accounts maintaining the healthy target balances. Our increasingly diversified income streams, including family mediation services and training programmes, continue to support our charitable objectives while ensuring financial resilience.

The trustees approved appropriate staff pay increases for 2025, recognising the valuable contributions of our team and maintaining our commitment to fair employment practices.

Training and Development

Our training programmes continue to generate income while spreading restorative practices throughout the community. We recognise training as both a core service and a means of building capacity for restorative approaches across Portsmouth. The trustees have identified this as a key area for future development.

Community Partnerships and Impact

Our collaboration with local agencies, including the NHS and various community groups, demonstrates our commitment to integrated service delivery. We continue to work closely with Portsmouth City Council and youth organisation partners to address antisocial behaviour and promote community cohesion.

The Waterfront Restorative Approaches Partnership (WRAP) continues to provide valuable feedback and community engagement, while our assessment service maintains its vital role in supporting those in need of mediation services.

Looking Forward

As we move into 2025-26, the trustees remain committed to our vision of helping to establish Portsmouth as a restorative city. Our strategic plan provides clear direction for expanding our impact while maintaining the high-quality, person-centred services that define our approach.

We are exploring opportunities to strengthen our partnerships, enhance our training offerings, and develop new approaches to community engagement. The potential for integrating wellbeing support into our services reflects our holistic understanding of community needs.

Acknowledgements

The trustees would like to acknowledge and thank the dedication and hard work of our Service Manager Steve Rolls, our staff team, volunteers, project partnerships, and supporters of Portsmouth Mediation Service.

Our collective efforts continue to make a tangible difference in the lives of many. The completion of our strategic planning process, combined with our strong financial position and committed team, positions us well for continued growth and impact.

As we look to the future, I am confident that our strategic approach will further strengthen our ability to serve our communities and advance the cause of restorative justice. Thank you for your continued support and belief that together, we are building a foundation for increased peace and championing Portsmouth as a Restorative City.

Should you be inspired to become part of our team as a volunteer or a trustee, we would be delighted to provide further information.

Paul Hutchings
Chair of the Board of Trustees
On behalf of the Board of Trustees



The Restorative Game is a Long One!

"We always say that Restorative is a long game... but the years go quickly! That personally feels very true for me as I celebrate a decade with PMS. Where have those years gone! It's funny I still feel like the new boy."

As I begin to write this, my 10th manager's annual report, I thought it would be interesting to revisit what I wrote down in my first update back in the 2015/16 report. I have cut and paste some of it here below in italics:

Sometime during last year someone remarked to me that 'Mediation' was becoming an outdated word and that the future was 'Restorative'. As a team we have all embraced this new Restorative Pathway and together, we have begun to embed a restorative culture within our service. In simple terms we are always looking to help repair relationships and facilitate reconciliation and restoration when conflict and disputes arise. We are seeking to live and work restoratively by fostering positive relationships with our colleagues, clients and partners. Further on in these pages you will find our Values & Vision, you will see that we are looking to play a central role in seeing this great city Portsmouth become known as a Restorative City.

Portsmouth Mediation Service is always looking for a 'joined up approach' in helping the people of Portsmouth, we believe that good relationship and partnership with other agencies and voluntary organisations is essential in meeting the various needs of our communities. This Annual report highlights some of the innovative work we are doing with our local schools, the Portsmouth Police, the University and Faith Communities.

So often in our journey we can't see what has been achieved we can only see what remains to be done, so It's always good to have those points where we pause, look over our shoulder and recognise and indeed celebrate some of the success stories.

It's good to read again that excerpt from the 2015/16 Annual report and appreciate how PMS through successive teams have developed and embedded a restorative culture into the way we do things. We have a motivated and empowered team who find purpose, identity and belonging in the work they do. We focus less on procedures and policies and more on people and relationships. We don't always get things right and our human nature can surface in the wrong way, but we are determined to work at creating positive and productive relationships. This relational unity and shared vision helps PMS to punch well above its weight.

It's also interesting to read how we were set on developing a collaborative approach with other partners as the most effective way to serve the citizens of our city. Ten years later and we are proud and privileged to be engaged in so many positive working relationship with other great groups and organisations. It's a foundational restorative idea that Together we are Stronger. You can see in the pages of this report that nowhere is this truer than in the growing relationships of the Waterfront Restorative Approaches Partnership (WRAP).

