Chapter 4

VICTIM-OFFENDER MEDIATION IN SWEDEN

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1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF VICTIM-OFFENDER MEDIATION IN SWEDEN

In Sweden, the use of mediation emerged and developed spontaneously in several locations across the country. The initial projects started in 1987 in two cities (i.e. Hudiksvall and Soln/Sundbyberg). One of these projects was initiated by the police, the other by a volunteer organisation for former prison inmates and their families. During the 1990s, a number of mediation projects started in different parts of the country, for the most part under the responsibility of the municipalities. Both the objectives and the forms taken by the projects varied.

In 1998, a national organisation was founded – the Swedish Association for Mediation1. The organisation’s objective was to work for the development and dissemination of the use of mediation as a method of conflict resolution in Sweden. The organisation’s primary focus has been directed at the use of Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) in connection with crimes committed by young offenders.

The same year, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ2) was commissioned by the Government to initiate a trial project using mediation in connection with young offenders. The Government felt that the mediation was an important issue and that work in this area should be developed. The National Council for Crime Prevention was to follow and co-ordinate the projects included in the trial project and evaluate the project

1 Svenska föreningen för medling.
2 Brottsförebyggande Rådet.
Itself. No particular requirements were made of the projects other than that they should primarily deal with young offenders, preferably youths between fifteen and seventeen years of age, and that participation in mediation should be voluntary for both victim and offender. The projects were also to be conducted in a way that was consistent with the parties’ right to personal integrity. Different types of mediation project were encouraged in order to provide as broad a basis as possible. In collaboration with the Committee on Crime Prevention, and an inspector appointed by the Government, the National Council for Crime Prevention was to choose the mediation projects that would be included in the trial and was to distribute funding to these projects.

In total, the trial included 32 different projects, which conducted a total of 400 mediations during the year of 1997. The evaluation describes the different phases that characterised the initiation of these mediation projects. These were divided into six separate stages:

1. The conception phase – the initiative for starting the projects usually comes from public employees, such as police officers or social workers who come into contact with young offenders and crime victims in the course of their everyday work.

2. Establishing support for the project – this phase involves the dissemination of information to politicians and other local decisions makers, and funding is sought to initiate the project.

3. The organisational phase – the project is organised and collaborations are established between relevant parties. This phase often involves someone being employed to retain overall responsibility for the project. The project is adapted to existing practical conditions in the form of funding, time available and levels of commitment to the project. A large part of this work involves looking for ways to attract mediation cases to the project.

4. The execution phase – the practical work of conducting mediations begins. Most commonly this starts with simple cases, such as shoplifting and vandalism. With increasing levels of experience, the direction of the project takes form and routines begin to become established.

5. The operational phase – at this stage, the form of the project has become established and mediations have been conducted for a substantial period of time.

6. The maintenance phase – by this point mediation has become an established operation with fixed routines. The project is known about and is utilised by several different organisations. However, one common

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3 The Council is a research institution subordinated to the Swedish Government. Its major task is to work for crime prevention through research about the criminological field and supply the Government, the judicial system and the public with this knowledge.