

Helping families move forward ‘future proof’ - *Isabel Aldiss*



“What I really enjoy about Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) is the difference you can make to families. People come to us, sometimes with a very emotional mindset and it’s very satisfying to see them move forward,” says mediator Isabel Aldiss.

“There may be tears in meetings, sometimes there may be apologies; I’ve seen people hug one another at the end. Not all mediations go that way but if we can get parents at least to a

point where they can communicate and that helps them get through a difficult change process, then being part of that change is awesome.”

Isabel worked in HR and in quality assurance for the New Zealand College of Midwives before studying for a post graduate diploma in mediation at Massey University, followed by a Masters in counselling at Auckland University.

Her extensive counselling experience includes working with adolescents and trauma relating to domestic violence, traumatic grief and loss. She has provided FDR mediation for FairWay in Auckland since the service was launched over three years ago.

“Preparation for mediation, where you work with both parties individually, before joint mediation, is also integral to the FairWay process, and that’s very important.

“The Fairway Family Dispute Resolution process is focussed on the child and on leaving families in a better way than we found them. It helps people find ways to explore options and plan for the future. While today you might be looking at a child of five and 50-50 care, that will change and we work at future proofing, giving families the ability to evolve to meet changing needs.”

“It’s very satisfying when, at the end of 90 minutes, someone says ‘I get it. I see that we have to move forward and to get there I have to go in slightly differently’”.

Isabel says the most difficult mediation situations are those where parents have developed rigid mindsets and have come to see the family court as the only option.

“Most people genuinely want the best outcomes for their child but sometimes parents are so caught up in their own grief that they are stuck and forget it is about their child’s needs and try to use mediation for their own needs.

“Mediation is very organic; you are there in the moment. You use a lot of empathy, you have to really listen to parties and identify with them in terms of what they are ready to try to achieve.”

Isabel says meeting individually with each party prior to joint mediation, is a vital part of the process.

“One of the great advantages of mediation is individual private meetings, which can happen at any time.

“During these ‘breathers’ I will have very frank conversations with each party. I’ll find out what they are hoping for and what their bottom line is. I’ll ask if this is where they want to be heading, if it’s where they want their family to be.

“Generally it is two people who love their children but may not like one another. They do want the best for their children and ultimately that comes down to communication.

“I had a case where the parents lived in totally different locations and they came to mediation with a solution in mind - where the children would live with one parent one year and the other the next.

“Through the mediation process, they began communicating in very real terms and really thinking through the arrangement and what this might be like for their child. This enabled them to get to the point where they both said ‘This is not going to work’ and eventually they reached a different agreement. As they left they were talking about the child’s birthday and asking about each other’s parents.

“Mediation can’t be fitted into boxes. Mediators are constantly learning and constantly coming up against different challenges. But I feel very fortunate to be doing this work and to be working with some great supportive people.”



How Family Dispute Resolution can help you

Family Dispute Resolution will have the right fit for your family, with over 80 accredited mediators around New Zealand.

Many families are entitled to 12 hours of fully-funded Family Dispute Resolution services.

Get in touch with Isabel and the Family Dispute Resolution team to find out more.

Phone 0800 774 420

Website <http://www.fairwayresolution.com/got-a-dispute/family-disputes>