



# Strategic Plan

2023 - 2026



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...enabling the best outcomes for children when parents separate



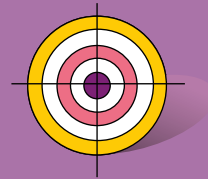
## Vision

- That Family Mediation NI is fully integrated into family support services as the first choice when parents separate and for broader family disputes.



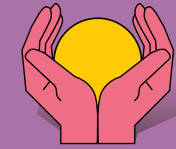
## Mission

- Enabling separated parents to agree the best outcomes for children by accessing the professional services of FMNI.



## AIMS

- To promote family mediation as the approach when families separate.
- To provide a positive approach to conflict management within families.
- To further establish FMNI as the lead agency offering family mediation.
- To provide a range of family mediation training services.



## Values

- Empowerment
- Respect
- Openness
- Integrity
- Confidentiality
- Equality

# Introduction

Mediation offers a constructive way to resolve conflict and avoid entry into the Court system. Evidence shows that conflict between parents who are separating can have long term negative effects on children's health and well-being and their outcomes, as well as having a debilitating impact on the parents' ability to parent effectively during the separation process itself and on in to the future.

FMNI seeks to ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the focus of all mediation that includes children;-

## **UNCRC ARTICLE 9 (separation from parents)**

Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests (for example, if a parent is hurting or neglecting a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.

It is now widely recognised in judicial, academic and family support services opinion that adversarial legal processes can compound the emotional harm for children and parents and may leave them less well equipped to maintain relationships, to manage conflict and cope with the end of relationships during the rest of their lives. This is a cycle which may be perpetuated in families and therefore society, this is a public health issue and an access to justice concern.

**Sir John Gillen's many recommendations included:**

**'A fresh emphasis on solutions outside the court arena with more accessible mediation and educative parenting programmes in private law cases involving children'.**

*(Review of Civil & Family Law 2017)*

**Until we face the fact that child inclusive mediation is a key component of conflict resolution in family justice outside the court arena and are prepared to properly finance that concept without further delay, nothing will change the current profound failings in our management of the interests of children in the course of family breakdown".**

*(Sir John Gillen, former Lord Justice of Appeal of NI)*

Naomi Long, Minister for Justice in 2021, speaking at FMNI's 21st Birthday Event, commended the contribution FMNI has made to enhancing the use of mediation and the improved outcomes which no doubt resulted for the families FMNI have supported over the last 21 years. The Minister said that the work of FMNI and others in this field has shown that in appropriate cases mediation can give rise to better outcomes for families and improve the life experiences of children.

Ms Long stated "I want to build on that good work....The Joint Private Family Law Early Resolution Action Plan, launched with Minister Swann, prioritises action on alternatives to court so as to ensure it becomes a central component of our justice system. That parents use mediation as the first step in resolving disputes, rather than defaulting to court... I believe, collectively, with our justice system partners, with mediation providers, and with others who provide support services to families we can achieve that goal and ensure the best possible outcomes for families in Northern Ireland."

FMNI provides its services directly to families in dispute which may include parents, siblings, stepsiblings and the extended family. Providing families with the skills to resolve conflict equips them for the future. The process is based on voluntary participation. FMNI provides training and support to other professionals and accepts self-referrers and referrals from a range of sources within the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.

FMNI delivers its services through a team of professional mediators in venues across Northern Ireland. FMNI has been commissioned by the Department of Health since 2009 to deliver the service free to pre-court parents. FMNI seeks to influence service commissioners and policy makers so that mediation is the preferred way to resolve familial disputes in order to improve outcomes for children and families.

# The Development of the FMNI Strategic Plan & Priorities

The absence of an N.I. Assembly, ongoing uncertainty associated with Brexit and insecure funding streams to support development of services and the procurement process to commission vital services all compound to be real threats to service delivery going forward.

The Board members and stakeholders considered a future vision in the current challenging environment, acknowledging that as a client led service we will continue to be creative, innovative and flexible to ensure a professional service is accessible to achieve best outcomes for the children of separated parents and for those engaging in intergenerational mediation.

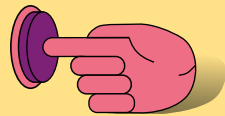
## Family Mediation NI (FMNI) strategic priorities are:

- Raise awareness of the benefits of family mediation for children, young people and their parents (and wider family)
- Develop service delivery to include digital development to assist parent preparation support, evidence/research production and expand training provision
- Diversify funding streams
- Influence policy makers and commissioners to invest in FMNI to achieve better social and economic benefits in NI.

