



## **An introduction to restorative justice and its place in the British criminal justice system**

The aim of this briefing is to make Friends more aware of restorative justice and its use in Britain. It will look at the youth and adult systems in the two separate jurisdictions: England and Wales, and Scotland, where the pace and scale of its development has been different. It is a brief introduction to the issues, not a comprehensive account. It can be used in conjunction with the *Ways of witness* booklet to find ways to engage in, and influence, the criminal justice system in the UK.

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*Justice should be compassionate, forgiving and healing – restorative, not retributive. We want to change attitudes and encourage the criminal justice system to move towards this vision of justice.*

Crime, Community and Justice Subcommittee, 2009

*Where any have received offence from any other, first to speak privately to the party concerned, and endeavour reconciliation between themselves; and not to whisper or aggravate matters against them behind their backs, to the making parties, and the breach wider.*

Yearly Meeting in London, 1692  
Quaker faith & practice 20.70

*Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.*

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## What is restorative justice?

In a criminal justice context, restorative justice seeks, in a structured and purposeful way, to meet the needs, rights and interests of both victims and offenders. This is usually – but not always – done by enabling them to meet face-to-face. This can occur in various ways at different points in the criminal justice process, or outside it altogether. The Restorative Justice Council, a British charity, defines the process thus: “Restorative justice brings those harmed by crime or conflict and those responsible for the harm into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward.”<sup>1</sup> Marian Liebmann, an internationally renowned Quaker champion of restorative justice, says “it aims to restore the wellbeing of victims, offenders and communities damaged by crime, and to prevent further offending”<sup>2</sup>.

Restorative justice has advocates and practitioners in many countries. These supporters are often secular, but have strong connections to, and support from, faith groups. As a loosely-organised reform movement, it encompasses both a vision for transforming existing criminal justice systems – criticised for their adversarial and unduly punitive approaches – and a set of evolving practices that exist within and alongside existing systems<sup>3</sup>. The vision speaks of mending that which is broken, restoring relationships and community, healing hurt and removing the causes of harm. It looks forward to a time when the conventional trappings of criminal justice are less common, perhaps abandoned. Those trappings include retribution, deterrence, coercive forms of rehabilitation, and high rates of imprisonment. Because of the extensive social changes required to bring this about, some Canadian Friends (and others) have called this ‘Transformational Justice’<sup>4</sup>. The existing array of restorative practices may or may not become the seeds from which this vision is realised, but they are helpful in themselves, even now, and Quakers are right to pursue these

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1 Restorative Justice Council (2017)

2 Marian Liebmann (2007) *Restorative Justice: How it works*. London: Jessica Kingsley

3 David J Cornwell, John Blad and Martin Wright (eds) (2013) *Civilising Criminal Justice: an international restorative agenda for penal reform*. Winchester: Waterside Press

4 Ruth Morris (2000) *Stories of Transformational Justice*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

small-scale and localised improvements whether or not they have a transformational effect in the future.

‘Forgiveness’ remains a complex and controversial issue in the restorative justice movement, not least because there are different understandings of what it means.<sup>5</sup> Faith groups tend to value it and to understand its importance to human wellbeing. In practice, however, forgiveness cannot be demanded or required from crime victims who participate in restorative justice programmes. Nor should offender-participants be led to expect that they will receive it, no matter what they say or ask.

Restorative approaches are valuable even the only outcome for participants is a deepened understanding of why a crime occurred and what its personal consequences have been. It is certainly helpful for one or both participants to put harmful incidents into perspective, preventing what might be painful memories from dominating their lives. But forgiveness is not essential to the encounter.

Nonetheless, restorative approaches – either during the victim-offender meeting or some time afterwards – do at least take the spiritual and psychological possibility of forgiveness seriously. In a world that often dismisses forgiveness as weakness, or as misplaced kindness, and where perpetual animosity towards offenders is all too often encouraged, this too is a virtue. For Quakers, ‘forgiving justice’ is not a contradiction in terms.<sup>6</sup>

All faith traditions have at some time idealised and practised ways of doing justice that might nowadays be called ‘restorative’, although they often coexisted alongside other cruel and repressive practices<sup>7</sup>. Restorative justice seems relatively new to us in the modern world, but in New Zealand, Australia and Canada it has been indigenous people, whose traditions have long sustained such approaches, who have

