

# Contemporaneous record of a Restorative Justice conference

Why me?

Location: a prison

## Present:

- M – Harmed person (in his 20s)
- G – Mother
- D – Offender (in his 20s) convicted of robbing M at knifepoint in xxx Park, xxx on the late evening of xxxxxx.
- N – Police officer / Restorative Justice facilitator

*A prison officer (from where D is held) and a Why me? observer are also in the room.*

In the room at 10am are N, M and G, sitting in chairs arranged in a circle.

N – My job is to get things addressed in the right order. If we move onto things in the wrong order I'll intervene. He'll be in in a minute.

M – I'm nervous.

G – I'm daunted.

D is brought into the room by a prison officer. He sits down.

N – Welcome D (*introduces everybody – they say hello*). Thanks all of you for coming. We're here to discuss the robbery that happened on the xxx in xxxx. We want to talk about how this family has been affected and how D can address reoffending and how he can make things better in the future. Our only ground rules are to please treat everybody here with respect. You will all have a chance to speak. Please speak to each other, not to me. In the end we'll do a formal agreement which will be given to D to show what he can do to make things better. This is a chance to make things better. Now what actually happened? D – you give your account.

**D** – Well, I was walking down the street and noticed you (*refers to M*). I was withdrawing from drugs and I needed money. My mate pulled out a knife. I was in two minds. We had a little tussle. My mate took the ipod. My mate got arrested and I got arrested two days later.

**M** – I've always wondered why people take drugs

**D** – My mum is bi-polar. My girlfriend stopped me seeing my little boy. Mum had a breakdown and I turned to heroin.

**G** – M lost his father two weeks before this crime. He had to deal with all that – deciding with us to turn off the life support machine then the funeral. Why didn't that make M turn to heroin then? And does your mum know about this?

**D** – Different upbringing.

**G** – My younger son started with cannabis and I turned it round – got him arrested and he went on a drugs programme. You should earn money for your drugs if you're going to take them.

**D** – Heroin messed me up – I didn't care about things.

**G** – All of us have some things going on in our lives – everyone does – He does (*nods to N*), she does (*nods to Why me? observer*). Having a traumatic thing happen should not make you go on drugs. Too easy. You should be facing up to responsibilities and tackling problems.

**N** – This is a facing up process.

**D** – I got myself clean here (*in prison*). I was disgusted I did knife crime – I did petty stuff before.

**G** – What happened in the tussle? The knife could have gone into M – what then? You could have been up for killing him?

**D** – Yes. I have thought about that now.

**G** – It could have been a death sentence

**M** – Can you talk about the friend you were with?

**D** – I'm trying to distance myself from drugs people. I was doing structured days out from prison but I ended up falling back. I breached probation to get back into prison because you get proper help in here to do it.

**G** – What will happen when you leave prison?

**N** – Bring us back know to what happened...what was stolen?

**D** – My ipod touch, cards and a receipt.

**G** – What made you decide on him, not Joe Bloggs?

**D** – He was the only person I could see. Not often you see people that time of night. If anything had been open I'd have done that.

**M** – How much did you get for the ipod?

**D** – £70 – I split it with my friend then spent it on heroin. I needed the money in fifteen minutes, because the dealer was leaving the place he was, otherwise I'd have been really ill.

**G** – You didn't think about M or his family?

**D** – No

**M** – What's withdrawal like?

**D** – Like flu, you're sick, you get diaorrea, your stomach is twisted, so bad – you want to commit suicide. Worse thing.

**N** – What was your habit?

**D** – £70 a day

**N** – All crime?

**D** – some and my mum would give me cash

**M** – How do your parents feel?

**D** – Dad disowned me but my mum thinks I'm ill and needed help. I've lost my little boy and my partner and my job through it. I'm lucky to have mum and dad. I'm so disgusted with myself for getting into it again – that's why I wanted to get back to prison.

