

WEXFORD RESTORATIVE PRACTICES PARTNERSHIP

'Developing Restorative Practice in County Wexford'



WRPP

Restorative Practices

2016 Activities Report

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- TUSLA Child and Family Agency
- Wexford County Council
- HSE Suicide Prevention Office
- Probation Service
- Garda
- Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board
- Wexford Education Centre
- Wexford Local Development
- Ferns Diocesan Youth Service
- Bernardos
- Slaney Youth Diversion Project
- Safe Youth Diversion Project
- The Cornmarket Project

I would also like to acknowledge the County Wexford Children and Young People's Services Committee and Wexford Local Development whose support has made our work possible.

Paul Delaney

Chairman

Wexford Restorative Practices Partnership



WHAT IS RESTORATIVE PRACTICE?



The essence of restorative practice is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things **with** them, rather than **to** them or **for** them (Wachtel, 2004). Restorative practices (RP) are both a philosophy and a set of skills that have the core aim of building strong relationships and transforming conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner. Restorative approaches provide an underpinning ethos and philosophy for making, maintaining and repairing relationships and for fostering a sense of social responsibility and shared accountability. When harm has been caused by inappropriate, sometimes thoughtless, negative behaviour then all sides need:

- A chance to tell their side of the story and feel heard
- To understand better how the situation happened
- To understand how it can be avoided another time
- To feel understood by the others involved
- To find a way to move on and feel better about themselves

If conflicts and challenges are dealt with in a way that get these needs met then those involved can repair the damage done to their connections with the others involved, or even build connections where there were none previously. Punitive disciplinary responses, on the other hand:

- Cause resentment rather than reflection
- Are rarely considered fair
- Do not repair relationships between those in conflict and indeed can make them worse
- Leave those labelled as wrongdoers feeling bad about themselves leading to further alienation
- Can often leave those people expected to act punitively feeling uncomfortable and frustrated, and wishing there was an alternative.

Environments that have had most success in the implementation of a restorative approach are those that have seen it as part of an ongoing plan to develop relationship skills, emotional literacy, health and wellbeing and distributed leadership opportunities.

The six principles of restorative practice are:

1. **Restoration** – The primary aim of restorative practice is to address and repair harm.
2. **Voluntarism** – Participation in restorative processes is voluntary and based on informed choice.
3. **Neutrality** – Restorative processes are fair and unbiased towards participants.
4. **Safety** – Processes and practice aim to ensure the safety of all participants and create a safe space for the expression of feelings and views about harm that has been caused.
5. **Accessibility** – Restorative processes are non-discriminatory and available to all those affected by conflict and harm.
6. **Respect** – Restorative processes are respectful to the dignity of all participants and those affected by the harm caused.

(Transforming Conflict, UK 2016)

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?



In criminal justice, restorative practice is widely known as restorative justice. Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offenders to explain the real impact of the crime – it empowers victims by giving them a voice. It also holds offenders to account for what they have done and helps them to take responsibility and make amends. In the UK, research demonstrates that restorative justice provides an 85% victim satisfaction rate, and a 14% reduction in the frequency of reoffending. Restorative justice is about victims and offenders communicating within a controlled environment to talk about the harm that has been caused and finding a way to repair that harm.

For offenders, the experience can be incredibly challenging as it confronts them with the personal impact of their crime. For victims, meeting the person who has harmed them can be a huge step in moving forward and recovering from the crime.

Restorative justice conferences, where a victim meets their offender, are led by a facilitator who supports and prepares the people taking part and makes sure that the process is safe. Sometimes, when a face to face meeting is not the best way forward, the facilitator will arrange for the victim and offender to communicate via letters, recorded interviews or video.

For any kind of communication to take place, the offender must have admitted to the crime, and both victim and offender must be willing to participate. Restorative justice can be used for any type of crime and at any stage of the criminal justice system, including alongside a prison sentence.

Restorative justice in Ireland was introduced on a statutory basis for the first time in the Children Act 2001. There are two restorative justice initiatives provided for in the Act:

- A restorative conference or restorative caution included in the Garda Diversion Programme
- A court-ordered restorative justice conference delivered through the Probation Service and coordinated by a qualified restorative justice facilitator.

In a restorative justice conference, a victim can speak directly to an offender about the hurt and harm they have caused. In some cases, there is an agreement on a way that the offender can compensate the victim, possibly by way of an apology, financial or other reparations to the victim, or by doing something positive for the community. In addition, an outcome may be that an initiative is undertaken by the offender that might help to prevent re-offending.