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5 Liebmann (2007) pp327–333

6 Tim Newell (2000) *Forgiving Justice: A Quaker vision for criminal justice*. London: Quaker Home Service (The Swarthmore Lecture 2000)

7 Michael L Hadley (ed) (2001) *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*. New York: SUNY Press

helped give restorative justice its contemporary prominence. All these traditions manifest what *Six Quakers Look at Crime and Punishment* called “overcoming evil with good” and showing “love, respect and concern for all, particularly those rejected by others, reaching out to the good in them.”<sup>8</sup> The enduring commitment of Quakers to nonviolence and to peacemaking, has, as in the Mennonite church in North America, made them especially appreciative of restorative justice, which is a concrete, practical expression of these higher ethical ideals. Some Yearly Meetings have developed specific testimonies on restorative justice<sup>9</sup>, although British Friends have not found unity on the goal of the ‘non-punitive society’ and the ‘testimony against punishment’ that the Six Quakers had wished to see.

Many practitioners have taken the principles of restorative justice into wider fields, such as schools, children’s services, workplaces, hospitals and communities. We refer to this wider application as restorative practice. Restorative practice can be used anywhere to prevent conflict, build relationships and repair harm by enabling people to communicate effectively and positively. Restorative practice can involve both a proactive approach to preventing harm and conflict, and activities that repair harm where conflicts have already arisen.

## **Why restorative justice matters**

William Tallack, the Quaker co-founder of the Howard Association (forerunner of today’s Howard league for Penal Reform), and its secretary for the first 35 years of its existence, commended learning from the Maori practice of restitution to injured parties.<sup>10</sup> Margery Fry, a later secretary of the Howard League (who left the Society of Friends but who retained her ‘Quaker conscience’) recognised that the criminal justice system of her day neglected the needs of victims on several levels, and she was instrumental in persuading government to create the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (now Authority) in 1964.<sup>11</sup> The six Quakers who deliberated on crime and punishment

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8 London: Quaker Home Service (1979) *Six Quakers Look at Crime and Punishment: a study paper by a group of Friends*. p7

9 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (1989) *Testimony on Restorative Justice*, Committee for Criminal Justice.

10 William Tallack (1905) *Howard Letters and Memories*. London: Methuen and Co.

11 Enid Huws-Jones (1966) *Margery Fry: the essential amateur*. Oxford: OUP

in the late 1970s went beyond this and advocated an array of other 'non-punitive', caring responses. They noted that restorative justice is "a realistic and sometimes rigorous response which may at times be painful to the offender and others, but this pain, unlike punishment, is incidental to what should be purely restorative action and hence is not destructive to the very elements in society which we are seeking to enhance. Justice, in this view, is not a blind balancing, so far as possible, of evils, but a righting, so far as is possible, of wrongs"<sup>12</sup>.

Quakers have long understood that crime and the fear of crime can have a divisive effect on society, creating a sense of an 'us' who must be protected and a 'them' who must be contained, expelled or shunned. Similarly, we have understood that penal systems tend towards the callous and the cruel unless actively encouraged to become civilised and compassionate. Restorative justice is one form of activism we can take. We see the criminal justice system as society's imperfect response to the many factors that contribute to criminal behaviour and victimisation. We believe that creating opportunities for dialogue and understanding can help create and sustain safety within communities – and do so better than prevailing forms of punishment. It can also improve the wellbeing of both victims and offenders, while supporting both and idealising neither. Restorative justice, by itself, cannot address the causes, or indeed all the consequences, of division, violence and injustice in society. But it can respond to some harmful incidents in ways that do not further exacerbate the harm. Punishment – particularly the inappropriate use of imprisonment – often does do that.

Victims of crime should have the right to participate in restorative justice if they wish because it can help them to express their feelings and put a face to the crime. It can lead to a better understanding of why a harmful event occurred, and/or to an apology and reparation. Restorative justice can enable offenders to make amends and spur them to take advantage of rehabilitative opportunities that will prevent the future victimisation of other people, and enable them to better reintegrate into society. The six Friends acknowledged that there would always be 'non-co-operators' who would not cease to harm others unless restrained, but

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<sup>12</sup> London: Quaker Home Service (1979) *Six Quakers Look at Crime and Punishment: a study paper by a group of friends*. p28

they envisioned that many more offenders and victims would want to access restorative opportunities. At that time, society had not created these opportunities and did not encourage their consideration. This has changed and victims and offenders do now have opportunities to engage in restorative justice, although availability is still patchy.

