



WHY PRISON?

A Framework to encourage discussion about the purposes, effectiveness and experience of imprisonment as a response to criminal actions



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Quaker Peace & Social Witness
Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee
April 2013

FOREWORD

“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.”

QPSW Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee, July 2009

Quakers have a long-standing historic involvement with the criminal justice system on both sides of the bars. This involvement continues into the present day with a commitment by Quakers to address the criminal justice system at all levels, from supporting individual prisoners to responding to government consultations.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness’s Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee is the current successor to a long line of groups and committees within the Yearly Meeting structure addressing the criminal justice system itself.

Our name reflects our sense that we are concerned with the state criminal justice system and how to build community, and a need for Friends to make witness in relation to both. The prime focus of this work is the promotion of restorative justice, trying to keep all those who are harmed by crime at the centre of processes and criminal justice systems.

Learning from Experience

We believe that greater understanding of the effect of judicial sentencing upon all concerned is a step towards creating change. It becomes possible to avoid the potential damage to individual lives and wider society, and to see what might be more constructive responses.

Our *“Learning from Experience: Personal narratives from the criminal justice system”* project is designed to help us do this. A key element of the project is asking 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.

We are using this resource of individual stories in a variety of ways, including now producing new materials to inform, challenge and support Quakers in Britain in making their witness in the area of crime and community justice.

Imprisonment

The stories tell us that there is widespread ignorance about what prison is really like and why people are sent there. Similarly, there seems to be little understanding of the widespread and deep impact of the denial of liberty on an individual, on families and on the community in general.

Our own discussions have revealed a common desire to explore why we send people to prison. We recognise that this is a deep debate and it will always contain many different opinions.

Personal narratives from the criminal justice system

The extracts in the Stories section are from eighteen of the personal narratives collected by Friends as part of the *Learning from Experience* project, providing instances of real experiences in Britain from the 1970s to today.

They are from adult men and women of varying ages, backgrounds and life experiences. Some are from the person who received the custodial sentence; others are from friends or relatives of someone who has been imprisoned.

Some of the stories are in the person's own words, others are 'as told' to the Friend who collected it for us. All these extracts have been edited to some extent, mostly to ensure anonymity or make them more accessible.

People contributing their stories are asked to tell us the effect of the criminal sentence upon them, the worst thing about the experience, whether there was anything positive about it, and if something or someone could – or did – make things better for them.

We do not ask about the offence for which the sentence was given. Although some people do volunteer this information in their story, we do not always include it in what we publish.

Discussion Framework

We hope this document will help Friends:

- consider the realities of imprisonment good and bad,
- explore the range of experience, attitudes and opinions which exist amongst themselves,
- provoke greater awareness of the place of imprisonment in the criminal justice system, in government policy, and in social attitudes,
- find their own answers to this major question, whatever those answers may be, and
- explore responses to the question of how the use of imprisonment does, or does not, meet our Quaker vision for the criminal justice system

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QUESTIONS

1. What do you think prison is for?
2. What do you think prison should be for?
3. Which of these purposes could be accomplished only by prison?
4. Which of these purposes could be accomplished by other means (as well as, or instead of, prison)?

5. Are there benefits to imprisonment? If so, what and to whom?
6. Are there disadvantages to imprisonment? If so, what and to whom?

7. When someone is sent to prison, what sort of experience should it be for them?
8. When someone is sent to prison, what sort of experience should it be for any other people affected by that imprisonment?

9. Does your understanding of the nature, purposes and effect of prison meet your vision of what our criminal justice system should be?

STORIES

STORY ONE

In the first prison I was issued with prison uniform and taken by a prison officer to a cell on the second landing of a block and shown what was supposed to have been my new home. My new neighbours had thoughtfully arranged a house warming party. I was bundled into the cell by several of these hospitable sorts, and was subjected to some violent high spirits – from which I was lucky to escape intact. In some ways it was a relief to be placed on a charge related to violent conduct. I could spend my days in peace, in solitary confinement, and in relative freedom from threat. But on the other hand, I was concerned that I had already severely debited my good behaviour account – the only incentive to secure release earlier than that otherwise expected. Self-defence was no excuse for breaking prison rules.