# Other strategic drivers and evidence relevant to our work includes:

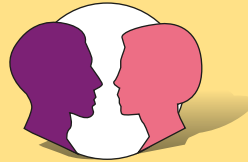
-  Families matter: supporting families in Northern Ireland ([health-ni.gov.uk](https://health-ni.gov.uk)) and Family & Parent Support draft strategy
-  Mental Health Strategy Northern Ireland 2021 – 2031 | Department of Health ([health-ni.gov.uk](https://health-ni.gov.uk))
-  Children and Young People’s Strategy 2020-2030 | Department of Education ([education-ni.gov.uk](https://education-ni.gov.uk))
-  Strengthening family relations 2019-2024 consultation | Department of Justice ([justice-ni.gov.uk](https://justice-ni.gov.uk))
-  [Private-family-law-action-plan.pdf](#) ([justice-ni.gov.uk](https://justice-ni.gov.uk))
-  Draft PDF Programme for Government (PfG) 2021 | Northern Ireland Executive
-  Joseph Rowntree Research JRF Search | JRF
-  Family Separation Scoping Study Report\_final.pdf ([nuffieldfoundation.org](https://nuffieldfoundation.org))
-  A Study of Irish Children’s Experiences of Parental Separation: Dissemination Issues and Approaches | Professor Sheila Green, Trinity College, Dublin.
-  [MediationwithSeparatedParentsrecentresearch2002-2007.pdf](#)
-  Divorce or separation for parents | Royal College of Psychiatrists ([rcpsych.ac.uk](https://rcpsych.ac.uk))
-  FMNI Impact Report 2021-22 – Family Mediation NI
-  Independent Operational Review ( 2021)
-  Independent review of FMNI’s Foundation training Programme (2022)

# Planning Forward...



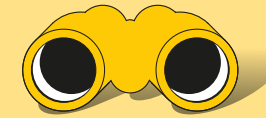
## 1. Develop and implement services to meet identified needs

- 1:1 Review Costs of services in line with full cost recovery policies
- 1:2 Meet the needs of stakeholders and public
- 1:3 Maximise the use of the hybrid model of delivery
- 1:4 Consolidate our proven ability to be agile and react to external crisis
- 1:5 Maximise capacity by developing training provision.



## 2. Influence Policy Makers and funders

- 2:1 Commission bespoke NI based research to evidence impact
- 2:2 Continue to support a cross government departmental approach
- 2:3 Highlight the relevance of family mediation within the current and future government policy related to families and to funders and commissioners of family support services
- 2:4 Influence the Department of Justice's 'Joint Private Family Law Early Resolution Action Plan' and future Programme for Government.



## 3. Awareness Raising

- 3:1 Further develop a public awareness campaign
- 3:2 Develop the partnership approach to awareness raising
- 3:3 Increase awareness and uptake of the unique service offered by FMNI.

## 4. Maintaining excellence

- 4:1 Collating and analysing evaluation and outcome data to inform best practice
- 4:2 Demonstrating excellence and improved outcomes
- 4:3 Provision of high quality training and supervision.





# Outcomes

There are three types of outcomes from FMNI's work.

## Outcomes for Children

- Improved relationships and access to both parents underpinned by the rights of child
- Improved emotional wellbeing through a reduction in stress and anxiety
- Improved ability to resolve disagreements and maintain relationships, breaking the cycle of potential destructive conflict into adulthood
- Reduce the potential for alienation from one parent.

## Outcomes for Parents & Families

- Increased co-parenting ability through the empowerment of parents to develop conflict management and communication skills
- Increased ability to manage the separation and enable agreement about practical co-parenting matters
- Reduction in conflict and associated anxiety throughout the separation process, enabling improved parenting going forward
- Improved wider family relationships and well-being through engagement with family mediation.

## Outcomes for Society

- Reduction in the likelihood of children experiencing ACE (adverse childhood experience) and therefore alleviating the demand on other public services
- Increased positive impact on community wellbeing by building individual and family resilience to positively adapt to change
- Increased recognition of family mediation as the option of choice in terms of cost effectiveness.

*For the purposes of this strategic plan, the following definitions should be assumed;*

*Parents: parents, guardian and care givers  
Children: children and young people*



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