**N** – Talking about the fight – you held the knife to M's head? This is the only thing you're in for? Did your friend get a lesser sentence?

**D** – He was on bail for something else. He's younger than me. I've lost everything. I think there's no reason for me to be here anymore but that's the coward's way out.

**G** – You've got to turn yourself around. You've got to change the way you are. Do you want to stay here for the rest of your life? If you've got a habit, you've got to fund it yourself not go around mugging.

**M** – Or you should try to get away from it.

**G** – Otherwise it'll be pointless letting you out. It'll be one vicious circle. How would you like it if it happened to you?

**D** – Awful

**G** – You've got to get away from excuses. Everybody has got to face up to problems and not do this stuff. My cousin split from his wife, she wouldn't take him back and he jumped from xxx Bridge. It's the easy way out. You've got to stop taking the easy way – you've lost everything , all because of drugs.

**N** – (to D) What you did was out of order. (to D and G) D accepts this.

**G** – You don't know what M was going through.

**M** – You don't know what it was like. After it I was angry – I hit things. I wanted to know why someone would do that.

**G** – I had to start picking him up – he didn't want to go out – he was jumpy. Not just the thing of taking something – it's the knock on effects. He was a xx year old frightened to go out at night. All because of drugs.

**N** – So nineteen months on he's still affected.

**G** – He doesn't want to take the dog for a walk in the dark at xx years of age. He should be going out and living a normal life.

**M** – The anger went quickest. Now I'm not so bad, but still a bit wary. I keep my eyes peeled.

**N** – What about the financial losses?

**M** – There was no money back, no insurance

**N** – (*to D*) It was a tough time for M with his father's recent death. These things have a very serious effect on victims.

**M** – We were both in the wrong place at the wrong time.

**N** – who else has been affected by this?

**M** – Immediate family and my close friends

**N** – G, how was it?

**G** – So angry – if I'd come face to face with you you wouldn't be walking now. When we found out it was drug related – even worse. The younger generation take the easy way out. No one will accept responsibility – in your case it's to take drugs. If you go on you'll be back in here. What effects is this having on your poor mother?

**N** – Yes explain the effects

**D** – I've lost my child, my mum is so stressed knowing I'm in prison, my brother is ashamed of me. My family have washed their hands of me.

**G** – Once you lie it leads to another lie. When you've lied to your family you've lost their trust.

**D** – My dad has lined up a job for me – this is my chance.

**G** – They'll always think it's you when you are new in a job if anything goes missing because they know what's happened. I feel that way about my younger son who took cannabis. If anything is missing the thought always comes into my head that he has nicked it.

**M** – If you keep lying you end up believing in your own lies.

**D** – I've done stuff here to get better

**N** – What are the other effects on you?

**G** – You could go on for ever – it’s always there in the back of your head. As a mum you worry – you want to protect your child. It’s instinct.

**M** – Would you do things for your son?

**G** – How would you feel if someone had done this to your son?

**D** – The same. My dad is ashamed of me.

**G** – You must get off drugs. You must ask for help here – that’s if you don’t want to be on drugs.

**D** – The support here is good.

**G** – You have got to keep thinking every moment you’re out. There’s a good and bad road. You need to stay on the good road now, otherwise your life is over. Your son could grow up fatherless – think of the future.

**D** – Yes I know – you’re right.

**G** – You can get another partner but your son is the number one priority.

**M** – You need to ask for help

**G** – Never be ashamed to ask.

**M** – I know it’s hard to ask but you must.

**N** – D has had alot of help on this wing

**D** – *(to M)* It can’t be nice not being able to go out without being scared.

**N** – You must remember the effect of the crime on M and G. This should stop you offending again. What are you doing now?

**D** – Detoxing. I had methadone at first and I was clean for two and half months. I’ve done all the groups, victim awareness, TSB awareness, drugs course, PASRO – I wrote my life story. It makes you think of the impact. I wanted to do RJ to find out how you felt.