Whether to apply restorative approaches to victims of domestic and sexual violence is a controversial subject. This is because of the intimate nature of the crimes and the perceived danger of re-victimisation. But there are programmes that have attempted to offer restorative work<sup>13</sup>, and where victims want and benefit from such endeavours. This may be because authorities have refused to prosecute, on the grounds that (within the prevailing adversarial system) a conviction is unlikely. The existence of these schemes means there is a case for Quakers to support this approach for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. For some of these victims, having their voices heard, and being able to confront and challenge the person who harmed them, is more important than seeing them punished by the state. Many crimes – crimes of violence often and especially – can be understood as an abuse of power by one or more persons over another. In supportive restorative encounters, women in particular can ‘speak truth to power’ in ways that may help the (usually) men involved to become more aware of their sense of sexual and domestic entitlement, and identify the root of their aggression.

A similar restorative case can be made for responding to hate crimes and incidents. Recent empirical research has attempted to discover whether restorative justice practices could: help repair the emotional traumas caused by hate crimes; address issues relating to identity and/or cultural differences between participants (those which are causal to the offence); or prevent the recurrence of hate crimes between the stakeholders of inter-personal conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Results show that restorative practices can help victims of hate crime, by lowering their anxiety, anger and fear. Successful cases also resulted in desistance from hate behaviour.

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13 Estelle Zinsstag and Marie Keenan (eds) (2017) *Restorative Responses to Sexual Violence: legal, social and therapeutic responses*. London: Routledge

14 Mark Walters (2014) *Hate Crime and Restorative Justice: Exploring Causes, Repairing Harms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

## **Restorative justice: principles and processes**

Since the time of the six Quakers, advocates of restorative justice in many countries have gained experience by experimenting with restorative crime practices and embedding them in existing justice systems. Such approaches require expertise, planning, and oversight, if only to ensure that re-victimisation does not occur in a face-to-face meeting. There is concern, however, about over-professionalising restorative encounters. Services make good use of trained volunteers to facilitate victims and offenders in co-creating, as far as possible, and within legal parameters, their own resolutions.

A number of different practical approaches have evolved to meet needs and address problems in distinct and specific ways. These include:

- victim-offender mediation, which brings individual victims and offenders together
- restorative conferencing. This is when larger groups, including families and relevant community members, use a 'script' of questions for the parties concerned
- family group conferencing. This is when victim and offender meet, each with family support, and families have private time to devise solutions
- victim-offender education groups, which involves group dialogue between (say) burglars and victims of burglary,
- personalised reparation, which involves making agreed amends to the victim
- sentencing circles, which are groups that invite offender and victim, plus family and community members, to share views on the incident's impact and to agree solutions.

The precise format and process in each of the above may be different but there are key principles common to all forms of restorative justice. Marian Liebmann describes them thus:

- victim support and healing is prioritised
- offenders take responsibility for what they have done
- there is dialogue to achieve mutual understanding

- there is an attempt to put right the harm done
- offenders look at how to avoid future offending
- the community helps to re-integrate both victim and offender.<sup>15</sup>

For some Quakers, Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) for sex offenders are also an example of restorative justice. Quakers were instrumental in introducing these to Britain, drawing on Mennonite initiatives in Canada. Strictly speaking, COSA is not restorative justice, because there is no direct victim involvement, and no intention or requirement to facilitate a victim-offender dialogue, or to make direct amends. The focus of the Circle's trained volunteers, drawn from the community, is on the wellbeing and responsibility of the 'core member'.

The larger aim of COSA, however, is to prevent further victimisation, in part by building up an invariably stigmatised offender's social ties and enabling him or her to be 'restored', as far as possible, as a member of a local community. In that sense there is an affinity with the aims of restorative justice, as well as shared commitment to treating offenders with respect and compassion. COSA is perhaps better regarded as one of the more welcome instances of 'community justice', a diverse cluster of interventions originating largely in the USA. These can sometimes be complementary to restorative justice, but may also be in tension with it, because they can subordinate the needs, rights and interests of offenders too completely to the demands and wishes of the community.<sup>16</sup>

