**The Mint House: Oxford Centre for Restorative Practice**

**Growing restorative practice: The Mint House Approach**

1. Restorative practice is best known as an approach to resolving difficulties and repairing harm when conflicts arise and relationships breakdown. It involves all those affected looking at what the impacts have been and what needs to happen to put things right. The same core principles, or underpinning ethos, can also help to build and maintain healthy relationships, reducing the risk of conflicts taking place.
2. Such practice is increasingly being seen as core to healthy individuals, families, organisations and communities. In social care and other settings, it can also be key to helping participants give voice to, and meet, their own and each others' underlying needs.
3. While the prize is great we know from academic studies[[1]](#footnote-1), and from the many failed attempts, that growing restorative practice - getting to the point where it is used consistently and sustainably in many different contexts - is challenging. It involves much more than learning a new tool or technique. Often it involves a new way of thinking for practitioners: a shift from taking on the role of 'rescuer' to being truly collaborative; a willingness to enter 'uncharted territory'; plus flexibility in responding to issues that emerge. Great care is needed throughout to make sure participants don't suffer further harm.
4. To flourish, restorative practice needs to sit within a culture that is *itself* marked by respectful relationships and healthy dialogue, with implications for management, leadership and governance: how decisions are made and how colleagues relate to one another. Changes are likely to be needed to systems, policies and procedures,ranging from staff supervision to discipline and grievance to assessment tools/forms and the handling of complaints. And at a practical level, restorative approaches take time, when time is often at a premium.
5. So what does it take for restorative practice to become 'the way we do things round here?' As Kay Pranis points out: '*There is no single road map or blueprint for building a restorative system; .... The process of searching for answers should involve dialog with all who have an interest in the question.'[[2]](#footnote-2)* With this caveat, there are some common themes which guide our approach:
* ***Top level buy-in***. Senior leaders need to back a restorative approach in full knowledge of what this means in practice - e.g. the scale of change likely to be needed and possible effects on peoples' workloads. Leaders will benefit from having time and space to reflect on what being restorative means for them personally and talk openly and honestly about the implications for organisational culture, management, leadership and governance.
* ***A restorative approach to implementation***. By definition, restorative approaches cannot be imposed. Pranis recommends going with the grain: *'Energy is most effectively expended working with those who are actively interested in trying restorative approaches. Seeds sown in fertile soil produce the most impressive results which, by example, will convince sceptics more readily than direct persuasion.'* However introduced, the process of implementation should model restorative principles, being marked by honest and respectful dialogue.
* ***Supporting manager and practitioner journeys of action reflection****.* Previous initiatives have fallen flat because training and practice were out of kilter. Significant effort was invested in staff training only for staff to lose confidence because - for a variety of reasons - they weren't able quickly to put their learning into practice. The underlying assumption here is that restorative practice is a technique that you learn 'off site' then implement as opportunity allows - typically by facilitating a restorative conference.

We need to turn this notion on its head. The focus instead should be on supporting practitioners - individually and collectively - to explore what being (more) restorative means in their specific contexts through a continuous journey of action reflection. This might involve a combination of: one to one coaching or mentoring; co-facilitation; group supervision; plus opportunities to build skills and share learning through a community of practice. There is also a case for inviting practitioners to keep a reflective journal, using this to reflect on their experiences and learning.

Managers will also benefit from help to navigate what being restorative - taking a genuinely person-centred approach - means e.g. for how priorities are set, how staff are supervised and how those being served experience the service.

* ***Restorative policies and procedures***. Working more restoratively inevitably means adapting policies, procedures and assessment tools, building in restorative principles and reflecting a new approach to exploring people's underlying needs, resolving difficulties and promoting dialogue.
* ***Empowering participants.*** According to Chris Straker (until recently Chief Executive of the Restorative Justice Council) restorative practice needs to be developed with full involvement of all those likely to be touched by it. Intentions to work restoratively need to be shared with children, young people, families /other service users: as Chris Straker puts it 'they must demand a restorative process for the system to change.' This may involve working with current or potential service users to shape a shared vision of what a restorative service looks like. Implementation also needs to draw on feedback from and dialogue with children, young people, families/other service users about the quality of their experience and the difference it made.
* ***Evidence and awareness.*** Finally, restorative practice thrives best where communities, businesses and institutions understand its power and benefits. This means being clear about what's involved, telling stories of transformation and helping people learn by doing. It also means evidencing the costs and benefits of restorative practice, including what it means for individual, community and workforce well-being. Some work has been done on this,[[3]](#footnote-3) but the stronger the case the better.
1. Extract from a presentation by Professor Jennifer Llewellyn of Dalhousie University

http://www.hullcentreforrestorativepractice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/KN3-JL-City-of-Restorative-Culture-Hull-2017-2.pdf; Alexandra Wigzell & Mike Hough, *The NOMS RJ Capacity Building Programme: a study of the quality of participant and implementation experiences* (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Building support for community justice: Principles and strategies* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, e.g. *Building Bridges: An Evaluation and Social Return on Investment Study of the Le Cheile Restorative Justice Project in Limerick*. (2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)