

Restorative Approaches to Sexually Harmful Behaviour (SHB) UK



Type of intervention



Individual Work

Group Work

Target groups, levels of prevention and sub-groups:



Tertiary prevention

Children (6-11 Years), Young People (12-17 Years), Young Adults (18-20 Years) | Male & Female | Individual Work, Group Work



Tertiary prevention

Children (6-11 Years), Young People (12-17 Years), Young Adults (18-20 Years) | Male & Female | Individual Work, Group Work

Target population

Children and young people who display sexually harmful behaviour (SHB) and victims of children and young people who display SHB.

Delivery organisation

Specialist Restorative Services with knowledge and experience of SHB such as the AIM Project in Greater Manchester and intervention sessions run by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation, UK.

Mode and context of delivery

- Identification of potentially suitable cases
- Thorough risk and restorative assessment to ensure safety and applicability
- Detailed preparation with all parties
- Delivery of either direct (face to face meeting) or indirect (shuttle mediation) communication
- Detailed evaluation

Can be delivered either in a formal criminal justice context after prosecution/conviction and as part of a formal order on the offender, or as part of a safeguarding/welfare approach outside the criminal justice system. It is often felt to be more appropriate if initiated at the request of the victim. It is subject to standards of practice describing 'sensitive and complex' cases in the UK's Standards of Restorative Practice, available from the Restorative Justice Council.

Level/Nature of staff expertise required

Requires a high degree of Restorative Justice practice skills in assessment, preparation and delivery of this approach. Practitioners need to be experienced in a wide range of sensitive and complex cases with contextual background knowledge of issues in relation to children and young people displaying SHB.

Intensity/extent of engagement with target group(s)

Intensity and extent of engagement will vary from case to case, but as these cases are defined as 'sensitive and complex' in a restorative sense, they will demand enhanced skills and knowledge, together with time and attention, to ensure safety and to deliver potential benefits to participants. Additionally, restorative approaches operate in a complex web of multi-agency responsibilities and concerns and require excellent communication and liaison to explore suitability and to deliver an outcome that fits with other ongoing interventions/support services.

Description of intervention

'Restorative Justice (RJ)' and 'restorative approaches' are terms which are used interchangeably to indicate a process involving a victim and an offender potentially taking part in communication which may be direct or indirect. The nature of the process in any particular case will be governed by the safety of the participants, the potential benefit to both parties and the wishes and needs of both. Assessment of the above factors may lead to no communication taking place, indirect communication taking place or a face-to-face meeting taking place, with supporters and others taking part in a meeting described as being either a mediation, restorative conference or family group meeting, depending on the structure and focus of the methodology. All participants engage on a purely voluntary basis. A number of factors might be seen to be a 'driver' for consideration of the process:

- A previous close or familial relationship which will endure beyond the harm that has arisen, but which needs to be placed on a safe and managed footing
- Questions and issues that the victim needs to be addressed and which were ignored by the formal criminal justice processes
- The need to address the reality of the harm caused in a context which is wider and more inclusive than that offered through the formal criminal justice process
- To offer benefit to the healing and recovery process which many victims seek and/or offering additional dimensions to victim empathy and the expressions of shame and remorse by the offender

The construct of the meetings will vary from case to case, but should reflect the particular needs and characteristics of participants.

Evaluation

Restorative approaches have been subject to extensive multi-national evaluations, many of which indicate a strong influence in reducing offender recidivism. Many other studies have detailed the real benefits felt by victims of crime when engaged with restorative approaches. Routinely victim satisfaction studies return figures in excess of 85% victim satisfaction, as opposed to those experienced by engagement with the more 'traditional' elements of the criminal

justice system. The RJC (Restorative Justice Council) details a study showing a reduction in PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) for victims engaged in a restorative approach. However, very little research has been conducted in the narrow field of RJ and SHB. There is currently a European Union research initiative to survey RJ/SHB practice but this will not report until 2015. Other RJ/SHB Projects such as Project Restore have published limited case evaluations and the AIM Project describes a number of cases in Martin Calder “ Working with children and young people who sexually abuse; Taking the field forward’ RHP 2007 (see below).

References

Hudson, B(2002), ‘Restorative justice and Gendered Violence; Diversion or Effective Justice?’ ‘The British Journal of Criminology on Practice, Performance and Prospects for Restorative Justice’, Vol42, 3, 616-634

Mercer,V, Henniker,J; 2007, Working with Children and Young People who Sexually abuse; Taking the field forward. Ed Calder,M.C. “Restorative Justice; Can it work with young people who sexually abuse?”; Russell House Pub

Project Restore; an exploratory study of RJ and Sexual Violence; May 2010, Julich,S, Buttle,J,Cummins,C,Freeborn,E.V, AUT University

Sherman,L,W. Strang,H. (2007) ‘Restorative Justice; The evidence’ Report following the Jerry Lee Program of Randomised Trials in Restorative Justice, pub by the Smith Institute

Contact details

Vince Mercer, Restorative Justice Coordinator of AIM Project
www.aimproject.org.uk