### **Does restorative justice work?**

Contemporary governments demand evidence of effectiveness – usually cost-effectiveness – before supporting and investing in criminal justice interventions, and restorative justice has had to prove its worth in various independent evaluations in order to be taken seriously. Quakers should not balk at this; it would be unethical to encourage the use of any intervention with victims and offenders without some rational basis for believing that it could actually achieve desirable and beneficial outcomes. But, outcomes for whom? Governments have a tendency to make interventions and evaluations fit their agendas, and may, for example,

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<sup>15</sup> Liebmann (2007)

<sup>16</sup> Contemporary Justice Review 7(2004) special issue on *Restorative Justice, Community Justice or Transformative Justice – how best to meet human needs?*

be more interested in discovering whether restorative justice supports rehabilitation and reduces re-offending than meets the immediate needs of crime victims. This focus can make it difficult for victim support and advocacy groups to see what restorative justice offers them. Reducing reoffending is important – by definition, it reduces victimisation – but the impact on victims must always be part of what is considered when evaluating restorative justice.

As Philadelphia Yearly Meeting noted in 1989, the empirical case for doing restorative justice was itself easily made: “Research into the needs of victims indicates that most victims desire recognition of the harm done to them, restitution from the offender and a commitment that further crime will not be perpetrated by the offender.”<sup>17</sup> Subsequent independent academic evidence from around the world<sup>18</sup> on the outcomes of restorative justice processes, of which there is now a considerable amount, is mostly very encouraging. It should be borne in mind that evidence of success using one restorative approach, in one particular context, is not proof that all forms of it will work everywhere, every time. Other restorative approaches can be tried, and may work better.

In general, evaluations show:

- victim and offender satisfaction with both process and outcome
- reduction in post-traumatic stress symptoms for victims
- mostly positive, though somewhat variable, results for reduced reoffending
- confidence in restorative justice processes – and even a preference for them over courtroom procedures – where good practice guidelines are followed.

Benefits for victims include having the opportunity to:

- learn about the offender and put a face to the crime
- ask questions of the offender

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<sup>17</sup> Committee for Criminal Justice, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. (1989) *Testimony on Restorative Justice*.

<sup>18</sup> Sherman & Strang (2007) *Restorative Justice: The Evidence*. [www.iirp.edu/pdf/RJ\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/RJ_full_report.pdf)

- express their feelings and needs after the crime
- receive an apology and/or appropriate reparation
- educate offenders about the effects of their offences
- sort out any existing conflict
- be part of the criminal justice process
- put the crime behind them
- be empowered.

Benefits for offenders include having the opportunity to:

- take responsibility for their actions
- find out the effect of their crime
- apologise and/or offer appropriate reparation
- re-assess their future behaviour in the light of this knowledge.

Benefits for courts include having the opportunity to:

- learn about victims' needs
- impose more realistic sentences.

Benefits for communities include having the opportunity to:

- accept apologies and reparation from offenders
- help reintegrate victims and offenders
- stop disputes escalating into more destructive situations.

## **Personal experiences of restorative justice**

Two stories from 'Learning from Experience'<sup>19</sup> show how variable the effects of justice processes can be. The first example below shows how restorative possibilities were missed, while the second one shows how a restorative approach can make a positive difference.

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<sup>19</sup> *Learning from Experience: personal narratives from the criminal justice system*. A six-year project run by CCJS from 2009 to 2014 which asked Friends to collect stories directly from anyone affected by criminal sentencing – the person who is sentenced, their partner, their children, the rest of their family, their community, the wider community, the victim and victim's family.

## **A damaging experience in court**

*Personal narrative 25, not previously published*

A teenager, M, had been drinking with some older lads who then attacked him for his money. M was encouraged to complain to the police about the attack and discovered that the lads were already well known for having committed various petty crimes. One lad, V, was willing to plead guilty to GBH, which would have meant that M didn't have to give evidence in court. Against police opinion, V was charged with the more serious crime of assault with intent to rob, which could potentially carry a more serious sentence, and M had to give evidence in the juvenile court. Meantime V was threatening him in phone messages.

M, who is dyspraxic, and not confident, couldn't have his parents with him in court. The defence solicitor reduced him to such a state of panic that the magistrate had to call for a break. It turned out that V already owed £200 in other compensation orders. V was found guilty of assault, but not guilty of attempted robbery and was made to pay compensation of £75 to M, which he only started to receive nine months later.

M was traumatised by his court ordeal and refused to make a statement when a year later his car was attacked by someone else. The father comments on his feeling that another nail had been hammered into the coffin of the justice process. His son had become another person who would fight shy of having any involvement with the due process of law.