For me personally these past 10 years have had a huge impact on my thinking and the way I operate in my various roles. When I first walked through the doors of PMS, I had no idea that I would soon become a restorative convert and that would rapidly progress into being a champion and ambassador of the Restorative Approach. It's taken many years for me to finally see and understand that punishment and punitive action do not help repair the harm, hurt or the lives of people and yet as a society we persist in the thought that a Big Stick will somehow make people behave. Our default is to expel and exclude people who break the rules which is

why at PMS our restorative mission to bring about understanding means that at every opportunity we try and help keep people inside of family and community, because when you throw them out, they do worse things! I heard a quote recently at A Band of Brothers Meeting, an old African proverb.

"A child that is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."

PMS along with our local youth organisations and others understand the importance for young people to be nurtured and encouraged in a place where they belong.

So this remarkable restorative journey continues to meander across every sphere of Portsmouth city life, there are like me countless new restorative converts and champions who have all caught hold of this transforming vision. I continually meet people who PMS have helped to envision and equip with restorative skills, who are leading lights in their organisations and communities – it seems to me that incrementally and cumulatively, bit by bit Portsmouth is becoming a better place to live and work.

I want to thank again every member of our team and all of our friends, partners and supporters who are connected with us on this restorative journey. Together we are truly making a difference.



I also would like also to make a special mention of thanks to Tina (pictured centre above at her leaving lunch) who after 15 years of great service to the people of Portsmouth stepped down from her role as an Assessment officer. I am very pleased to say that despite her relinquishing this position she continues to bring a wealth of wisdom to the new journey that is unfolding in Winchester with the Solent Restorative Partnership. You can read more about this exciting initiative in the next pages of this report.

Steve Rolls
Manager



From Winchester Mediation to Restorative Partnership

Here Jess Hudson formerly a volunteer with Winchester Mediation Service (WMS) reflects on the recent restorative developments in Winchester.

Founded in 2002 Winchester Mediation Service (WMS) sought to assist the residents of Winchester and District with disputes by utilising mediation with a dedicated team of mediators and trustees. Over 22 years WMS successfully helped to create happier communities, build relationships, prevent homelessness, prevent job loss and spread information about the usefulness and potential of mediation with a range of clients and referrers such as Citizens Advice, Hampshire County Council, local businesses, the police (through RS) and private individuals. Although WMS did have some significant successes, mediation is only one tool in the 'restorative toolbox'. The possibility to provide a service to Winchester, Basingstoke and the surrounding area that encompassed the success WMS had seen with mediation whilst utilising further restorative principles was a brilliant opportunity.



Jess is pictured here with Mike (left) who was also a former volunteer Mediator with WMS.

Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS) had seen significant success by approaching disputes with restorative principles and skills, one of which being mediation, to help to not only resolve the dispute in front of the parties but to provide the tools to resolve and prevent disputes escalating and thereby helping to foster happier communities without the need for frequent intervention through means such as mediation. This new approach encompassing not just mediation, but also restorative justice is one that all of the members of WMS were keen to see applied to Winchester and the surrounding areas and is one which the members of SRP are very excited to see develop.

Due to various difficulties WMS sadly closed in November 2024, however this made way for a new initiative with a fresh approach, and so the Solent Restorative Partnership (SRP) was formed supported by the trustees and mediators of WMS and envisioned by Steve Rolls, the Service Manager for PMS. SRP helps individuals, families, workplaces and the local community to resolve conflict with a compassionate, impartial and future-focused approach to help people repair harm, restore trust and build stronger relationships.

Since its launch, SRP has experienced great support from former members of WMS with several new mediators joining SRP to continue restorative practice in the local community. SRP recently hosted a coffee morning at Rick Stein's in Winchester high street which was well supported by the PMS, local community, referrers and local charities. SRP has also had great uptake in terms of its community outreach, workshops presentations and restorative training events. Multiple meetings with the police and local education establishments, such as the University of Winchester, have already taken place and interest and bookings are rolling in from Citizens Advice, local schools, the police, local businesses and more. Training courses and talks have also been delivered to the SRP team, such as by John Swindell (Restorative Consultant & Trainer), which have all been incredibly informative and thoroughly enjoyed. Overall, all of the volunteers at SRP have been blown away by the support and interest from the local community.



