



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE UNIT

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NEWSLETTER

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Restorative Justice Conferences Reduce Trauma from Crime, Study Shows¹

The NSW DCS Restorative Justice program aims to facilitate consensus about how to reduce the harm caused by an offence. The primary aim is however to address unresolved issues.

In Abbey Porter's EFORUM article, she states that "The emotional and psychological impact of crime can last far beyond the incident itself, in some cases affecting victims' lives for years. A groundbreaking study has shown, however, that restorative justice conferences can mitigate those effects and help victims heal and move forward more quickly."

Porter details the outcomes of a clinical study undertaken by Dr. Caroline M. Angel. Dr Angel studied the impact of restorative justice conference participation on post traumatic stress

symptoms in London based victims of burglary and robbery.

In keeping with the anecdotal experience of NSW victims of crime, Angel's research findings clearly demonstrate that participation in conferencing reduces the psychologically traumatic effects of crime.

To what does Angel reportedly attribute the reduction in post traumatic stress? Porter concludes that of the many factors "Perhaps most important, they answer a question that plagues many victims: Why me?" Angel is reported to say "It is a very common type of rumination. You saw it over time – the people who attended the conferences were less likely to ask that question" she said. Ruminating that question was attributed as a significant predictor of continued post traumatic stress symptoms.

¹ Porter, Abbey J Restorative Practices EFORUM August 15, 2006 www.iirp.org

Here is a real example of the self reported benefits of victim participation in victim-offender conferencing in NSW.

A victim of crime had suffered a partial breakdown and was unable to work for some months due to the stress of the offence. Since the conference the victim has reported that he is 'doing really well' that he is 'glad he did it' and that he has 'moved on'. The victim's wife reports that she feels a 'big relief' after meeting the offender and that she sleeps better at night. The victim's daughter is not as worried as she used to be about her father going to work.

Another local victim of crime described her participation in a DCS victim offender conference:

"Absolutely everything is done to make sure the conference won't traumatise you any further.

I was terrified the day of the conference – so much so that I could barely speak. At first I couldn't even look at him and I even wanted to block my ears. But I didn't want to give him any reaction.

I thought of all these things I wanted to say to him. There were some things I absolutely felt I must ask him – but I

simply forgot. I wasn't as anxious as I thought I would be. I realised that I didn't need to know the answers.

When they asked me what I wanted from the conference, I didn't know. I guess I still don't know what I got from it. But I know that I have improved a hell of a lot. I'm not as scared as I was, I'm more settled and I rarely think about him anymore (which is great)."

In NSW the Restorative Justice Unit provides a process for transforming the conflict generated by criminal behaviour, healing people affected by the crime, enhancing human relationships and reintegrating offenders into the community.

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