If the Crown Prosecution Service had talked to the victim before they decided on the charge there could have been a much more satisfactory outcome. As the father comments: "with a bit of restorative justice V's antisocial behaviour could have been addressed and their relationship with M could have been repaired".

## **Restorative justice in all but name**

*Personal Narrative 12, used previously in the 'Learning from Experience' briefing for Friends, August 2010*

A local lad earned some money cleaning cars and doing other odd jobs for neighbours. Eventually his fingerprints identified him as the culprit in some burglaries and he was sent to court. The judge asked for a

psychiatric report and as a result the lad was placed into foster care and then at residential school where he “learned to read, at last”. The Youth Offending Team maintained contact between him and one of the neighbours he had robbed, carrying messages between them. He sent her a card saying he was sorry and in a much better state. She wrote back, saying she forgave him.

The combination of a liberally minded approach from the court, good coordination and planning from all the agencies including social services and education, the sensitivity of the Youth Offending Team offering restorative justice in all but name, and the compassion of the person harmed by his offence, made a positive difference to this young life.

### **Aggravated burglary leading to nightmares**

A woman and her eight-year-old son were the victims of an aggravated burglary. They were terrorised by the burglar, who received a prison sentence. The boy experienced persistent nightmares and as the burglar’s release date approached, the woman became apprehensive that the burglar would return. She approached her local Advice Centre, which referred her to the local (probation-based) Mediation and Reparation Service. The mediators visited the offender (just released), who was upset to hear how worried his victim still was. A meeting was arranged at the Advice Centre, at which the offender apologised in full and reassured the victim he had no intention of returning to cause harm. The victim accepted the apology and reassurance, and found the meeting helpful. The son’s nightmares stopped soon after.<sup>20</sup>

### *A reflection from Quaker faith & practice*

“Reconciliation in its basic form occurs between two people face to face... But we must be clear that reconciliation, in the sense of meeting, comprehending, and working to prevent the future following the pattern of the past, is not always possible. The demand for justice, the desire for revenge, may prevent it. Quakers in particular seem to have a horror of revenge as a motive. We need to remember that, in the interests of social harmony, law-abiding citizens have voluntarily surrendered their rights of retaliation to the state. It may be true that when the state takes revenge,

nothing constructive has been achieved. But it is also true that if not even this is done, the hurt remains with the person who has been wronged. Where the burden of suffering is clearly on one side, the burden of wrong-doing on the other, it is a kind of insult to tell the victim that he or she should be reconciled. We are told that there is no peace without justice. How are we to meet the claims of justice without forging the next link in the chain of hurt?

Restitution ... accepts the reality of what has happened and the right of the sufferer to 'have something done about it'. It accepts that the perpetrator is in most cases feeling guilty, or at least humiliated to have been detected. But it offers him or her an opportunity to regain the good opinion of the sufferer and the community, and to be seen as a person who can give as well as take away, who can right wrongs as well as cause them... When I was working with deviant and deprived children, and almost all disciplinary matters were decided by the whole community on a basis of putting things right, I was able to see how the victims feel supported and protected by this approach. It was moving to see how much they wanted to accept the evidence of contrition, how much they wanted to forgive. Provided that we could ensure that it worked effectively, those who had been hurt were satisfied; it was outsiders, not directly involved, who became angry and told me that this was a sentimental option which did not face the realities of injustice. They were afraid of pain, hurt, violence, and the breakdown of order; and their fear made them violent. Those who had already experienced this breakdown recognised that restitution offered them a way out."

John Lampen, 1987  
*Quaker faith & practice* 23.103

## **Obstacles to implementation**

Since campaigns first began to promote restorative justice, there has been progress to develop the practice in Britain. A significant number of victims and offenders have benefitted from restorative justice even though it has not yet transformed the wider criminal justice system, which has arguably become more punitive. The picture is mixed; it can't uniformly be described as failure. Developments in England and Wales and in Scotland have, however, differed significantly, with more (if still

sporadic) government funded projects and police initiatives in the former than in the latter.<sup>21</sup> A number of organisations, often precariously funded, now exist to take work on restorative justice issues forward. The list of these organisations can be found at the end of this booklet.

