Written evidence from The Forgiveness Project

AN EVIDENCE-BASED RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMME

In 2010 NOMS recommended that The Forgiveness Project should commission an independent evaluation of RESTORE. Recognising that short early interventions can support offenders’ desistance journey but acknowledging also that measuring re-offending rates rarely can be attributed solely to one intervention, the advice from NOMS was to evaluate our impact by measuring intermediate outcomes.

Funded by the Monument Trust, Rayne Foundation and Bromley Trust we went ahead to commission an independent evaluation from the Forensic Psychological Services (FPS) at Middlesex University which was launched in the House of Commons in 2012 in the presence of the Prisons Minister, Jeremy Wright.

For the full report (Adler & Mir) http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/9401/

The evaluation included both quantitative data to measure short term attitudinal outcomes and qualitative data to measure medium term ones. Using the main standardised scale Crime PICS II (regarded widely as a good proxy for recidivism), analysis of variance indicated that before the intervention the control and research groups were substantively the same. However, after the intervention, there were significant differences found, all in the positive direction, indicating that those who completed RESTORE had improved general attitudes to offending, were less likely to anticipate re-offending, and less likely to evaluate crime as worthwhile. FPS consider this to be an exceptional result.

In addition to the FPS evaluation, cultural scientist Christina Straub carried out a qualitative evaluation of RESTORE at Ashfield Young Offenders Institute (Bristol) where funding from the Home Office’s Communities against Gangs, Guns and Knives fund (2011-13) enabled us to embed the work within the fabric of the prison 2012-2013.

We have also developed a theory of change for RESTORE modelled on a framework created by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC).

EVIDENCE SUMMARISED

Intro
RESTORE engages neither a ‘risk-based’ nor a ‘needs-based’, but a ‘strengths-based’ approach to addressing reoffending. Our philosophy confronts standard, judgement-led approaches, which have had consistently poor success rates in achieving persistent offender desistance. The RESTORE programme therefore fits well within ‘assisted desistance’ policy thinking.

According to rigorous research into the RESTORE approach to date, the quality of engagement and response amongst participating prison populations has proven to be extremely high – often soliciting commitment levels unprecedented in individual offenders’ prison records. Thus attendance and repeat attendance levels have been evidenced as particularly strong in comparison to other prison-based learning opportunities, and offender evaluations of the programme have been extremely positive.

**Intermediate outcomes**

**Knowledge & skills**

Participants demonstrated that they feel differently, for example more focussed and emotionally open, empathetic, supportive, supported, heard and understood by others. This has resulted in participants feeling and communicating differently about themselves, their victims and what is possible for the future.

Participants demonstrated that they can think differently, for example being less judgemental, challenging their negative thoughts and seeing new possibilities opening up. They were witnessed adopting new perspectives on other people, seeing new reasons for their life events, realising the effects of their own actions on their victims, and accommodating different choices or options within their view of their own future life path.

**Attitudes & values**

Participants often began to engage in and express attitude change, for example new attitudes towards how criminality works. These changes were apparent in offenders’ revised views on the inevitability of their reoffending, and on any usefulness of anger or benefits from revenge. Attitudes were seen to change regarding the beneficial value of forgiveness, on the nature of justice, and on the possibilities afforded by motivational and positive thinking.

Participants expressed new motivation to change their life paths, for example manifesting increased self-esteem and motivation to make new effort, determination to believe in themselves. Many expressed the wish to give back and restore, and a new desire to contribute to a wider community, to participate in further training and even to mentor others.

The RESTORE process catalysed different choices and intentions, voiced by participants on completion. Participants expressed intentions to follow inspirational examples, to reconcile and restore damaged relationships, and importantly the intention not to perpetuate cycles of violence and damage.

**Altered Behaviours**

Offenders engaged in different behaviours following participation in RESTORE, for example employing new levels of empathy, trying to foster forgiveness of others and to forgive themselves, challenging their own anger, not succumbing to revenge desires, resisting violence. Some offenders began building positive relationships, and avoiding negative or regressive peer relationships.

Participants began acting with a greater awareness of the negativity of victimhood – for example no longer seeking revenge, or regarding other people as holding the answer to the
obstacles they face. Apparently now able to recognise the ‘ripple effect’ of their (and others’) criminal behaviour, some offenders seemed ready to take new control of their own story. 

**Staff reported** better relationships between staff and prisoners and a positive behaviour change on the wings.

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