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DON'T BE A STRANGER ON NEIGHBOUR DAY

One of the most effective ways of avoiding a neighbourhood dispute is to introduce yourself to the people living next door, according to the state's free mediation service, Community Justice Centres.

Community Justice Centres' Director Natasha Mann said Neighbour Day on 27 March would provide people with a great opportunity to break the ice with neighbours, particularly those who remain virtual strangers, despite living on the same street.

"Neighbours who know each other often find it easier to discuss and peacefully resolve issues such as noise problems or disputes over fences, trees or the use of common facilities."

Ms Mann said many people who seek help from Community Justice Centres in resolving disputes have not properly met their neighbour prior to entering the mediation room.

"There has been an increase in high-density city living, but unfortunately it seems the closer we are in proximity to our neighbours, the more distant we are in terms of getting to know them," Ms Mann said.

"Developing a friendly relationship with your neighbour helps to build respect and tolerance, which is important when you are living on top of one-another and hearing each other's noises."

Neighbours who are finding it difficult to resolve a dispute can contact Community Justice Centres on **1800 990 777** to arrange a free mediation in their area.

"Mediations are conducted by two impartial, trained mediators who help people to understand each other's point of view and to work together to reach an agreement that is acceptable to all," Ms Mann said.

Community Justice Centres' mediators achieve a success rate of more than 80 per cent.

The service, which is part of the NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General, has been helping to resolve conflict between neighbours, families and work colleagues for 30 years.

Neighbour Day is Australia's annual celebration of community. Neighbour Day events will be held in streets and backyards across the nation on Sunday, 27 March 2011.

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