I was moved fairly shortly afterwards to Prison Two, where I settled without further incident and was accommodated in a cell, which slept two. Here my occupation included the sewing of mailbags and the soldering, by the thousands, of some sort of electrical contrivance I hadn't seen before or since. In my "free" time, I availed myself of a number of useful, educational courses – for which I was grateful, and have since built on substantially. They gave me the basic interests and skills which have served me so well since. These courses were in accounting, statistics, economics and business studies.

Due to the vagaries of the prison system I was moved to Prison Three. I don't recall why. It mattered little to me – although it was certainly true that my family and friends found much more difficulty in managing the time and travel challenges, which accompanied visits. In Prison Four my cell dwelling changed to a sort of dormitory arrangement where one bedded down in a cubicle, with a curtain, which doubled as a door. From here I was [in time] discharged.

STORY TWO

My cell mate really looked after me and had become a good friend. Two days before I was due to be released he phoned his wife who told him that she was going to divorce him. That evening he was very stressed and unhappy. The next morning when I woke up at 6 I saw him hanging dead from the window of our cell – he had cut a sheet and tied it to the middle bar of the window. I immediately pressed the cell alarm button but no one came until 6.50. It was not until 7.15 that the door of my cell was opened and I wasn't allowed out until 10.00am. The body was removed before I went back to my cell but I had to stay in that cell for the rest of the day and an extra night as there was no room for me elsewhere. Eventually I was removed to another cell but I was in a real state and I still have many nightmares about what I saw.

STORY THREE

I have served 10 years so far; the government/ministry of justice does plenty for us in terms of funding and provision of many courses. There is so much help available in prisons you just have to ask. The only "bad" I can say about prison life is obvious: the loss of liberty and sporadic family contact, limited fresh air and poor diet. The pros outweigh the cons massively. In 10 years I have been offered and completed over fifteen offence-related and restorative courses, including alcohol, work, cognitive distortions, anger and violence, victim empathy and assertiveness. I am about to start a social and life skills course around alcohol. All this is available to any inmate who wishes to reform, change, rehabilitate. Prison has helped me in many ways: I am more mature mentally, I have strong but reasonably sane moral values, I am more assertive, the aggression has left me and I have a strong work ethic, and things I didn't have previous to my incarceration.

STORY FOUR

As he has grown older the offences have become more serious. The pattern now is that he has these short periods in prison, comes home, and demands entry to the house. At the end of his first one or two sentences he was referred to the services for homeless people in the city. When sober he is polite, presentable and well spoken. Digs were found for him, but he lost them when he lost his temper and offended again. He was given hostel places, but always lost his temper with a staff member or another resident, and back he went to prison.

He does well in prison in the main. He gets well-fed, has good exercise and he now understands the system. When he comes out and is homeless he knows what kind of offence to commit to get himself back there, which he does within days. Short prison sentences merely confirm his pattern of behaviour and do not begin to confront the difficulties he has.

A secure, long term setting with good anger management provision could help as he is willing to be re-housed under supervision in the community. Without this he is likely to go on committing offences. He gets to the gym in prison and gets stronger each time he is there.

STORY FIVE

In prison I have found the staff helpful and when bullied on one occasion the incident was quickly dealt with. A positive outcome of this experience is that being in prison has made me realise how many women there are who are imprisoned for small offences and who are no danger to the public. I used to think that all prisoners must have committed very serious offences, like causing injury or murder. I now know better.

STORY SIX

Once you enter the prison system it is very apparent how quickly you leave your old life and identity behind you, you no longer have rights, wishes or even hopes. The system is designed to take care of all that for you with an almost regimented routine and structure. You begin to live your life around meal times and lock up. Due to the length of my sentence the system ignores you, it only works on EDR – Earliest Date of Release – so if you have a long sentence you can forget about getting help or doing courses for the first part of your sentence. This was very frustrating as I had accepted I needed help.

