

## Difficult Conversations:

### The Role of Mediation in Assisting People with Dementia & their Families

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## What is Mediation?

Mediation is a process in which an impartial and independent third party facilitates communication, negotiation and promotes voluntary decision making by the parties to assist them to reach a mutually acceptable solution

(Mediator's Institute of Ireland MII)



## Development of the Pilot Elder Mediation Project

- Partnership between The Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Mediation Northside
- Plans commenced in early 2009 with a steering group established
- Organised Elder Mediation World Summit and Symposium in June 2009
- Trained 7 existing volunteer mediators – September 2009
- Role out of pilot project in 2010 (with no additional funding)



## Mediation Northside



mediation  
northside





**At the Elder Mediation International Summit and Symposium, Dublin June 2009**

Maurice O'Connell – CEO The Alzheimer Society of Ireland  
 Judy McCann Beranger – Elder Mediation International Network  
 Colin Daly – Managing Solicitor Northside Community Law Centre



## Rationale for the Pilot Project

- Older people and their families face difficult decisions as they age
- Families often feel burdened by responsibility and by conflicts regarding differing views of care plans
- Services consistently report family conflict is a major source of stress for carers and has a huge negative impact on the quality of life of the person with dementia
- Mediators have the necessary experience and knowledge to determine the most effective approach for the family to move forward



## Training for the Volunteer Mediators

54 hours of training completed by 7 volunteer mediators covering topics such as:

- Introduction to Dementia
- Understanding Perspectives – the person with dementia and the family
- Communication and the Person with Dementia
- Advocacy
- Power Balancing
- Ethical Issues
- Grief and Loss
- Elder Abuse
- Community Support Services
- Legal Issues



## Our Team of Volunteer Mediators



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## How did the Elder Mediation Service work?

- Referrals were open to families living with dementia and a limited number where dementia was not the issue
- Most of the referrals came from the ASI through advertising the pilot locally amongst our services
- A screening panel met regularly to assess the appropriateness of new referrals and review existing cases
- Mediation Northside managed the pre mediation phase and set up the mediations
- Steering group meet regularly to discuss the issues arising out of the pilot

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## Referrals to the Service

- Total of 11 referrals/enquiries to the service
- Dementia was involved in all but one referral
- Advocacy Officer involved in 2 of the cases
- 4 cases went through to full mediation
- 4 cases – a significant amount of time was spent in pre mediation but did not progress beyond this stage
- 6 people availed of conflict coaching

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## Unique Features of the Mediation Service

DEMENTIA  
RIGHTS  
making your voice heard

**Advocacy** - where appropriate, cases were referred to the Dementia Rights Advocacy Service to offer support to the person with dementia throughout the mediation process

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## Link between Mediation & Advocacy

- We wanted to promote the voice of the person with dementia throughout the mediation process
- All cases involved in the mediation services were referred to the advocacy service
- In 2 cases, the advocate supported the person with person to ensure they was represented throughout the mediation process
- The advocates role meant that the views and wishes of the person with dementia were expressed where they may previously have gone unsaid



## Unique Features of the Mediation Service



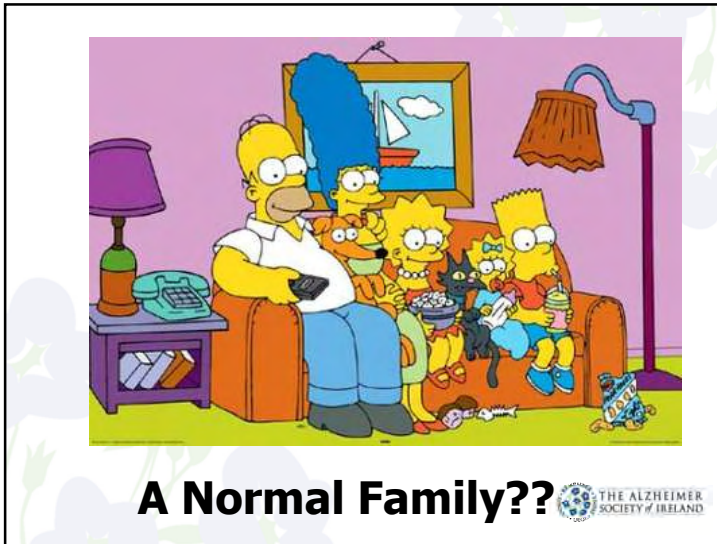
**Conflict Coaching** - offered to all family members to help them manage the disagreement more effectively



## Role of Conflict Coaching

- Conflict coaching was offered to all families who contacted the service
- In some cases it was not possible to bring the family to mediation. However, we offered the family conflict coaching to help them manage the disagreement more effectively
- Conflict coaching is a structured process that helps people on a one to one basis, to develop or enhance their skills, knowledge and competencies, to effectively engage in and manage interpersonal conflict

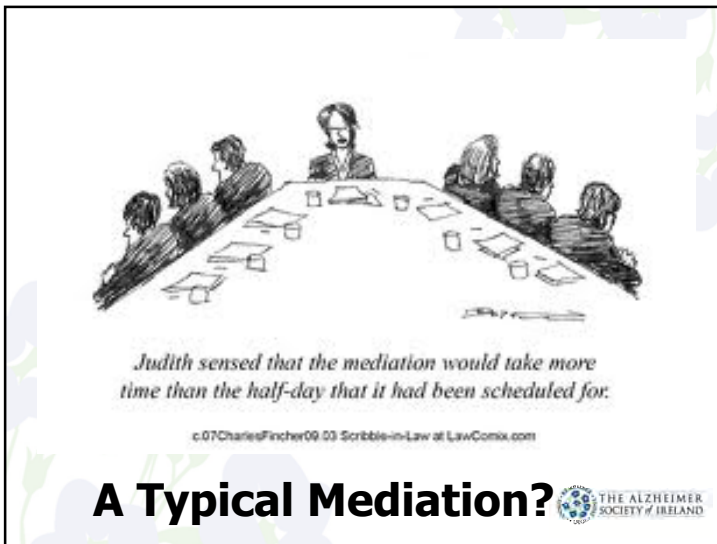




### Issues that Have Arisen

- Families not in agreement about their loved ones care
- Grief, denial and family dynamics all play a strong role
- Intergenerational conflict
- People struggle with care planning decisions that need to be made
- Communication has completely broken down
- Legal and financial issues

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### Benefits of Elder Mediation

- Mediation has helped to repair some damaged sibling relationships
- Encourages uninvolved family members to become involved again
- Provided a safe environment for people to focus their energy in reaching solutions to their disputes
- Promoted communication and cooperation
- Introduced families to greater supports
- Allowed people to take control of their decisions and actions

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## Challenges faced by the Pilot



## Dementia Specific Challenges

- In early-stage dementia, it is good practice or acceptable for the person with dementia to be involved in the mediation if the mediator believes the individual has good decision-making ability with only occasional lapses
- In later stage dementia, it is not appropriate for the person to be involved directly with the mediation. However, they could be supported by an advocate.



## Evaluation of the Pilot Project



## Themes from the Pilot Project

- The complex dynamics of family conflict & the impact of dementia poses many challenges for mediation;
- Mediation raises ethical questions around the involvement or lack of involvement of the person with dementia;
- The benefits of partnership between diverse organizations to develop innovative services;
- Sustainability, efficiency and the most appropriate model of mediation are all important questions that need to be raised in order to meet the needs of those involved



## Recommendations

Mediation  
Training  
Empowerment  
Service Development  
Influencing



## Thank You! For More Information

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