BACKGROUND TO WEXFORD RESTORATIVE PRACTICES PARTNERSHIP



The proposal to develop restorative practices in County Wexford grew out of an action put forward by the Cornmarket Project to the Young People & Mental Health Working Group of Wexford Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC), and subsequently included in the plan for County Wexford by CYPSC. In early 2016, the Cornmarket Project was appointed as the lead agency for the development of the restorative practice actions contained in the CYPSC plan. Following the appointment of the Cornmarket Project to lead on this initiative, an initial steering committee of local organisations interested in restorative practices was established. Since then, the Cornmarket Project has anchored the work of the WRPP and has provided administration and other supports throughout the first year of development.

The steering committee expanded its membership during 2016 and agreed to adopt the name Wexford Restorative Practices Partnership (WRPP). Membership of WRPP currently includes: TUSLA Child and Family Agency, County Wexford Children and Young People's Services Committee, HSE Suicide Prevention Office, Probation Service, Wexford County Council, Bernardos, Garda, Waterford Wexford Education Training Board, Wexford Education Centre, Wexford Local Development, Slaney Youth Diversion Project, Ferns Diocesan Youth Service, Youth New Ross, SAFE Youth Diversion Project and the Cornmarket Project.

In November 2016, Wexford County Council unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the development of restorative practice in County Wexford. In addition, WRPP also received a further vote of confidence and support when a series of actions supporting the introduction of restorative practice was written into Wexford County Council's Local Economic and Community Plan for 2016 – 2021.

INFORMATION SEMINARS

WRPP decided to gauge interest in restorative practice in County Wexford and organised two information seminars in mid-2016. The first of these was held in Wexford on 30th May with an additional seminar held in Enniscorthy on 1st June. These two seminars proved extremely successful with an attendance of forty-three representatives drawn from throughout County Wexford from a cross section of organisations including child and family welfare services, youth services, education, community, housing and criminal justice. Arising from the seminars it became clear that we already had a cohort of skilled restorative practice facilitators in Wexford, mainly in the education and criminal justice sectors. These facilitators, who had already been championing the development of restorative practice over many years, were now able to come together through the vehicle of WRPP to gain additional support and to further coordinate and advance their efforts. Moreover, those who attended the two seminars from a wide range of organisations, but who had little knowledge of restorative practice, expressed their enthusiasm and support for helping in the development of restorative practices in County Wexford.

FIRST WRPP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The first annual conference of Wexford Restorative Practices Partnership was held on 15th October in Enniscorthy and was attended by sixty delegates from sectors that included: Young People's Services, Education, Community Development, Criminal Justice and Housing and Homelessness. The conference listened to a panel of expert speakers from the areas of restorative practice and restorative justice relate their own experiences of developing and delivering restorative practices. A brief account of the conference is given below.

CONFERENCE OPENING REMARKS – MICHELE WEIR



The conference was opened by Michele Weir, Senior Probation Officer for County Wexford, who outlined the work that the Department of Justice, through the Probation Service, is doing in this area. She stated that promoting and encouraging change in individual offenders and the facilitation of their reintegration into the community is central to Probation Service strategy on Restorative Justice, citing the Probation Service Restorative Justice Strategy – Repairing the Harm: A victim Sensitive Response to Offending, November 2013. She stated that the Probation Service believed that offenders must accept personal responsibility for their behaviour and where possible make good the harm they do. Equally she said, we are committed to respecting the rights of victims of crime in all our work with offenders. The values of restorative justice are compatible with the values of openness, respect, professionalism and commitment which underpin the wider Probation Service Strategy – Lasting Change through Offender Rehabilitation 2015-2017.

FIRST KEYNOTE SPEAKER – CLAIRE CASEY



The first keynote speaker was Claire Casey, practitioner and trainer in RP from the Tallaght Childhood Development Initiative. Claire related how the Tallaght Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) had come into being. She stated that the CDI is funded under the Government's Area Based Childhood Programme (ABC), which builds on the learning to date from prevention and early intervention programmes. The ABC aims to break the cycle of child poverty in areas where it is most deeply entrenched and to improve the outcomes for children and young people where these are currently significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the State (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013).

