

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FORUM, PERTH CONCERT HALL 20 NOVEMBER 2007

This Forum was held for those involved in Restorative Justice Services in the Children's Hearings System and was introduced by Alison Wright, Head of Practice, SCRA. It featured a mixture of presentations and workshops headed by professionals working within Restorative Justice.

Before this, however, Donna Bell, from the Youth Justice Team, gave the **Scottish Government Policy update**. This featured the key themes of:

- "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime
- Earlier intervention – early, effective responses to offending (Restorative Practices playing key role instead of sucking children into the Hearing System. A helpful & quick approach being much better & necessary)
- Early years strategy - was discussed in Parliament on 31.10.07
- Promoting good behaviour as well as punishing bad
- 'More choices, more chances' agenda for young people – a key commitment from the Government – need for support to make correct choices
- Personal & collective responsibility
- Management of high risk young people – publishing guidance in early 2008
- Inclusion at every stage"

It was stated that there was much less centrally held funding and therefore much less capacity for the Government to make funding available for projects. However, it was stressed that all agencies have a responsibility and should be doing what is effective to change behaviour, building on good practice, working in partnership and focusing on outcomes. Dialogue needs to be kept going.

Workshops followed with the theme of developing the use of Restorative Justice Services and featured "anti-social behaviour", "schools", "residential child care settings" and "serious offences and persistent offending".

Each of these workshops demonstrated local initiatives and programmes which had been successful or which were being put in place to deal, hopefully effectively, with restorative justice issues.

The Anti-Social Behaviour workshop was run by the Glasgow Restorative Justice service and discussed the referral process, highlighting successes and problems encountered. Their referral criteria stated that the youngster had to have been referred for specific incident(s) of ASB, backed by sufficient evidence. The young person should be between 12 & 18 with his behaviour having a recognisable impact on victim(s). They must also reside in Glasgow and have no pending cases with the PF or Reporter or have been previously referred for an offence. More information on this service can be found at www.glasgow.gov.uk followed by entering 'restorative justice services'.

Residential Child Care Settings - Restorative Justice can be used in this context as a more effective way of dealing with the harm caused by misconduct, bullying or a breach of rules or violence. Several residential schools, children's homes and secure care units in Scotland are now in the early stages of staff training and implementation.

Schools – One of the workshops for this featured a brief overview of the service within Glasgow schools. This offered its services to a limited number of secondary schools (now 8). Following research in other areas, the RJS worked to find an alternative to pupil exclusions. They delivered information to staff and pupils of identified schools and based Schools' Workers in the schools on a part-time basis. This helped raise awareness of the service and helped them become fully integrated into the school behavioural policy. The service has gone from strength to strength with regular meetings held between school and RJS staff which encourage the information sharing process and the sharing of good practices. The service has worked with 1121 pupils, all interventions have reached a satisfactory agreement and only 144 pupils have been re-referred for further issues. In all cases, the exclusion was avoided through the use of restorative processes. (More information from the above website, followed by entering 'school support service', then 'restorative justice service in schools'.)

The afternoon presentations began with "**The respective roles of Victim Support Scotland and the RJS.**" This was a joint presentation by Alan McCloskey (VSS) and Billy Nicol (Youth Justice Advisor, Sacro). VSS is the lead voluntary organisation dealing with victims of crime and is independent of government and other agencies. Many victims have been assisted both in their own communities but also in court and 1000 victims of youth crime have been assisted in the Dundee VOYCE Service, set up to address gaps in service. This is a victim-centred approach offering access to information and support with an opportunity to express the impact of the crime, by shuttle mediation, to the young person responsible. Victims can choose to access any or all parts of the service including direct mediation. It is a multi-agency approach and helps young people consider their offending behaviour.

Sacro's mission statement is to reduce conflict and offending and make communities safer. Using restorative approaches they are empowering those affected or harmed by young people's behaviour whilst seeing the young people as a potential resource in their families and communities. Sacro visit the person harmed (if agreeable), listen to their experience, explain what's available to them and organise a restorative procedure if wanted. 91% of cases were completed successfully (2006 figures). 30% of victims met the young person responsible (with support) and 8% carried out a reparative task. 92% of those harmed who had participated in the restorative approach fully recommended the Sacro Youth Justice Service with an equally high number commenting that they were able to express how they felt and able to influence what the young person should do to make amends. It was felt to be a very friendly, supportive and positive experience.

Apart from a general question and answer session involving the various speakers of the day, the final presentation was an update on the **National Evaluation of RJS** given by Germana Vitrano (RJ Research Officer). This detailed the breadth of research (covering over 30 RJ projects in Scotland) and illustrating the materials used for recording and monitoring – client forms and participant feedback questionnaires. The Research Collection will take place from January 2007 to December 2008 with data collection being done electronically.

All in all, the Forum was very enlightening as well as helping participants to learn that there is a lot of positive work taking place to minimise anti-social behaviour and help young people through the tough times they are facing, thus preparing them more to become effective and responsible community members.

Report prepared on behalf of the SACP by Angela McGroarty.