

# Why Me? Policy Position on Restorative Justice

## What is restorative justice?

Restorative Justice (RJ) gives a victim of crime the chance to tell the offender their side of the story.

An RJ conference is a facilitated meeting between a victim of crime and the offender, where the victim describes the impact of the crime and how they feel about what happened. It has a powerful cathartic effect. Often, it is the first time that victims participate in a process which is about them rather than the offender.

Victims have a chance to speak about their experience and to ask questions, such as 'why me?' and 'why did you do it?'. In turn, the offender experiences at first hand the victim's story and has the opportunity to understand the harm they have caused. For the victim, it is equally important to hear the offender's story.

Victims report a reduction in fear and a 85% satisfaction rate<sup>1</sup> with RJ conferencing. conferencing is proven to reduce Post-traumatic stress disorder' and thus helping victims and reducing health care costs

Effective RJ conferencing is proven to reduce reoffending by 27%.

## What makes them so effective?

Individuals are deeply affected by crime and it often affects friends and family. RJ conferences offer a way out of a life of fear and reduce the trauma.

**Will Riley** was attacked in his own house by Peter Woolf. By his own admission, this successful, strong and tall businessman was scared to go back into his own house, until he met his attacker in an RJ conference. 10 years since that conference, Peter has not committed another crime and Will has gained back his confidence and his life.

**Dave Rogers** met the boy who killed his son in an RJ conference. His life without his son will never be the same again, however meeting the young offender has reduced his trauma and allowed him to live more peacefully. It has had a hugely healing effect on his life and he advocates it for all victims of crime.

**Laura's** life was turned upside when her house was burgled when she and her husband were asleep in their beds and their small child in the room next door. She could not understand why he had picked their house, their car, their lives to upset and ruin. Since she has met the offender in an RJ conference, her life has changed - she no longer feels a victim and she feels stronger as a result.

### **What is the problem?**

- RC is not available to all victims of crime nor is it offered consistently across the UK – only 1% of victims are offered RC.
- Police and victim organisations, particularly frontline volunteers working with victims, are often unaware of the potentially life-changing effects of RJ on victims or are unclear about how to provide it.
- An offender has to admit their guilt and agree to participate. Even when they do, it can be difficult to arrange a meeting because the offender may be in prison far away.
- The agencies involved in dealing with crime are not coordinated and what is good for the victim often ends up as a secondary consideration.<sup>ii</sup>
- RJ conferences can be complex to achieve and can incur substantial upfront investment to realise.

### **What is the solution?**

- RJ should be made available to and offered to victims of crime from the moment they enter the Criminal Justice system
- Victim support organisations should ensure that their contact with victims includes information about and support for RJ conferences.
- Better information to the police, prisons, probation and courts will increase awareness of RJ and how to access it for victims.
- RJ should be offered to all victims pre-sentence – i.e. an amendment to the LASPO Bill – to allow the court to make attending a conference part of the sentence.
- Investment in RJ, on the offender side alone, is shown to make savings of £1 billion over ten years<sup>iii</sup>. The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill needs to make statutory provision for RJ with appropriate funding.

### **Four top truths about Restorative Justice conferences**

- TRUTH A restorative conference only takes place when both parties are willing to participate.
- TRUTH Research shows that the more serious the crime and the harm caused, the better a RJ conference works<sup>iv</sup>
- TRUTH Offenders often find a face-to-face meeting with their victim tougher than the court because they are confronted directly by the story of the person they have harmed and have to account for their actions; whereas in court their case is presented by a lawyer, they themselves do not even have to look at the victim or say anything.
- TRUTH For every £1 spent on a RC, £8 are saved in the Criminal Justice system through reductions in recidivism. The victim suffers less trauma and needs less state support to carry on with their lives.

---

<sup>i</sup> Shapland, J et al (2008) Restorative Justice: Does Restorative Justice affect reconviction? The fourth report from the evaluation of three schemes. Ministry of Justice Research Series 10/08. London: Ministry of Justice

<sup>ii</sup> Community or custody, Make Justice Work, 2011

<sup>iii</sup> Matrix Report,

[http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/matrix\\_evidence\\_\\_economic\\_analysis\\_of\\_interventions\\_for\\_young\\_offenders/](http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/matrix_evidence__economic_analysis_of_interventions_for_young_offenders/)

<sup>iv</sup> Shapland et al.