Claire went on to relay how in 2010, CDI identified the work of the Hull Centre for Restorative Practices in the UK as being relevant to the Tallaght West context, and offering a model which could meet locally identified needs. It was an approach which supports everyone to build healthy relationships, to look at where we are accountable and to take responsibility for our actions and was an appropriate fit with the dynamics and relationships within Tallaght West. In addition, she said that the solution-focused model offered an outcome based and sustainable intervention. Evidence from Hull demonstrates that a range of organisations had taken

on a restorative approach to their work and achieved positive results in very short time frames. For example, after only one year, the nine schools where restorative practices were initially piloted reported the following: 79% reduction in class disruption; 92% reduction in exclusions from breaks; 81% reduction in days lost from fixed term exclusions; 79% reduction in reported verbal abuse to staff; 80% reduction in pupil to pupil physical abuse; 82% reduction in incidents at lunch; and a 92% reduction in reports to the Principal or other senior staff.

Training for the CDI was delivered by the UK Office of the International Institute for Restorative Practices monthly and targeted all the agencies with responsibility for children and young people (including schools, early year's services, youth services, educational welfare staff, local authority staff, probation services, community centres, community Gardaí, adult education services, etc.) as well as parents and young people themselves.

Claire concluded her presentation by stating that CDI began its RP Programme with an overall vision of equipping those working or interacting with children and young people with the skills to build strong relationships and to effectively and easily support the resolution of conflict when it arises. The independent evaluation, CDI's experience and that of a plethora of people working with or concerned about young people, confirm that consistent use of a restorative approach will do both things and more.

SECOND KEY NOTE SPEAKER – GARDA INSPECTOR ANDY TUITE



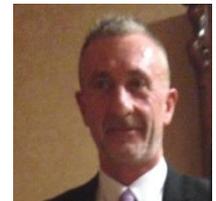
The second key note speaker was Andy Tuite from the Irish Youth Justice Service and a facilitator and trainer in RP for the Gardaí and other staff involved in criminal justice and Garda youth diversion programmes. Andy began his presentation by speaking about his involvement over many years in the Garda Diversion Programme. He outlined how the Diversion Programme utilises Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices to engage with young people to address offending behaviour. The approach focuses on the Victim and allows for the victim's voice to be heard. The young person gets an opportunity to address the victim and the harm caused because of their criminal behaviour. Andy spoke about how Restorative Justice is a voluntary process where the young person accepts responsibility for his/her offending behaviour and becomes accountable to those he or she has harmed. The victim is given the opportunity to have their views represented either by meeting the young person face to face or having their views represented by someone else.

Outlining the objectives of this approach Andy went on to state that when an offence or crime is committed there is harm done to a person or a community. In some way that person or community is affected by the harm. Restorative Justice aims to deal with the harm through a discussion. Restorative Justice attempts to bring that harm to the centre of the discussion. It does this by giving a voice to the person who has been affected by the crime. It then creates an opportunity for the offender to repair the harm caused by the offence and work towards the prevention of re-offending. The Restorative Justice process does not concern itself with judging or blaming.

In addition, Andy also gave an account of who typically can attend the process and under what circumstances. All those taking part in a Restorative Justice intervention do so voluntarily. Participants should include the young person who has offended, his/her family and the victim, who may also bring along someone to support

them. Any person, who can positively contribute to the process, may be invited by either the victim or the young person. The process is organised by a Juvenile Liaison Officer if done through the Diversion Programme, or by an appointed Restorative Practices facilitator if done through the Probation Service and who is specially trained in mediation and restorative practices. Examples of people invited to attend with the child and his/her parent or guardian include persons to support the victim, teachers, social workers, sports trainers and youth or project workers. Andy also stressed that the use of restorative conferencing and circles was by no means 'an easy way out' for offenders.

He stated that although it can be a very tough process for those who have committed an offence, it is also fair and respectful and again he emphasised, like the two previous speakers, that he has been involved in many restorative practice interventions where the outcomes were far better than the traditional application of punitive measures. In conclusion, Andy stated that restorative practice in communities resolves conflicts and disputes before they escalate into crime and is an effective approach to dealing with antisocial behaviour and neighbour disputes. It enables people to understand the impact of their behaviour on others. It delivers effective outcomes owned by the local community and creates stable, positive community environments.