STORY SEVEN

I had been on remand for over eighteen months before I was sentenced to life with a tariff of four years ten months. Now my sentence begins and I have become part of the system and all of a sudden I am being interviewed by various officers. Everything is confusing, so much being asked and so much to take in and nobody there to explain things to you. You have to ask others, many just giving misinformation, rumours of this and that, leaving even more confusion and worst of all people who you think know the answers, the prison officers, are the least helpful or even don't know the information you need to know.

I was moved with a couple of hours notice to a prison in London. This was to be the closest I would be to my family for the next thirteen years. My family were able to make the journey to London about once a month. Unfortunately I only had two visits before I was moved again. This was a five hour car trip from home and effectively the end of visits from my family for many years. So much for the information in the lifer handbook, stating that the prison service know the importance of family support and that wherever possible a prisoner would be kept no more than a hundred miles from their family.

STORY EIGHT

I have been in a dozen prisons altogether now and as I'd been living on the streets more or less all the time I was out, prison felt gradually like home. In spite of some of the violence around at least you had food and a place to sleep when you were in. Being on the street all the time I got into alcohol and then drugs later. I had a girlfriend who was a smack-head too but she died.

I was given 'life' with a tariff of four years. I have been in ten. I am soon going for a year to a centre where I will learn about how to cope with life outside. I haven't a clue about how it works outside. My home has been a prison since I was seventeen.

STORY NINE

I did not do what I was convicted of, but it has sent me on such a lovely journey that I am glad the whole incident occurred. When the judge handed me the sentence, never been in trouble, I decided that I would use the time positively. Within the first few days I decided to give up smoking and have not touched a cigarette since. I had tried for years to give up. No doubt it is the best thing that ever happened to me: I feel so fit.

The 19 months I actually served allowed me to do lots of things. It gave me time to reflect on my life and where I was going with it and to look at my spiritual path (which brought me to Quakers). In open prison I had a job working in an old people's home, it has to be the best one in my life. I just adored my time there. The consequence of my going to prison is that it steered my life in another direction.

STORY TEN

I believe it has made me a better person by doing courses and also looking at myself in depth. The sentence has given me plenty of time for soul searching and renewing relationships that I had previously destroyed by my selfish attitude. The worst thing is being away from family and, most important, not knowing when the sentence is going to end. It would be nice to know how long the tunnel is so that I can see the light instead of treading water which is what I have been doing now for 2 years.

STORY ELEVEN

The prison experience was not as traumatic as the worry of the effects on T's elderly wife and family. The prison was a two to three hour journey from the family home by car and a day's travel by public transport. The first positive thing T talks of after incarceration was the provision by the prison service of a phone card enabling contact with his wife and family. The prison Chaplaincy proved a valuable side of prison life and being able to have a personal stereo and relax through music also provided release from the grim situation.

T benefited from receiving and sending letters to friends, family and Quakers alike.

He learnt to establish his own routine within that which was compelled by the prison regime, thus he was able to enjoy a certain amount of personal freedom and autonomy of identity. He also felt that he was able to contribute in a meaningful way to prison life by listening sensitively to other residents and prison staff with whom he came into contact.

STORY TWELVE

Once in prison he was in full security, which meant he was only allowed out of his cell for one hour a day and shared a cell with a murderer who had committed a particularly horrible offence. After two weeks he was put on to working so he was allowed out of his cell to work.

Visiting was very hard, I had to ring up to get a pass, I would start ringing at 8am and it was engaged, and press re-dial repeatedly for about three hours before I could get through. We had to queue outside prison before they would open the gates, then leave all our possessions and be frisked. He was sitting at a table in a 'netball' bib, to identify him as a prisoner, and we had to sit at the other side of the table.

