

## Detailed analysis of Intake Interview Comments Forms.

Scottish family mediation services offer a pre-mediation or 'intake' meeting to individuals contemplating mediation. Whether or not these clients go on to a joint mediation session, feedback forms are sent out between one and four weeks after the intake meeting. During the course of 2001, feedback forms from three of Scotland's largest services, FM West (Glasgow), FM Lothian (Edinburgh) and FM Central Scotland (Stirling and Falkirk), were gathered and analysed. Some of the findings were discussed in an article that appeared in 'Mediation in Practice' (see <http://www.charlieirvinemediation.co.uk/Article%20for%20UK%20College.pdf>)

The following study was written in 2002 and uses a simple form of discourse analysis to understand and categorise answers to a particular open question.

After a number of multiple choice questions, clients were asked 3 open questions about their experience of the individual information meeting, or intake interview. The first of these asked, "**What, if anything, did you find personally helpful about the individual appointment?**"

A large percentage of clients responded to this question with a comment: at FM West, 85 out of 100 (**85%**), at FM Central Scotland, 64 out of 92 (**70%**) and at FM Lothian, 53 out of 72 (**74%**). The comments covered a broad range of impressions, but in order to understand clients' reactions, I have broken them down into eleven categories. It is hoped that these will allow family mediation services to understand what it is that clients get out of the intake interview, and to draw to the attention of policymakers that a simple conversion to mediation is not the only outcome which can be regarded as successful.

Some people's responses fell into more than one category. The categories are:

- 1) **a chance to talk** – this includes the idea of speaking freely, being heard, time to talk, not being alone with my problem. E.g. *"being able to discuss issues with someone who understood those issues", "having the opportunity to express my feelings and given the time to explain the distress experienced by myself and children, during a marriage separation"*
- 2) **qualities of the worker** – including being good at the job, understanding, attitude, listening, being supportive, experience of separation and divorce, sensitivity. E.g. *"the understanding and sensitivity of the situation", "I have always spoken about my problems with my family and friends but speaking to mediation is so far better because they understand what you are going through better than family and friends"*
- 3) **qualities of the service** – including the general response, premises, telephone answering. E.g. *"time to talk. Pleasant room"*
- 4) **information received/explanation given** – e.g. *"clear focus in conveying information about the service and how it operates",*

- 5) **impartiality** – e.g. *“most helpful to me, personally, was that I felt I was listened to in a non-judgemental manner”*
- 6) **confidentiality** – e.g. *“privacy to tell”*
- 7) **being helped to see the other person’s point of view** – e.g. *“mediator had me thinking about how my partner may feel as well”*
- 8) **personal progress as a result of the interview** – this includes the ideas of being helped to confront issues, moving forward, being given a sense of direction or hope for the future e.g. *“it made me face some issues I didn’t want to face”, “I can see a glimmer of light ahead of me now”, “I felt that for the first time in a long time things can move forward in our separation”, “I was depressed beforehand but came out thinking very positive”*
- 9) **focus on children** – e.g. *“it gave me an insight into how my child was feeling about the separation and how her behaviour was not that unusual due to the situation”*
- 10) **reassurance – allaying fears about the Contact Centre or mediation** – e.g. *“Seemed interested in background information and to reassure me that my child would be safe in a contact centre”*
- 11) **awareness of ethnic minority situation** – e.g. *“similar experience of other Asian couples, knowing I’m not alone in this position”*

The number of comments falling into each category is set out in the tables below. There are tables for comments received by FM West, FM Central Scotland and FM Lothian. Only FM Central Scotland broke the results down by gender. The results are broadly similar and suggest that the same trends would be found nationally.

## Analysis of FM West comments

### 85 comments

Category	#people	%
1. Chance to talk	32	40%
2. Qualities of worker – understanding, ability to listen, taking time, knowledge of separation and divorce, objectivity	33	39%
3. Qualities of the service (including premises)	5	6%
4. Information and Explanation	12	15%

<b>5. Impartiality</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>6. Confidentiality</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>7. Chance to consider the perspective of the other parent</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>8. Personal progress as a result of the interview</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>9. Focus on Children</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>10. Reassurance – allaying fears about the Contact Centre or mediation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>11. Awareness of ethnic minority situation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>

### Family Mediation Central – analysis of comments on same question

64 comments (26 male, 38 female)

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<b>Category</b>	<b>#Male</b>	<b>%Male</b>	<b>#Female</b>	<b>%Female</b>	<b>%Total</b>
<b>1. Chance to talk</b>	4	15%	11	29%	<b>23%</b>
<b>2. Qualities of worker – understanding, ability to listen, taking time, knowledge of separation and divorce, objectivity</b>	15	58%	12	32%	<b>42%</b>
<b>3. Qualities of the service (including premises)</b>	4	15%	8	21%	<b>19%</b>
<b>4. Information and Explanation</b>	1	4%	11	29%	<b>19%</b>
<b>5. Impartiality</b>	2	8%	5	13%	<b>11%</b>
<b>6. Confidentiality</b>	1	4%	0	0	<b>2%</b>
<b>7. Chance to consider the perspective of other parent</b>	0	0	1	3%	<b>2%</b>
<b>8. Personal progress as a result of the interview</b>	4	15%	8	21%	<b>19%</b>
<b>9. Focus on Children</b>	3	12%	1	3%	<b>6%</b>

<b>10.</b> Reassurance - allaying fears about Contact Centre or mediation	0	0	2	5%	<b>3%</b>
<b>11.</b> Awareness of ethnic minority situation	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>

## Family Mediation Lothian – analysis of comments on same question

### 53 comments

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<b>Category</b>	<b>#People</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1.</b> Chance to talk	<b>15</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>2.</b> Qualities of worker – understanding, ability to listen, taking time, knowledge of separation and divorce, objectivity	<b>21</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>3.</b> Qualities of the service (including premises)	<b>5</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>4.</b> Information and Explanation	<b>7</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>5.</b> Impartiality	<b>7</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>6.</b> Confidentiality	<b>1</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>7.</b> Chance to consider the perspective of other parent	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>8.</b> Personal progress as a result of the interview	<b>3</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>9.</b> Focus on Children	<b>3</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>10.</b> Reassurance - allaying fears about Contact Centre or mediation	<b>5</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>11.</b> Awareness of ethnic minority situation	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

## *Discussion*

The overwhelming impression from these tables is that what clients appreciate most is the opportunity to talk to someone who understands their situation. The other key finding is the importance of knowing that the person they are talking to is a sensitive, knowledgeable professional who will not take sides. While receiving information and an explanation is also important to clients, it seems to be less significant.

A sizeable group described some kind of personal progress made as a result of the interview. It is important to bear in mind that these forms go out almost immediately after the intake interview to avoid the commencement of mediation itself affecting the results, and so this personal progress can be regarded as an outcome of the intake interview itself, in addition to conversion to mediation. Also of interest is the fact that that, even at the individual interview stage, clients value the worker's impartiality.

The Comments Forms contained many more comments, both in response to the open questions and appended to the multiple choice questions on issues such as domestic abuse and child abuse. I would suggest that the above categories could be refined and used to analyse all of the comments received.

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