Many people are now trained in restorative justice techniques, although many more are still needed. Some criminal justice professionals have a good understanding of what restorative projects can offer, though this does not necessarily translate into practical support. There is a vast academic and practitioner literature on restorative justice, supportive evaluations of certain forms of it, some good practice guidance, and even memoirs by people who have sought it and benefitted from it.<sup>22</sup> All this is helpful, and Quakers have played a part in making it happen in both Scotland and England and Wales. But from our standpoint, given the traditions and testimonies on which we draw, and our perception of what remains damaging about so much of contemporary criminal justice, there is still resistance to overcome and more to be done. Broadly speaking, the obstacles to the increased advance of restorative justice are as follows:

### **Political pressure**

Dominant political parties tend to claim that electorates – and crime victims specifically – only understand and want punitive responses to offenders, often in the form of imprisonment or tough alternative sentences. Mindful of media outrage at anything which seems ‘soft on crime’, or unduly respectful of offender’s needs, rights and interests, political parties can be reluctant to consider any penal measure they think will make them electoral liabilities. This limits the expansion of rehabilitative measures, as well as restorative justice.

### **Negative public perception**

There are myths in circulation about restorative justice – that it is only suitable for dealing with minor offences, or young offenders, that it never works, or that it is only for the benefit of offenders. Nebulous

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21 For a recent overview of debate and practice in Scotland, see [www.scottishjusticematters.com/the-journal/restorative-justice-april-2017/](http://www.scottishjusticematters.com/the-journal/restorative-justice-april-2017/)

22 One such memoir, by the mother of a murdered daughter, is Lesley Morland (2001) *An Ordinary Murder*. London: Aurum Press.

and confusing presentations of it feed these misconceptions, making it difficult for restorative justice to seem like a credible, versatile, practical, emotionally intelligent response to harm in a wide variety of cases, including those involving serious violence.

### **Doubts among crime victims**

Crime victims and the organisations that represent them are not all of one mind about the merits of restorative justice. Some prefer resources to be devoted to other forms of victim support, and in the past some have been openly hostile to restorative justice (sometimes because of the above misconceptions, sometimes in principle). This is changing, fortunately, but it should always be remembered that restorative approaches cannot advance far unless strong victim voices are appreciative of them, and this cannot be forced, even by Act of Parliament.

### **Patchy uptake among justice workers**

Interested individuals apart, neither criminal justice social workers in Scotland nor probation officers in England and Wales have seen restorative justice as integral to their knowledge or skill base, unlike some of their North American counterparts. Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales have fared better, and lessons could be learned from them. Partnerships between statutory agencies and third sector organisations – especially, but not only, victim organisations – are a good way to develop and institutionalise restorative practices (as well as the training to sustain them) within the criminal justice system, to create a base on which further reforms could be built.

### **Mixed support from law-enforcement**

Police interest (including the current Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales) in some aspects of restorative justice has been welcome. Their fixed and limited view of what restorative approaches are for, however, can, if allowed, impede political and professional debates about what other forms of restorative practice could contribute to criminal justice more broadly.

Despite the energy and ingenuity of its many champions, restorative justice, by its very nature, has not been owned, controlled or campaigned for by a single profession or agency, or even by a unified network of organisations. It *has* acquired an identity, and a degree of prestige that it did not have 40 years ago. Its claims have been heard in high places, but it has only rarely been taken up as a major government commitment, probably because it is not an easy fit with other political and penal orthodoxies, or the electoral priorities mentioned above.

## **Things you can do**

### **Be informed and inform others**

- Seek information from national groups and become involved in the debate.
- Become more aware of local issues and facilities. Seeking information can open up areas of need for involvement and support.
- See the present system at work by attending court hearings.
- Ask your Police and Crime Commissioner about the place of victim support and restorative justice in their operational and financial plans for your area.
- Using the information you have obtained, lobby your legislators, local councillors, Police and Crime Commissioners, etc. to support greater use of restorative justice within the criminal justice system (and elsewhere).

### **Get involved**

- Learn and practise non-punitive responses, conflict resolution techniques and mediation skills.
- Attend/train for Alternatives to Violence Workshops.
- Volunteer with your local restorative justice project such as Circle of Support and Accountability, mediation service, or Neighbourhood Justice Panel

Whatever your occupation, look around to see where mediation and restorative justice would be fruitful.