On one occasion I tried to take him some trainers. When he was sentenced he was taken away in the suit and shoes he had gone to court in, and had no other clothes. His smart shoes were uncomfortable, but they wouldn't let him have the trainers. I argued with the wardens and eventually they relented. Eventually he was given a prison uniform, but this was at least a week later. At his prison medical he was asked what drugs he needed (e.g. methadone), and he requested some athletes foot powder!

Visiting was an awful stressful experience. We were allowed to visit once every two weeks. I used to have to stop on the way home to cry. All the time there was nobody to give me any information.

He was transferred to an open prison so when I rang to get a visitors pass to the first prison the person said he had transferred and was not here anymore and I should get in touch with the open prison. I rang there and they had never heard of him. They were very helpful, however, and did get back to me eventually, and told me he was travelling with some other prisoners that were being dropped off at another prison where he had to stay the night. I rang there but they wouldn't let me visit because they said he had been transferred, so I rang the open prison again and they said he hadn't, and wasn't there. I had no idea where he was, and no-one in the system seemed to either. This went on for four days and eventually the open prison said they would get him there as they had some laundry coming in from the transfer prison and they would bring him back in the laundry van. My persistence got him there in the end.

STORY THIRTEEN

Prison life is for me mentally stressful, being bullied, no real help or support from prison staff. I've had no visits, nor post as I've no family nor friends on the outside. By choice I remain in cell, only come out for meals or staff appointments, medical care.

STORY FOURTEEN

I had a visiting pass for 2.30pm. There was, of course, a traffic blockage on the motorway. I eventually got there a few minutes before 2.30pm. As I came through the first stage of security, I was immediately told that I should have arrived at 2.00pm so as to be cleared for my 2.30 visit. I protested that I'd come a long way and there'd been traffic hold-ups beyond my control, and was allowed to proceed to the next stage. There followed numerous security stages, and long periods on vast landings among other visitors who were sitting, either hopeful or resigned, waiting for the name of their prisoner to be announced.

All the prison personnel were hostile, blaming me for being late and saying it was very unlikely that my visit would take place. The other visitors were friendly, cynical, funny and encouraging and discouraging by turns.

When my visit was eventually called, I went through inspections to make sure I wasn't carrying drugs, and had to stand for an interminable length of time between two sets of automatic double doors, which I found terrifying. So, when I finally reached M, I was biting back tears and a complete jelly. I thought I should make excuses for the state I was in, and of course his response was, "You're only visiting, I'm here for years". I doubt whether the visit was any help to him at all. I felt a total disgrace, and he probably thought the same.

STORY FIFTEEN

I was brought up to regard a prison sentence as something inflicted on people who all else had failed. I was completely bemused at finding myself thrust into a criminal world of which I knew very little. Unlike many men facing prison for the first time, I had no history of earlier offending nor probation nor fines nor community sentences. I was suddenly in the position of being a complete outsider, vilified by other prisoners. ... I mixed with all sorts: confused young men refused bail after a minor theft, one or two old lags who represented nothing more than a nuisance to society.

STORY SIXTEEN

My son was sentenced to prison. I regarded it as a waste of my income tax money. He had been stopped in his wrong-doing and completed an NVQ in computing while on bail awaiting sentence. He needed treatment for depression and alcoholism, and a job.

STORY SEVENTEEN

Now began the worst three months of my life. I was “taken down” and processed by Group 4 custody staff, below the Court rooms. I was “bussed” (to use “inside” parlance) in a “cellular confinement vehicle” to prison. I was the last to be put onto the bus and first taken off. The motorway was blocked so the truck used A class roads adding another 45 minutes to the journey. On arrival I was placed in a room at Reception. After what seemed an eternity (about one hour) the door was opened. Now began my ‘real sentence’, the sheer horrific reality had really cut through my shock and trauma of the sentencing. I was a prisoner! Once now prison processed, I became a number not a free man.

After a time on the Medical Wing I was moved into what proved to be the oldest part of the prison still standing. Constructed in 1808 this wing was used to house prisoners awaiting sentencing of capital offences. It housed the condemned cell and “pinion room” (as the execution cell is correctly called). On this wing I shared a cell with a man with some questionable personal habits! (Urinating on the floor, washing himself with Nivea cream at 4.00am each morning in complete darkness and urinating into our cell kettle – which had been replaced twice before I arrived!)