**N** – *(to prison officer)* Tell us about x wing

**Prison Officer** – It deals with drug detox. There are four nurses monitoring. Usually it’s 5-7 days to get them stable and then they get better by exercising. They are given information on drugs and then go to another wing to work. He’s (D) is upstairs and working now.

**D** – The best support in jail is on C wing. You need to be on that wing.

**N** – Can you get drugs in here?

**D** – Sometimes, but you lose everything on C wing if you’ve had drugs.

**Prison Officer** – If you fail a drugs test you lose everything on C wing

**G** – Tell me truthfully – what if someone offered you drugs?

**D** – No. I've turned it down. I've had one spliff.

**M** – What about on release?

**D** – I hope I'm mentally strong enough to turn it down. I want to get away from drug areas.

**G** – If you feel you're OK, you need to deal with it stresses come up.

**D** – I was ashamed to ask for help before. I was scared.

**G** – In my marriage – 35 years – you work together through the problems. My husband was on the dole for a bit, but we stuck it out and worked together.

**D** – I wasn't able to ask for help with my relationship breakdown.

**G** – You should ask your mother for help. Every kid should be able to ask their mother.

**D** – I thought I had to deal with it on my own.

**M** – You have to work to regain trust. Then your family stands by you. My mum does.

**D** – My mum is getting over it. My dad wants me to prove myself and work as a kitchen porter. I did retail for a bit. I'm lucky – my dad has secured this.

**M** – In a sense losing your dad's trust has been a blessing – you have a motivation to work to regain it.

**G** – You've got to do one step at a time. Your first is getting over drugs.

**D** – It's hard, especially on the outside when you can just go and get some. I'm having regular contact with drugs support. I'm looking into total blocker medication which you can get.

**G** – That sounds like a good idea. Then you'd be wasting your money if you took drugs and they didn't work.

**N** – Will you go to xxx Drugs Project?

**G** – My other son went there – they're fantastic.

**D** – I'm off drugs. I want to stay off.

**M** – Your biggest test is now. Will you relapse? It's not what you want.

**D** – I don't want people to go through what I put you through.

**N** – All the stuff here in prison – he's taken every opportunity. He'll have to use all of this on release.

**D** – Starting afresh – away from here - should help.

**M** – A new start?

**D** – definitely.

**N** – Probation will give you support.

**D** – I've got a good relationship with probation and my offender manager.

**N** – So your son will be xx years old on xxx. Will you be staying clean for him?

**D** – Yes.

**N** – You are standing up and taking responsibility? And facing the consequences? You don't get any reduction in sentence for taking part in this. Today is another reason not to reoffend, so we are putting together an agreement. What are you going to do in the future?

**D** – Stay off drugs and ask for help if I need it.

**M** – Stay away from drugs and crime.

**N** – Earn trust from your family unit.

**D** – I've got to build a relationship with my son.

**N** – Be a good dad.

**D** – I've missed out on a big part of his life, I don't want to miss out on any more.

**N** – The ripple effect from this crime is large, but there are lots of positives. You've got a job to go to.

**G** – Stop mugging people with knives. You've got to give your son someone to look up to when he's growing up.

**M** – If your son sees you with drugs and crime he'll imitate you.

**G** – What happens if your son finds the drugs on you? He needs a role model. If you're not doing it for yourself, do it for your family – your son. I'd do anything for my sons. I love them even though I didn't give birth to them – they're both adopted. You've got to show your son. You can steer back your son. Your son will respect you because you've got experience. Keep him on the right path. You can stop and help other people with what you know and have done.

**M** – You can help others

**D** – I've experienced it.

**G** – That knowledge you've got, you can pass that on.

## Everybody then signs the agreement.

**G** – You better stick to this or watch your back

**N** – This is your promise to M and his mother. Now hopefully you will feel normal off drugs.

**D** – I'm sorry, I apologise to you (to M and G)

**M & G** – Thanks.

D is then taken from the room by the prison officer. The meeting concludes.

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