THIRD KEYNOTE SPEAKER – FRANK MURPHY

The third keynote speaker was Frank Murphy, a school principal from Ballindaggin in County Wexford and tutor in RP with the Wexford Education Centre. Frank began his contribution by stating how useful he had found restorative practice in his role as a teacher and school principal. He reflected on his own experience of how the use of one of the core concepts of RP, active listening, had helped both the perpetrator of an offence and the person offended against, to be more able to resolve conflict and reach an amicable solution. He also said that schools are being challenged as never before to respond to changing societal needs in ways that will support students, parents and teachers in meaningful learning communities.

Frank stated that the old punitive ways are proving to be inadequate and that restorative practice which has a relational based approach that is respectful and creative, is proving in early research to be effective in its outcomes. Frank stated that based on his own experience and that of other teachers he has trained in this approach, he now believes that the restorative approach is one that merits serious consideration by educators everywhere. He mentioned that in his own school they have trained many students to adopt the RP approach and these had then functioned as 'RP buddies' for other younger students, with amazing success.

Frank also reiterated that the challenge of working and relating in our schools in a restorative way can go far beyond managing behaviour and dealing with issues of 'control' to creating dynamic, respectful, innovative, collaborative environments. He said that Restorative Practice offers a 'How', a pathway, in a clear, human, caring, supportive and structured way. Finally, he stated that while some people might think that this is wishful thinking, the experience of Restorative Practice in schools in Ireland to date has given schools the hope and the tools to become more effective and child-centred learning environments. In conclusion, Frank stated that at its most basic, restorative practices improve the quality of relationships we have. Using this approach can both avoid and minimise conflict, and help us to manage it better when it does arise. More specifically, restorative practices have been found to reduce school exclusions, improve staff sickness rates, reduce

tensions in the work place, and give people greater confidence in managing difficult situations. People who have participated in restorative practice training and are using it as a way of working, report that their work is easier, more enjoyable and more effective.

CONFERENCE CLOSING REMARKS – SHEILA BARRETT



Sheila Barrett is the coordinator of Wexford Children and Young People’s Services Committee. Sheila outlined how the development of Restorative Practices in Wexford is now an important action written into the CYPSC plan for County Wexford and is also supported by TUSLA, the Child and Family agency. Sheila emphasised how Restorative Practice can play a role in helping frontline staff in child and family services. She mentioned that from listening to the expert speakers at the conference, it is obvious that there are a range of restorative processes spanning from formal conferences to impromptu groups and circles and individual interventions based on affective statements and questions. All these seek to build and restore relationships. She closed the conference by observing that restorative practice provides an explicit and theoretical framework to enhance behaviour change and provides clear decision making and conflict resolution models for staff to use in their day to day practice.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

Four thematic workshops took place simultaneously on the afternoon of the conference. They were: Restorative Practices in Education, Restorative Practices in Young Peoples and Family Services, Restorative Practices in the Community, and Restorative Practices in Criminal Justice. Fifteen delegates took part in each workshop and their deliberations are included in this report in the form of an analysis of what the workshop participants felt were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis) relating to developing



restorative practices in Wexford. In addition, the participants were also tasked with outlining a four-point list of priority areas that they would like to see the WRPP working on as we move forward, and these were:

Education

- Training in Restorative Practices for the adult education sector
- That we should encourage whole school involvement as the best way to succeed
- How to get Restorative Practices embedded in communities
- How to ensure that we can get the broadest support for the work of WRPP

Community

- How to bring the enthusiasm for Restorative Practices from the conference into communities
- How and where to start
- How to involve others in our communities
- Identifying champions that will help spread Restorative Practices

Young People and Family Services

- Developing Restorative Practices starts with ourselves, how we practice and model it
- Identifying people who we can train and mentor
- Next steps, develop an action plan
- Evaluate the learning from training in Restorative Practice

Criminal Justice

- Restorative Justice will take time and resources to implement properly
- The implementation of Restorative Justice will require champions at every level
- It will be very important to measure outcomes from our various interventions
- We should build on the positive initial research in this area

WORKSHOP SWOT ANALYSIS

Each thematic workshop produced a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis, and these are listed below:

Education & Restorative Practice

Strengths	Opportunities	Weakness	Threats
Interest in RP in Wexford	Sharing of resources around emotional literacy	Not getting buy in from all	Not being consistent
Starting emotional language training	New junior cycle presents an opportunity to integrate RP	Organisations and individuals can fall back into old ways	Time constraints
Use of common language			
Ownership/Closure			
The prompt card as a resource			