Moved to another prison, my medical condition had got me single cell status but this generated social friction with neighbours on my landing [and] someone chose to make me the butt of their jokes due to extensive psoriasis on my arms. This was a first instance of personal bullying. After another instance I made an official complaint. Within a week I was moved onto a “main” wing and people started to seem more real and reliable.

STORY EIGHTEEN

From remand to starting a long term jail is just as traumatic as a house move: possessions stuffed into bags, acquaintances left behind, new beginnings. Lost, alone. I settled in well and eventually got a cell on a super enhanced wing through the Incentives and Earned Privileges system. It was en-suite. Only a few wings in the county had these luxuries: toilet, sink, shower, proper radiators as opposed to pipe running the length of a spur. The civilian prison staff were amazingly helpful, considerate and non-judgemental. Another surprise.

I went on to complete five Open University courses en route to my degree, all funded by the Prison Education Trust. The machine that typed this story was a gift from the Open University Student Education Trust. A free degree. Training. Opportunities. Not that everyone took them. Many men played play stations all day long or took meaningless jobs in workshops. Proper training was spasmodic, here today, gone tomorrow. The biggest shock for me, apart from the amount of drug users, was the illiteracy and the lack of ambition to utilise time in improving those aspects.

Don't believe the ‘holiday camp’ rumours. Prison food is not good: a low nutritional value. There were substitutes but only if one purchased them through the canteen (prison shop) at vastly increased, monopolised prices. Healthcare was reasonable once you got seen. Waiting two to three months for the dentist is not uncommon. Medication is available but strictly monitored. I am out now but still the punishment goes on. I am on licence for four years with restrictions on movements, job opportunities and relationships.

SUGGESTIONS

In working with the Discussion Framework ourselves, we found a number of different ways of using it, and these are outlined below: you will probably find others that suit your group. Timings are offered as a starting point and can be adjusted to suit the group.

Using the questions and stories for group discussions

- 1 *Using a single question and two stories which balance/contradict each other. About 30-60 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Write up or read out the question. Invite the group members to give their own responses to it. Give every group member a copy of both the chosen stories and enough time to read them and/or read them out. Revisit the question. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members earlier responses?

- 2 *Using a single question and two stories which balance/contradict each other. About 30-60 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Write up or read out the question. Invite the group members to give their own responses to it. Divide the group into two, giving each half one of the chosen stories, with enough time to read them. Revisit the question. Encourage group members in their contributions now to refer to/read aloud the story they have been given. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members earlier responses?

- 3 *Using one group of questions and most or all of the stories. About 60-90 minutes. For smaller groups.*

Write up or read out the questions. Invite the group members to give their own responses to them. Give each group member a different story for reading aloud in turn. Revisit the questions. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members earlier responses?

- 4 *Using one group of questions and most or all of the stories. About 60-90 minutes. For larger groups.*

Write up or read out the questions. Invite the group members to give their own responses to them. Give each group member a different story for reading silently. Revisit the questions. Encourage group members in their contributions now to refer to/read aloud the story they have been given. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members earlier responses?

- 5 *Using some or all of the questions and all of the stories. About 90-120 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Give every member of the group their own copy of the Discussion Framework well in advance so that they can read it in their own time. Ask them to write down their answers to the questions either before or at the start of the session, so that they can be shared with the whole group. This can be done openly or anonymously, and in a variety of ways according to the size and preferences of the group. For example: reading them aloud, adding post-it notes to questions written on sheets on the walls or tables, writing them on cards and circulating within the group for everyone to read. Invite discussion about the variety of answers. Have other people's answers and/or the discussion affected group members own earlier responses?

- ⑥ *Using one group of questions and most or all of the stories. About 60-90 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Make all the stories available to all group members (e.g. around the walls or individual copies of the Discussion Framework) before the discussion. Write up or read out the questions. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members previous responses?

