

Observer Programme

Guidance to Agencies hosting an Observer

Drawn up by Why me?

Background

During the 2003/4 Restorative Justice trials in the London Crown Courts, Esmée Fairbairn funded an Observer Programme which led to a number of high profile people – Peers, Judges, MPs, journalists, senior managers in the Criminal Justice System – sitting in on restorative conferences. Some of the observers championed Restorative Justice in the House of Lords and at senior Government level to ensure that more victims of crime would benefit.

Why me? started up another Observer Programme in 2012, in the light of the success of the previous programme. This works well to support the ongoing intention from Government to mainstream Restorative Justice in the Criminal Justice System, making it much more widely available for victims of crime through local services. It also provides an opportunity to increase understanding and support for Restorative Justice amongst the judiciary, Police and Crime Commissioners and other stakeholders – including local MPs, journalists and policy-makers. The programme is now supported by the Restorative Justice Council and the Ministry of Justice.

Relationship between Host Agency and Why me?

As an agency providing Restorative Justice at the local level you have a key part to play. The Observer programme will rely on the agreement of your participants **and** your agency's willingness to host an Observer.

Key benefits for you and your agency include:

- Engagement with local and national opinion formers, showcasing your good work
- Shaping the public perception of Restorative Justice, through their experience
- Building Judicial and senior management understanding and support for Restorative Justice in your local area



To support you in hosting Observers the Why me? Observer programme will provide:

- Details of Senior Managers, VIPS, Judiciary or Journalists in your area who would like to observe a restorative meeting.
- Diary management/liaison – we will let them know when you have a meeting available for them to observe – and provide them with venue, travel information, timings and protocol
- Support for the Observers – we will provide each observer with an Observer Pack outlining the research evidence, good practice, their role, and what to expect on the day. We will also provide the Observer with the opportunity to de-brief with the Why me? Observer programme Representative as they may well come away with strong emotions and questions about what they have experienced.
- This guidance to you in hosting Observers in your agency.

Guide to Coordinating the Observer.

Before the meeting

- Please check with the participants that they are happy to have an Observer watching the meeting. Explain to participants that the Observer is there to increase their own understanding of Restorative Justice; they will not take part in the meeting in any way, and will keep the details and identities of everyone involved in the meeting confidential.
- If you have the agreement of participants to having an Observer present, please inform the Why me? Observer Programme Coordinator of the date and place the meeting will be taking place, so they can liaise with one of the Observers waiting to attend a meeting.
- The Observer Programme Coordinator will confirm to you the name and contact details of the Observer who will be attending the meeting and provide you with any additional details about their background. Any Observer allocated to you will have been provided with the Observer guidance pack, they will have been thoroughly briefed about their role in the meeting and have been given details of when and where to come to attend the meeting.

Day of the meeting

- Ensure that the room you have booked for the meeting is big enough for a circle of chairs for the main participants, and a separate row or circle outside the circle. We suggest that the Observer should always sit outside the circle, and they will have been briefed not to speak during the meeting.



- As you set up the room before the meeting we recommend you also think about the Observer's line of sight – you may prefer for them to have a direct line of sight to the facilitator, but not to the victim/offender.
- *Where possible*, an Observer Programme Representative will call or meet the Observer prior to any conference/meeting, and will de-brief afterwards, so as to minimise work for the Practitioner. Why me? Representative *will not expect* to observe the meeting but may accompany the observer to and from the meeting.
- We recommend that the Observer briefly meet the Practitioner [Facilitator/Mediator/Panel Chair] before the meeting, to have the opportunity to ask any final questions, and to find out where you want them to sit in the room. If the Practitioner is occupied just before the meeting **and** a Why me? representative is unavailable, we recommend someone else be there to greet the Observer and show them to the room.

During the meeting

- At the start of the conference, when introductions are taking place, and when ground rules are being covered, we suggest you take this opportunity also to introduce the Observer, mentioning just their first name and not their professional role - particularly if they are a Judge, Prison Governor, MP etc. Do remind all participants that the Observer is there only to witness to meeting **and** remind the Observer that what takes place is confidential.
- At the close of the conference, if you have provided refreshments, it may sometimes be appropriate for the Observer to join in conversation with participants at this point in the process. *However* they will have been told in their Observer pack that the refreshment stage is an important element of the whole process, and the primary focus of this time should be to enable any on-going interaction and restoration between the main participants. **If the Practitioner/Facilitator feels the Observer should not take part in the refreshment stage conversation they should feel free to make this clear at the start and/or escort them out following the formal end of the meeting.**
- Observers should be escorted from the meeting and invited to immediately meet or call the Why me? Observer Programme representative, to de-brief, share their ideas, experiences and any questions they have following the process. This may well be in addition to any informal feedback discussion they have with the Practitioner running the meeting.

After the meeting

- The Why me? Observer Programme Co-ordinator will speak to every Observer to debrief following their observation of the restorative meeting. We will feedback any points or questions that the observer makes about you as the host agency. Confidentiality will be respected at all times.

Closing Remarks

We are very grateful to you for hosting the Observer to see the restorative work of your agency. We encourage all agencies to refer to the [Restorative Justice Council](#) *Practitioner and Service Provider* Handbooks for further practitioner and service development.

We value your support hugely for helping us to raise awareness about Restorative Justice and are keen to publicise good news stories. If you have stories to share about your work or about your experience with the Observer programme, please contact the Lucy Jaffé on 020 3096 7708.

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