Community Development & Restorative Practice

Strengths	Opportunities	Weakness	Threats
We have a diverse community of RP advocates	RP is open to the entire community	It could have limited uptake	Lack of funding for training
We can develop using word of mouth	It allows everyone involved in conflict the freedom to speak	How communication can be handled	If we don't deliver i.e. start early
There is a readiness and willingness	It respects equal status	A lack of awareness of RP	
This really works!	To develop and deliver RP training		
It is fundamentally about human rights	By being a pro-active language of engagement		
It is a pro-active approach			

Young People/ Family Services & Restorative Practice

Strengths	Opportunities	Weakness	Threats
That we have agency buy-in	To reduce costs	A significant gap in RP practitioners	Slower progress within families
We have a lot of existing expertise/ experience	To develop community relationships	A slow buy-in from families	Existing traditional approaches can be hard to change
RP is very cost effective	To have a quick buy in by young people	No specific funding	Not enough time for training
It can help build new community relationships	For further training	Amount of time it might take for training	Insufficient follow up on today
RP has a common approach and language	To develop our next steps		
It is part of the CYPSE plan for County Wexford	For lifelong learning		
RP improves work relationships			
We have strength in numbers			
We have many champions involved already			
We have evidence of it working			
There are good examples of different areas where RP has been effective			
RP is a fair process			
RP is transparent			
Young people like it			

Criminal justice and Restorative Practice

Strengths	Opportunities	Weakness	Threats
It helps to reduce re-offending	For flexibility in how RP is delivered	Lack of time and resources	Media mis-information
It provides closure through engagement of victims	To create healing	Confusion in relation to public opinion	Lack of support-internal in organisations
It is a progressive experience for all parties	To change attitudes	A weakness in emotional literacy	Lack of champions
In using RP, people are listened to	To have a positive effect on communities- the ripple effect (offender, victim & communities)	A lack of communication/ social skills	No political will
It can bring consistency across agencies	To enhance inter agency work	Possible negativity by staff	Financial resources
It provides for open accountability & apology from offender	To develop collective responsibility & community involvement in justice system	Complex language/ jargon	Legislation- time to implement
RP is a respectful process	To develop more RP champions	The possible length of process	Inter organisational lack of clarity- rolls
RP is evidence based		Legal aspect- disclosure & how to deal with it	Safeguarding confidentiality
RP ensures collective responsibility		Managing expectations	Lack of inter-agency work
It helps to deal in a restorative way even without full process		Young people engaging with adults	Risk to community if not done well
It can be a very positive process		Media buy-in, countering 'a soft option' take on RP	Not measuring outcomes
		Getting all parties engaged	
		When there is no direct victim	

WRPP FUTURE PLANS

WRPP is in the process of prioritising the suggested actions which arose from the workshops at our conference in October 2016 and these will then be used as the foundation for an action plan to further our aim of developing Restorative Practices in County Wexford. In the meantime, our immediate activities are centred on the delivery of training in RP facilitation skills and the development of mentoring support for those already involved in RP delivery in County Wexford. The delivery of this initial IIRP accredited training is made possible through grant aid from Wexford CYPSC, and will be delivered in early 2017 in Enniscorthy and Wexford with more advanced training organised for later in the year. It is also proposed to support other frontline staff throughout the County by delivering a series of shorter RP introductory half day courses. Some of these have already taken place, with others organised for delivery later in 2017.

Following the success of our first conference, WRPP has decided to make it an annual event where those interested in developing RP can hear from experts on the latest developments in relation to practice and research and get an opportunity to share their own experiences with others using RP in County Wexford. WRPP has also established an education sector sub-committee to explore how best to respond to demands from this area and to investigate opportunities to secure further resources for developing additional training into the future. As we continue to develop, Wexford Restorative Practices Partnership will encourage local organisations in County Wexford to adopt Restorative Practices as a way to simultaneously improve services and save money and we will work to provide the support and training to make this happen. In conclusion, the stated aim of WRPP is to develop Restorative Practices throughout County Wexford. We understand that significant challenges lie ahead in achieving this aim. However, we equally believe in the efficacy of Restorative Practice and that by working together as a partnership to fulfil this aspiration, WRPP can become a very effective force in contributing to the development of healthier and more resilient young people, families and communities in County Wexford.



Appendix.

Membership of Wexford Restorative Practices Partnership 2017

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