From left to right the new dynamic team that are spearheading the new SRP in Winchester, Nathalie, Lili, Jess, Mike and Tina

SRP has built on WMS's grassroots legacy, expanding it into a broader restorative ecosystem. With deeper community partnerships, new services, and a growing team and ongoing support from PMS and the local community SRP is well on its way to fulfilling its aim of transforming conflict into connection and delivering a meaningful and impactful service to the local Winchester community.



Jess Hudson

The Solent Restorative Partnership is a trading style of Portsmouth Mediation Service (registered charity no 1061569) (registered company no 3258327) who is the controller for the purposes of Data Protection.

A Restorative Journey with CPAR & The NHS

We're Nadiya and Laura, seconded from Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS), we began our CPAR journey with the NHS during September 2024, focusing on the issue of health inequalities.

Funded by NHS England, the Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) programme empowers voluntary sector organisations to tackle health inequalities in their communities. It supports these groups by helping them recruit, train, and mentor local researchers - equipping them to carry out meaningful, community-led research. The insights gathered are then shared with decision-makers at both local and regional levels to influence positive change.

We're Nadiya and Laura from Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS), and we began our CPAR journey with the NHS on 25th September 2024, focusing on the issue of health inequalities. At PMS, we deal with conflict every day - and we've seen firsthand how deeply it affects people's health. Initially, we explored several possible research questions, but we kept coming back to one that felt both personal and urgent:

"Is conflict a health inequality?"

For many of the people we work with, conflict is a constant in their lives. It becomes normalised - just something to endure. But the stress, anxiety, and breakdown of relationships that come with ongoing conflict can severely impact both mental and physical health. In short, people aren't thriving - they're just surviving.



Pictured here in the middle is Samantha Belfrage the Research Development Lead at Public Health - Portsmouth, on her left is Laura & Nadiya on her right is Roshni and Emily, CPAR researchers from Spark Community Space

To carry out our research, we received expert training from the University of Reading and the Scottish Community Development Centre, learning about research methodology, data analysis, and how to drive actionable change. With their support, we used a mix of methods - interviews, surveys, a writing workshop, and a focus group - to gather a wide range of perspectives.

What we uncovered confirmed our suspicions - but the scale and severity of the health issues linked to conflict were even more profound than we expected. Some of the stories we heard were deeply moving, and at times, heartbreaking.

We're now preparing to share our findings with CPAR NHS England and other community groups on 25th September in London. We'll also present our work locally in Portsmouth this November, alongside fellow CPAR researchers from Sparks Community and Work Better Innovations.

Watch this space - we're only just getting started.

If you're curious about our research, have questions, or want to get involved, we'd love to hear from you:



✉️ nadiya@portsmouthmediationservice.org.uk ✉️ laura@portsmouthmediationservice.org.uk

Focussed on Fair Process

"For this year's Annual Report rather than contributing an article on how well things are going (specifically with regards to the Restorative City vision) I thought that I would share some reflections on why we, at PMS, are so restorative focused. To provide a bases for that I want to start by making two statements."

Statement 1: Punitive is generally a very inefficient deterrent with regards to preventing "Wrongdoing".

Statement 2: Generally Wrongdoing is seen as an act that breaks the predetermined "Laws" or "Rules" in a community, organisation, workplace, club, sports group, families, schools etc.

Outside of the Judicial system the Rules are usually defined in various policies and values. There might be policies regarding work output, health and safety, gender, eating and drinking, use of drugs, use of language, bullying, timekeeping, holiday entitlement, etc. Assuming that the laws and rules are determined by well-meaning intelligent people (which they usually are) who have both power and authority, why are they not as effective as they should be?

Expecting someone to stay within the boundaries of those "Rules or Laws" makes 4 very important, but often wrong, assumptions:

- 1) They Understand them
- 2) They are a Rational person
- 3) They are a Moral person
- 4) And they have the Resilience to comply

Those assumptions might be right for some people but the mistake we make is to assume they are all right for all of the people all of the time, so I want to make some suggestions as to why that might not be the case.

- 1) **They Understand:**
 - The first mistake would be that everyone has read the policies and rules.
 - The second is in assuming that they are written in a language and a way that everyone can understand.
 - The third is assuming everyone's understanding of "Right Behaviour" is the same. Often our understanding of right behaviour and our responses to perceived wrong is formed by our informative years and our life experiences. For some shouting or violence or perceived selfish behaviour is normative and might even be a defensive response.
- 2) **They are Rational:**
 - We assume that rational offenders are deterred from future misbehaviour because they don't enjoy getting caught and suffering the penalty, so they make a pain/gain calculation. This is only effective if the pain is bigger than the gain so there is a need for escalating punishments according to the gains. Also not everyone will have the same perception as to what is pain and what is gain.

