

UNITE

UNITE Mediation, Conciliation and Training Service

The UNITE mediation service has been helping people solve disputes for more than 10 years. Disputes over noise, pets, boundaries, anti-social behaviour and parking have all been handled by the services.

North-East volunteers have just completed a training course (part of a special project funded by Connecting Communities Plus) which means they can now mediate and help neighbours resolve their disputes. The project focused on training members of minority ethnic communities and community wardens to be volunteer mediators. Newly-trained volunteers are just about to go out on their first case visits to people involved in neighbourhood disputes, including disputes in Hartlepool.

A similar course was completed in July last year. This project was funded by the Commission for Racial Equality and volunteers have successfully been working in the community since then.

Two recently trained volunteers are Sarah Harris and Mohammad Zaferullah (known as Zafar), who both currently live in Hartlepool. Zafar enjoyed mediating so much he has since joined UNITE as a paid staff member.

Development officer Zafar said: "After finishing my masters degree at Teesside University I was looking for work. I heard about the UNITE course and thought I would give it a try." "I took to it well, I love the variety of my job, meeting and helping many different people."

UNITE mediators act as go-betweens in neighbourly disputes, they then set up face-to-face meetings where people can sit down and talk together, and with the mediators help, work out an arrangement that everyone is happy with. Mediators don't give advice or tell people what to do, it is the parties themselves who make all decisions.

UNITE is a Community Legal Services Quality-marked organisation and provides a free and confidential service to residents. Anyone wanting more information about UNITE or who would like to join the team of volunteers, should contact (01642) 311633 or visit www.unite-mediation.org.