Using the questions and stories for a longer-term exploration

- ⑦ *For use as a pair of meetings of the same discussion group. Each meeting needs at least half a day. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Without reading the stories, discuss the questions, capturing the responses and retaining the record. Following this discussion, perhaps a week later, send the full set of stories to each group member. Sometime later (e.g. a month) re-visit the questions in the same discussion group, now considering them in the light of having read the stories. Have the stories and/or discussion affected group members earlier responses?

Using the questions and stories for personal exploration

- ⑧ *Using the whole Discussion Framework. About 30-60 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups.*

Give every member of the group their own copy of the Discussion Framework well in advance so that they can read it in their own time. During a period of Worship Sharing invite whatever reflections they want to make. This can be followed by a discussion either after a break or on another occasion.

- ⑨ *Using some or all of the questions and stories. For individuals to use in private consideration.*

Without reading the stories, read and think about the questions, perhaps writing down your responses. Then, having read the stories, revisit your answers. Have the stories affected your previous responses?

Using the stories for role play

- ⑩ *Using some or all of the stories. About 60-90 minutes. For both smaller and larger groups. Initially working in pairs, then as a group.*

Give each group member a different story with time to read it and get into 'character'. Ask each group member to choose one of questions 1 – 6. Group members then get into pairs. One participant takes on the role of the person in their story and tries to answer the other person's question. Repeat, with the roles of story-teller and questioner exchanged. Still in pairs, group members share how it felt to be the story-teller and what they feel came out of the two conversations. Back in the full group, this exercise can be used to respond to questions 7, 8, and/or 9.

General guidance for group discussions

- Perceptions and views may not be affected by facts, but could be through hearing other people's views and experience. Some will come from the group members themselves; some are provided by the stories collected through our Learning from Experience project.
- The Discussion Framework is designed simply to help Friends explore the topic from the basis of their own views, opinions and experience and within their understanding of the Quaker testimonies. Of course this does not exclude factual contributions from knowledgeable group members.
- It can be helpful to find out about the group members own relevant experience, expertise and knowledge as early as possible, for example by starting the discussion with an invitation to group members to express this. **A note of caution:** some participants may not feel they have anything to contribute at this stage, others may have but prefer not to share it.
- For groups wanting to gather factual information from specialist organisations, a list of sources is given on page 19. Some terminology is also offered on pages 16 & 17.
- All the suggestions for group discussions require someone to help the group by doing some initial preparation and then perhaps also acting as facilitator during the discussion.
- If the group wants to capture points from their discussion at the time, and perhaps to refer to later, the facilitator may need to do this too (or find someone from the group to do it) for example using a flipchart.
- Friends using this discussion framework are encouraged to open and close each session with a period of worship to help participants make the link between the life of the spirit and the subject being explored.
- The questions need not all be tackled at the same time. Nor do all the stories have to read at the same time. The suggestions below can be used for one-off discussions or over a series of discussion groups. Our experience is that one group of questions can be tackled within 60-90 minutes.
- Asking Question 9 towards the end of each discussion can be helpful in testing what has emerged from it. Or this could be the question each group member takes away to consider for themselves afterwards.
- **And a note of encouragement:** There are no 'right' answers. This is not a 'study pack' to explore a particular position: we hope it will support and encourage open discussion by Friends of this deep debate.

TERMINOLOGY

These are the terms and purposes most commonly used in the media and in government policies describing reasons for imprisoning people who are convicted of a criminal act:

- Deterrence – to discourage people from committing a criminal act
- Public protection – to protect society from people who have been convicted of committing a criminal act
- Reducing re-offending – to lower the number of instances when a person who has committed an offence repeats it or commits further offences
- Rehabilitation – to enable people who have been convicted of committing a criminal act to have a constructive place in society
- Reparation – to enable people who have been convicted of committing a criminal act to make amends to the victims of that act and/or society
- Retribution – to punish people who have been convicted of committing a criminal act
- Treatment – to deal with an underlying mental illness or addiction which has led someone to commit a criminal act

PEOPLE

The people who are affected when someone receives a custodial sentence can include:

- the perpetrator of the crime
- the children of the perpetrator
- other family members of the perpetrator
- the victim of the crime
- the family and friends of the victim
- people working in the prison service
- the community
- society more widely
- government

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is the mending of that which is broken, the healing of hurt, and the removal of the causes of harm. It uses healing as an alternative to retribution and punishment. It makes possible reconciliation.