3) **They are Moral:**

- Of course not everyone's morals, ethics or values are the same and again just as in assumption 1 our life experiences will have shaped what we think as morally or ethically correct.
- Also the prevailing culture of the group is a major factor in our behaviour. Social compliance can be a force for good or bad. Only last week I was with a group of people who work in education and they were discussing how the "covid isolation" generation of pupils are really lacking a moral, ethical perspective. That is because of the isolation gap so there was very little positive social engagement, and life became very "me centric".
- If the person is both Amoral & Irrational, they are immune to moral appeals or rational disincentives, so the last resort is often Isolation/separation or incapacitation.

4) **Resilience:**

- Training or time is spent in equipping individuals with the resilience to deal with wrongdoing or to have the capacity to resist the pressure or temptation to do wrong is so important, however even when they have had some training it is wrong to assume that they will then respond like a pre-programmed computer. We are not machines or cogs in a wheel, that mechanistic world view very flawed and outdated.
- Life is organic and is constantly changing and the changes or influences in our lives are often not predictable. Recently I was in a workplace meeting with 8 people, and I asked them to each mention one thing that was going really well for them and one thing that was not, in every case the thing that was causing them most angst was not work related. Those, generally unknown concerns greatly affect our resilience and emotional capacity.

At the start of every intervention we need to facilitate moral focused, interactive conversations with the Wrongdoer and the Affected parties. This needs to be in a safe environment, where empathy, understanding and solution finding can be mutually agreed and jointly implemented. That will then be seen as a "Fair Process" by all parties and will enable them to continue interacting together, perhaps tentatively at first, as trust grows and hurt dissipates.

This should be the starting point whenever wrongdoing takes place and is foundational in all restorative practices.

John Swindell
PMS Restorative Consultant & Trainer



That's a WRAP!

The Waterfront Restorative Approaches Partnership (WRAP) is a collaboration of local agencies, charities and residents who have a vision to see the Southsea summer seafront become a safer place for our young people and their families.



In response to recurring issues of anti-social behaviour during summer months at Portsmouth's Hotwalls and Camber Dock, Portsmouth City Council (PCC) partnered with Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS) in 2022 to develop a restorative strategy. This led to the formation of a collaborative group that brought together local stakeholders, businesses, residents, and youth organisations. By 2024, the initiative expanded across the Southsea seafront and was renamed the Waterfront Restorative Approaches Partnership (WRAP).



WRAP works closely with Operation Nautical and key youth organisations - including Motiv8, Urbond, Pompey in the Community, Tall Ships Trust and Andrew Simpson Centre - to provide outreach, engagement, and positive activities for young people. Successful initiatives, such as sailing at Camber Dock, have helped reduce anti-social behaviour by offering meaningful alternatives and reclaiming public space.





With continued support from city agencies, police, local residents, and businesses, WRAP is building momentum and aims to maintain a consistent, unified approach to youth engagement, especially during the upcoming summer holidays.



PMS 6 Day Online Community Mediation Training Course

Sue Austin who along with Jo helps to spearhead our Online Community Mediation Training Course gives an update and overview on its ever-growing success.

In 2016, we developed a bespoke 6-day Community Mediation Training course and became a registered training centre with OCN London. This accreditation enabled us to deliver high-quality mediation skills training to the Portsmouth community, supporting individuals in their existing roles and helping us recruit and prepare volunteers for our mediation service.

Originally delivered in person, the course was rapidly adapted for online delivery in response to the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020. Thanks to our innovative team, we transitioned the full programme to a virtual format within just a few weeks. This not only ensured continuity during a challenging time, but also increased accessibility and reach, allowing us to engage participants from outside the local area.



Our PMS Volunteers are at the heart of our mediation service, and when effectively trained, they become one of our most valuable assets. They bring not only their time and commitment, but also a range of life experiences, perspectives, and interpersonal skills that enrich our work and enable us to better serve our community. To date, we provide annual training for Surrey Mediation volunteers, along with many professionals from diverse sectors who wish to enhance or start their mediation skills. Our training has fostered strong networks - WhatsApp groups, professional collaborations, and lasting friendships often form during the sessions due to our ethos of relationships being key in everything we do, including training. Feedback from participants continues to be overwhelmingly positive. Some examples of this follow:

"This training has given me the tools to manage conflict more confidently - both professionally and personally."