## **Resources and relevant organisations**

### **Alternatives to Violence Project**

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is for everyone who wants to handle conflict better, whether in the family, on the streets, in your workplace or somewhere else. Participants in AVP workshops learn from one another through group activities, discussion and role-play, drawing on real-life situations where conflict might happen, and exploring different ways to handle them. AVP runs workshops in various prisons in Britain. More information from: AVP Britain, The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT | 020 7324 4755 | [info@avpbritain.org.uk](mailto:info@avpbritain.org.uk) | <https://avpbritain.org.uk>.

### **Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) / Circles UK**

A Circle of Support and Accountability is a group of volunteers from a local community which forms a Circle around a high-risk sex offender (Core Member). It aims to provide a supportive social network that also requires the Core Member to take responsibility (be 'accountable') for his/her ongoing risk management. COSA have been proven to cut the rate of re-offending by sex offenders and to help communities feel safer. Circles UK is the national body supporting the development, quality, coordination and effectiveness of Local Circles. More information from: Circles UK, Abbey House, Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BE | 0118 950 0068 | [www.circles-uk.org.uk](http://www.circles-uk.org.uk).

### **The European Forum for Restorative Justice**

The European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) aims to contribute to the development of victim–offender mediation and other restorative justice practices. The EFRJ organises seminars and a conference every two years. It also provides information about International Restorative Justice Week, usually held each November. More information from: Secretariat of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, Hooverplein 10, 3000 Leuven, Belgium | +32 466 20 91 12 | [www.euforumrj.org](http://www.euforumrj.org).

### **Neighbourhood Justice Panels**

The UK coalition government introduced Neighbourhood Justice Panels to work with local communities using restorative justice. The focus is

to address problem behaviour and low level offending which affects communities, and to repair the harm caused. They involve the victim, perpetrator and any wider community interest in agreeing the details of a restorative justice outcome for behaviour that is being dealt with informally. They are also used where a conditional caution requires a restorative justice element that a Neighbourhood Justice Panel can help agree. More information from: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/process-evaluation-of-the-neighbourhood-justice-panels](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/process-evaluation-of-the-neighbourhood-justice-panels).

### **Restorative Justice Council**

The Restorative Justice Council (RJC) promotes quality restorative practice for everyone. It sets and champions clear standards for restorative practice, supports practitioners, advocates the widespread use of all forms of restorative practice, including restorative justice, and raises public awareness and confidence in restorative processes. More information from: RJC, Canterbury Court, Unit CC3.14, 1-3 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DE | 020 7831 5700 | [www.restorativejustice.org.uk](http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk).

### **Restorative Justice Forum (Scotland)**

The Restorative Justice Forum (Scotland) (RJF(S)) is an informal group bringing together key agencies, researchers and other interested people to consider how to progress restorative justice. The Forum is hosted by Sacro (a Scottish charity focusing on community safety and offender rehabilitation, which also manages Circles of Support and Accountability). The convener is Professor Joanna Shapland. To learn more about the work of the Forum please contact Connie Redpath [credpath@sacro.org.uk](mailto:credpath@sacro.org.uk) or visit [www.restorativejusticescotland.org.uk](http://www.restorativejusticescotland.org.uk).

### **Sycamore Tree Programme**

Sycamore Tree is a victim awareness project of Prison Fellowship: a programme that teaches the principles of restorative justice. It is taught in prisons in groups of up to 20 learners by Prison Fellowship volunteers. Prisoners on the programme explore the effects of crime on victims, offenders, and the community, and discuss what it would mean to take responsibility for their personal actions. More information from: Prison Fellowship England & Wales, PO Box 68226, London SW1P 9WR | 020 7799 2500 | [www.prisonfellowship.org.uk](http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk).

## Questions for reflection

These questions are offered for personal meditation and group discussion. They come from *Justice that Heals*, a restorative justice study pack produced by the (now decommissioned) Churches' Criminal Justice Forum.

In your experience, does it help to heal a relationship if someone who has harmed you in some way owns up?

What is the effect on a relationship of continued denial?

Is there anything in my life that I need to own, and for which I need to stop blaming others?

Which relationships have been damaged by my failure to do so?

To whom, if anyone, do I need to make reparation?

How can I do that without compounding the hurt?

What factors hinder reconciliation between offenders and their communities?

What factors hinder reconciliation between individuals?

Are there individuals or groups with whom I need to be reconciled?

What is hindering reconciliation?

Do you have personal experiences that illustrate restorative justice working?