Restorative justice processes

Here is a definition from the Restorative Justice Council, a national charity promoting restorative justice: *Restorative processes bring 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.*

The key principles of restorative justice processes are:

- Victim support and healing is a priority
- Offenders take responsibility for what they have done
- Dialogue to achieve understanding
- 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

There are a number of different processes:

- Victim – offender mediation: brings the victim and offender together
- Restorative conferencing: for larger groups, and using ‘script’
- Family group conferencing: provides family private time
- Victim – offender groups: brings together e.g. burglary victims and burglars
- Reparation: putting things right for victim or community

Does restorative justice work?

General evidence¹ on the use of restorative justice processes is mostly very encouraging, showing:

- Victim and offender satisfaction
- Reduction in post-traumatic stress symptoms for victims
- Mostly positive though somewhat variable results for reduction in reoffending
- Confidence in restorative justice processes where good practice guidelines are followed

Quakers have been advocating restorative justice since the late 1970s as this quotation from a 1979 publication, *Six Quakers Look at Crime and Punishment* shows:

“We believe in overcoming evil with good. We must speak and act from our own inner light to the inner light in others as Jesus did. He showed and taught love, respect and concern for all, particularly those rejected by others, reaching out to the good in them.”

¹ E.g. Sherman & Strang: Restorative Justice: The Evidence. 2007

ADVICES & QUERIES

Here is a selection of Advices & Queries from Quaker Faith & Practice that we found relevant in our own consideration of this issue:

11. Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths might you be evading? When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you. In worship together we can find the assurance of God's love and the strength to go on with renewed courage.
17. Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern? Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.
22. 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.
32. Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?
33. Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?
34. Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.
35. Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear.

INFORMATION

These are the key sources of information about prison policy, prisons and prisoners in England, Wales and Scotland.

Ministry of Justice (England and Wales)

W: www.justice.gov.uk/about/moj

Scottish Government Justice Department

W: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales (HMIP)

W: www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmi-prisons

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS)

W: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/public-safety/offender-management/offender/custody/Prisons/hmip

Independent Monitoring Board (England and Wales)

W: www.imb-ni.org.uk / www.justice.gov.uk/about/imb

Visiting Committees (Scotland)

W: www.avc.org.uk

Howard League for Penal Reform

W: www.howardleague.org

Howard League Scotland

W: www.howardleaguescotland.org.uk

Prison Reform Trust

W: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

Restorative Justice Council

W: www.restorativejustice.org.uk

To find prisons in England and Wales

W: www.justice.gov.uk/contacts/prison-finder

To find prisons in Scotland

W: www.sps.gov.uk/Prisons/prisons.aspx

[Because this Briefing is written primarily for Quakers in Britain Yearly Meeting and Friends in Northern Ireland are members of Ireland Yearly Meeting, details of the Northern Ireland Assembly are not included.]

This is one in a series of publications arising from the “*Learning from Experience: personal narratives from the criminal justice system*” project of the Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) Crime, Community and Justice Sub-Committee.

The project is still actively welcoming stories until the end of 2013. You don't have to be involved with the criminal justice system: you may have a friend, relation, colleague who has been affected. You may have a story of your own.

If you know of someone, please ask them if they would be willing to tell their story. Simple guidelines are freely available to help collect the stories in a form that protects the storyteller's anonymity. More information from Paula Harvey, Crime, Community and Justice Programme Manager.

QPSW is part of the central organisation of Quakers in Britain, and this Sub-Committee supports and represents Quaker concerns in the area of criminal justice.

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April 2013