"I really valued the interactive exercises and the supportive learning environment."

"Not only did I gain skills, I also built connections with like-minded people I'm still in touch with"

We remain committed to delivering engaging, high-quality training that empowers individuals and strengthens communities. (Pictured above Sue, Jo and Nadiya planning for training.)

PMS Family Mediation – Reaching Out in Portsmouth

Chloe Evans from our Family Mediation Team reports on another successful year.

PMS's family mediation service has made big strides since 2021 by:

- developing the service to be run by family mediators accredited by the Family Mediation Council
- becoming an affiliate of National Family Mediation (NFM)
- working within NFM's legal aid contract to deliver legally aided mediation

Over the last year we have continued to grow and develop PMS's family mediation service, keeping a restorative element within our service. We are dealing with on average over 320 queries per year, it seems to increase each year, and this includes clients who come back to us. Since we started in 2021, we have helped over 500 families with mediation.

We are continuing our relationships with the Portsmouth Family Hubs, providing a short triage appointment for families and support workers in each of the hubs on a monthly basis. We are also reaching out to develop relationships with domestic abuse agencies so we can help all clients with mediation if it is a safe environment for them. Our aim at Portsmouth Family mediation is to reach out to as many agencies as possible to send the message about mediation, if more people access it as early as possible, we can reduce the risk of conflict children experience in parental separation, with this in mind, we have also reached out to Portsmouth schools.



We have welcomed Lynn Jackson (*pictured right*) one of our Family mediators who has joined the team. Lynn is a qualified solicitor who has moved into mediation. She is very experienced and a great asset to us. Family mediation involves significant administration to handle enquiries and manage cases. This is especially so for legal aid cases as they are subject to audit by the legal aid agency.

We are constantly reviewing our processes so that we aren't overwhelmed with administration to the detriment of mediation work. We are looking to bring in a trainee mediator shortly who can help us with our administration and who we can help to become accredited.

Treasurer's Report

An independent inspection of our accounts has been conducted by Morris Crocker Accountants. Please refer to the separate 'Report of the Trustees and Unaudited Financial Statements' document for full information.

From a financial perspective, there are no Trustee interests, and none benefit financially from the service.

The Board of Trustees has continued to retain oversight of financial matters at their bi-monthly meetings, reviewing spending, day to day running and longer-term projections of financial matters. This includes ensuring that monies held are sufficient to uphold the service's reserves policy, namely that non-designated funds are maintained at a level of between three- and six-months expenditure.

In the past year, additional use of Xero accounting system has been used to identify both income and expenditure on individual projects undertaken to oversee each project's financial viability.

Whilst it is a 'snapshot' of the situation on a particular day, at the end of the past financial year (March 2025), monies held in our current account totalled just under £26,000, a further £56,000 was held in our savings account. Whilst £30,000 of that is identified for specific projects, the remaining £26,000 are general savings/reserves for the charity.

Here below are the financial headlines for the past 5 years, this is the first time that the PMS turnover has exceeded a quarter of a million pounds. After several loss-making years prior to Covid our reserves are now beginning to look much healthier.

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Turnover	250,626	229,975	183,626	141,455	141,097
Expenditure	214,324	207,507	169,822	136,433	138,009
Net Income	36,302	22,468	13,804	5,022	3,088

Phil Winchester
Trustee & Treasurer



The Hidden Cost of Workplace Conflict

Here Peter Higgins a professional and highly successful commercial and workplace mediator reflects on navigating some of the modern day complexities of Workplace Mediation in the UK.

Workplace conflict is an unavoidable reality for most organisations, yet its mishandling carries significant financial and human costs. While **mediation** offers a powerful, constructive alternative to formal grievance procedures, its implementation in the UK workplace is not without its difficulties.

The financial toll of unresolved grievances is stark. According to a comprehensive report by **ACAS**, "Estimating the costs of workplace conflict," published on **May 11, 2021**, workplace conflict costs UK organisations an estimated **£28.5 billion annually**. This staggering figure equates to roughly **£1,000 per employee**. A significant portion of this sum, £11.9 billion, stems from resignations, with disciplinary dismissals accounting for another £10.5 billion, and sickness absence adding £2.2 billion. Even a single formal grievance carries a substantial price tag, costing businesses an average of **£951** in management time. These figures unequivocally underscore the urgent need for effective, early intervention for resolving conflict.

