

# WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONFERENCE?

## Information for Participants

### What is a community conference?

A community conference is a meeting of the community of people affected by behavior or incident that has caused harm. The conference provides a forum for everyone involved in and affected by the situation, and their respective supporters, to better understand the situation and to find ways to repair the harm and to minimize further harm.

A conference gives those who have caused harm an opportunity to understand the impact of their behavior on other people, on themselves and on the wider community. A conference gives those who have been harmed the opportunity to talk about how they have been affected by the situation, and to contribute to negotiations about how best to repair the harm.

### Who attends a community conference?

A Community Conference usually involves the following people:

- \_ those who have caused harm and their supporters
- \_ those who have been harmed and their supporters
- \_ the conference facilitator (who is formally trained and experienced)
- \_ any resource(s) that may be needed or requested

### What happens during a Community Conference?

All participants are given an opportunity to recount what happened at the time, and what has happened since. The harm is generally emotional as well as physical. It is important that everyone present should have a clear understanding of the full impact of the behavior. The group then decides what needs to be done to repair the harm and prevent it from happening again. When an agreement has been reached, it is recorded in writing, and signed by participants, who are then given a copy of the agreement.

### What are the outcomes of a conference?

The immediate outcome of a conference is the Community Conference Agreement. The terms of the agreement may include anything from an apology and assurances that the behavior will not occur again, to repayment of money (where appropriate), repair of any physical damage to property, community service work, and an undertaking to seek appropriate support. The outcomes are limited only by the group's imagination and its ability to ensure compliance with the terms of the agreement. The process is designed to achieve maximum satisfaction for all who participate.

### How long does a community conference last?

This will depend on the circumstances and complexity of the situation, and on the number of people involved and willing to participate. The time taken to prepare for the conference depends on these factors. The conference itself lasts, on average, for around one-and-a-half hours.

### What are the advantages of this approach?

Those who have been harmed are given a safe forum to talk about how they were affected. Those who were harmed also play an important part in deciding how best to repair the harm and find ways to move forward in a better way. Family/supporters also get to talk about how this has affected them. They also take part in deciding what needs to be done. Those who have caused harm take responsibility for their behavior, rather than walking away from the community of people they have hurt. They are then given the opportunity to be accepted back into the community. Everyone at the conference learns from the experience.

