

REPORT ON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN PRISONS PROJECT

Through the six-month project of developing restorative approaches in prisons, the potential of the work has been clearly demonstrated. The commitment and enthusiasm of the staff working with restorative concepts has enabled the practicality of putting such ideas into action to be tested. Bristol, Norwich and Winchester prisons have clearly shown that restorative work can be developed in prisons and incorporated into daily use within prison protocols.

Process

The project has worked through the establishment of a core team in each prison composed of a multi-disciplinary group of staff. It has operated best in those prisons where the team has been allowed to review the range of work in the prison and has then made recommendations to senior management for priorities to be established and acted upon.

The involvement of partnerships with local agencies working in the prison has proved to be vital in progressing the work. These groups as well as being functional in their approach have been encouraged to see their work as representing the wider community around the prison.

The involvement of effective and experienced restorative justice consultants working with experienced and articulate 'victims' of crime has proved to be crucial in focussing the work as quickly as possible. The project has clearly shown that the work would need three years at least to affect the culture in the prison. The Belgian prison service experience has shown that it will take four or five years to work through the issues of staff development and prisoner awareness in order to ensure that prisons provide a safe environment for work with victims to take place so that visits to meet the offender are considered normal.

The culture of respect that is being sought can be developed through an approach that takes the context of the crime seriously and that helps prisoners take full responsibility, and continue to do so in their actions within the prison and on release, for what they have done. Whilst our work remains offender-centred we are missing a whole range of opportunities.

Prison staff have shown that there are many areas of work that the ideas can be applied to with effect. They include

Induction programs
Sentence planning
Victim awareness discussion groups
Race relations disputes
Anti bullying strategies with trained prisoners to help resolve conflicts
Dealing with complaints and requests through a mediated approach
Adjudications have been run through circles approaches
Staff grievances and conflicts have been approached through these ideas
Outreach work into the community through Prison Me No Way has been enhanced through restorative ideas and involving Victim Support in the crime days in schools
Meaningful community work of a reparative nature, engaging people in the work with prisoners

Recommendations

I recommend that the policy work of the Prison Service with victims of crime incorporates the development of restorative justice practice in prisons.

I recommend that a Restorative Justice Steering Group is formed with representatives of Prisoner Administration Group, the National Probation Service, Victim Support, the Restorative Justice Consortium, the International Centre for Prison Studies, with representatives from three prisons where RJ is beginning to work (Bristol, Brinsford, Bullingdon, Deerbolt, Holme House, Kirklevington Grange, Moorland, Norwich, Winchester and several others) and with a RJ consultant or practitioner.

This group's remit should be to:

- Develop and sustain restorative practice at local level through encouraging networking and support, through a newsletter (continuing RJ News), through meetings and conferences and to publicise

developments through Prison Service News and the Prison Service Journal

- Develop safe protocols and procedures to provide to those seeking to introduce restorative ideas. This would be available through Quantum and on the Prison Service website for wider dissemination.
- Develop understanding within criminal justice agencies and partners about restorative work in prisons and the implications for them
- Advise on the implementation of strategic issues in response to the recommendations of Halliday and Auld Reports
- Receive reports from the Home Office research on Restorative Justice and work with the consequences
- Support the development of the Victims Forum with Victim Support and others

I recommend that the research on restorative justice is matched by good reporting of local developments to maintain a directory of practice in prisons. This could be put on the Prison Service intranet and the Prison Service website for wider access.

I recommend that each prison could look towards appointing a Victim Liaison Officer (at Principal Officer level) to lead an audit of internal processes where people are likely to be victimised

To take appropriate actions

To be the focus for victim contact from outside the prison with safe protocols

To co-ordinate community-linked work in an integrated manner – such as groups coming into the prison, staff doing ambassadorial work through schemes such as Prison Me No Way and to develop a proactive approach to talking with groups in the community.

I recommend that some awareness training about victims is included in all staff development courses. That the victim empathy work carried out in accredited programs is considered by Victim Support and developed with some liaison with victims of crime by the designers and facilitators.

I recommend that senior staff and HQ personnel are encouraged to attend conferences on the subject of Restorative Justice in order to contribute our experience in this rapidly changing subject.

Tim Newell