Despite the clear benefits of mediation – including its speed, cost-effectiveness, and its unique potential to restore working relationships – several factors can hinder its success. One primary challenge is **resistance to participation**. Employees or managers may be unwilling to engage due to fear of retaliation, a lack of trust in the impartiality of the process, or a preconceived belief that a satisfactory resolution is simply unattainable.

Crucially, the **timing of intervention** significantly impacts the success of mediation. Often, mediation is unfortunately viewed as a **last resort**, a tool to be deployed only when conflicts have escalated to a critical point. By this stage, relationships may have severely deteriorated, grievances or counter grievances initiated, and positions having become deeply entrenched. When mediation is introduced so late, emotions are often running extremely high, trust is at an all-time low, and the willingness to compromise may be severely diminished, making resolution far more challenging.

However, evidence strongly suggests that **earlier intervention** through mediation yields far more successful outcomes. When introduced in the initial stages of a dispute, before grievances become formalised or deeply rooted, mediation can effectively prevent escalation. It can also preserve vital working relationships and significantly mitigate the associated financial and human costs. This proactive stance not only dramatically increases the likelihood of a positive resolution but also helps to cultivate and maintain a healthier, more productive workplace environment for everyone involved.

Power imbalances present another hurdle. In disputes between, for example, a manager and a subordinate, the subordinate may feel intimidated or coerced, undermining the perceived fairness of the process. Effective mediators need to possess the acute skill to recognise and address these subtle dynamics, ensuring all parties genuinely have an equal voice and feel heard. The **emotional intensity** inherent in workplace conflicts can also severely impede rational discussion. Feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment often run high, making it difficult for parties to focus on problem-solving rather than past grievances. Mediators need to

be adept at managing these intense emotions and skilfully steering the conversation towards constructive dialogue aimed at future solutions.

Furthermore, **confidentiality concerns** frequently arise. Parties may understandably fear that sensitive information shared during mediation could be used against them in future proceedings or informal discussions. Maintaining a robust "confidentiality bubble" around the mediation process is therefore crucial for fostering a truly safe environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their concerns openly and honestly.

Finally, the **lack of mediation skills** among internal personnel can be a significant barrier. Not all managers or HR professionals are trained mediators, and attempting to mediate without adequate, specialised training can lead to unintended, costly outcomes. These might include accusations of bias, a failure to properly address underlying systemic issues, or even exacerbating the conflict further.

Portsmouth Mediation Service has assisted a number of organisations in helping resolve workplace disputes. By embracing a proactive approach to conflict and leveraging the power of early mediation, businesses can unlock the true potential of this valuable tool, mitigating the substantial costs of conflict and fostering a more harmonious and ultimately productive working environment.

Peter Higgins
Commercial & Workplace Mediator



Police Partnership



PMS In Portsmouth & The SRP in Winchester Support our local police with referrals for low level Anti-Social Behaviour

Restorative Theory & Practice - Hand in Hand

In October 2023 Katie reached out to Portsmouth Mediation Service through the contact form on their Web Site, little did she know what that small step of faith would lead to.

I have been working for Portsmouth Mediation and Assessment Service (PAS) for nearly two years. Prior to my current role as an Assessment Officer, I worked in a secondary school supporting children with disabilities and challenging behaviour. At the same time, I held a second job working with children who have severe autism.

After a couple of years in these roles, I decided to pursue a degree in Health and Social Care at university. I reached out to Steve Rolls through the PMAS website, requesting a "coffee and a chat." I had previously met Steve over ten years ago while working at Highbury College, where I had the pleasure of attending a restorative training course led by Steve and Jenni Wessels. My then-supervisor, Debi Copeland, had encouraged me to attend the course.

Training can equip you with tools to improve your professional practice and to critically assess and handle complex situations, but certain personal qualities cannot be taught. Both Steve and Debi recognised these qualities in me. During our coffee meeting, I shared with Steve my desire

for a career change and a more challenging role aligned with my degree. Unexpectedly, he offered me the role of Assessment Officer, supporting Portsmouth City Council tenants experiencing neighbour disputes and the impact of anti-social behaviour. I accepted the role without hesitation.

I then completed a six-day mediation training course through PMS. For the following 18 months, I worked closely with Tina Downie, PMS's longest-serving Assessment Officer. Tina taught me how to approach intense neighbour dispute cases that could feel like "World War 3" with sensitivity and skill, avoiding actions that might escalate the situation. She demonstrated how to bring people together, even when they were reluctant to engage particularly in disputes that had been ongoing for years and where the original cause of conflict may have been forgotten. I am deeply grateful to Tina, who, like Steve and Debi, saw potential in me.



Katie (right) shortly after joining PMS with some of The Team at Landport Housing Office

Currently, I balance full-time university study with a 30-hour work week at PMS. I manage the contract with Portsmouth City Council, helping neighbours communicate their concerns and reach mutually acceptable agreements. Conflict and anti-social behaviour can affect individuals physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially, any one of these can have a serious impact on mental health and wellbeing. A breakdown in neighbourly relations can lead to wider community disconnection. My role is meaningful, and I have seen firsthand the positive impact it can have on individual wellbeing and community cohesion.

Recently, I completed a university essay on how mediation and restorative practices can resolve disputes in communities, housing environments, and among neighbours. For my dissertation next academic year, I plan to focus on the impact of neighbour conflict on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals living in social housing in Portsmouth, and to evaluate how restorative approaches can de-escalate anti-social behaviour.

Every day, I learn something new, both through my work and my studies. This continuous learning helps me connect theory with practice and has given me the confidence to carry out my important role effectively.

**Katie Porter - Assessment Officer
Portsmouth Assessment Service (PAS)**

Together We Are Stronger

Portsmouth Mediation Service (PMS) is not alone in facing up to the challenges of the Mediation world, which is why we so value our close relationship with other community mediation services across the South of England. It is so valuable for our service manager Steve to be able to regularly meet up with the leaders of other mediation services to support each other, share key challenges and together uncover fresh ideas and new solutions.



Pictured here left to right at a meeting in High Wycombe is Anthea the CEO of Alternatives to Conflict (formerly Mediation Bucks) who serve communities in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire. Liz from Catch 22 who heads up the community mediation service for Suffolk Norfolk & Cambridgeshire, Phyllida who is chair of trustee for Alternatives to Conflict and Alice the CEO of Mediation Plus who cover East & West Sussex.

Thank You to Our Friends!

PMS has a weekly online Team Meeting and every month we always come together in person with some food and refreshments. Since we closed our offices to work remotely, we are extremely grateful to our friends and partners who provide us with their meeting room and spaces.



We are very thankful to Kirsty and the team at Motiv8 for making us welcome at their offices



Becki and her brilliant team at Spark Community Space have also been wonderful hosts



Drame and the great people at Urbond have hosted us at their old place and at their smart new premises in the centre of Portsmouth.



Mediation to Stay Married

Before You Walk Away... What If There's Another Way?

They used to laugh over burnt toast. Now, silence stretches longer than any argument ever did.

You don't shout anymore. But you're not solving anything either.

Maybe you've both been wondering - **Is this it? Is divorce the only way out?**

But what if the answer isn't an ending?

What if there's a different path - one which is not therapy or forced into decisions, you're not ready for?

One where someone helps you talk - not as opponents, but as two people who once built a life together and maybe... still could?

Mediation to Stay Married (M2SM)

A space that's private. Neutral. No pressure.

Not counselling. Not court.

Just one small, practical step - before the big, life-altering ones.

Because many couples who separated didn't *want* to give up. They just didn't know how to pull their partner into the conversation in time.

So things slid. Walls grew. And that quiet distance became permanent.

M2SM helps you pause and talk.

What do we really want for our kids?

Do we still have shared dreams - buried somewhere under the stress and routine?

Are we truly done... or just stuck?

Here's How It Works:

Step 1: You start. Confidentially. One of our trained mediators will talk with you, one-on-one.

Step 2: If you're ready to take the next step, we'll reach out to your partner for the same private, no-pressure conversation.

Step 3: If both of you agree, we'll set up a joint session. It's your time, your space to explore what's next - together.

The outcome?

- Maybe one session is enough to reset your course.
- Maybe you agree to keep talking.
- Maybe it's time to seek another kind of help - and we'll guide you there.

But at least you'll have made the decision *together*, from a place of understanding - not frustration or silence.

M2SM isn't about saving every marriage.

It's about giving each couple the chance to make the *right* choice - with clarity and dignity.

Before you leave... talk.

M2SM is a new PMS initiative, inspired by Professional Mediator Kay Day

Portsmouth Mediation Service

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