

**Restorative Justice in Europe
Organising Restorative Justice Practice**

Communication with Related Agencies

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The principal goal of this workshop is to offer some reflections on:

- **The importance of communication to restorative justice**
- **The need of a comprehensive communication strategy**
- **The main objectives of such a strategy**
- **The values involved**
- **The key players that may be engaged**
- **The possible methods of delivery**
- **Suggestions on what should *not* be done**
- **The major benefits that can be secured**

The importance of communication to restorative justice

- Very often people adopt strong ‘punitive’ attitudes due to an unrealistic fear of crime and distorted perceptions of offending that are by and large spiced up by the media.
- Also, generally speaking, in relation to corrections, most people are persistently and consistently exposed to the bad news, and only scantily or awkwardly to the good news, to the progress made or to any success stories.
- Most local communities and individuals feel powerless before crime, and, since they develop a belief that this is due to ‘being lenient’, they opt for what they decide is the only viable alternative: *i.e.*, ‘being hard’.

**A good communication strategy
can reasonably temper such attitudes**

The need of a comprehensive communication strategy

Such a strategy can show:

- That ‘acting sensibly’ is not the same as ‘being lenient’ or ‘not being hard’;
- That society gets a better deal when punishment is meted out tactfully and not for its own sake or for mere ostentatious (political) reasons;
- That restorative justice is all about improving conditions on the ground, and not about some abstract, theoretical concept unrelated to real life experience or to concrete community interests;
- That restorative justice *is* dealing with victimisation in an effective way; and
- That the various agencies involved in the criminal justice system can, and will, deliver better when working in cohesion.

The main objectives

communication strategy

- To enhance the understanding and appreciation of the principles and practice of restorative justice.
- To solicit and secure support for restorative processes.
- To provide balanced information about the advantages, successes, and risks of restorative practices (maybe in comparison to the ‘punitive’ ones).
- To increase public confidence in the effective administration of justice through the use of restorative processes.
- To promote an all-round team-work environment when dealing with criminal justice matters.

The principles involved

communication strategy

For any communication strategy concerning restorative justice to be efficient and effective, it *must* at least:

- Comprise community participation and community building, without which the whole process will be compromised;
- Reflect the range of interests of all key players involved;
- Express precise and consistent messages (both by the general strategy itself and by each of the agencies involved);
- Be sustained over an extensive period of time;
- Be kept simple, economical, and within the existing possibilities of the agencies involved; and
- Be steadily monitored, evaluated and improved.

The key players that may be engaged

Not in any particular order

- Criminal justice professionals
- Prison staff
- Prosecution services
- The police
- Probation services
- Community legal services
- Media partnerships
- Agencies that offer community services (*e.g.*, housing, health, and social services)
- Victim and/or witness support agencies
- Voluntary and community organisations involved in criminal justice issues
- Politicians (local and/or national)

The possible methods of delivery

- It is advisable that a Strategy Team be created, representing as much key players as possible.
- The Strategy Team will:
 - set realistic objectives
 - consider options within budget constraints
 - establish a network between all interested parties for the relay of information (discussions, minutes, *etc.*)
 - create and distribute relevant printed material
 - develop a presence on the Internet (website, emails, *etc.*)
 - cultivate a healthy working relationship with the media (radio, TV, newspapers, *etc.*)
 - organise public events (discussions, fora, seminars, *etc.*)

Suggestions on what should *not* be done

If possible:

- Do not think on a grand scale – It is probably better to work on something that is quite simple and more manageable (both in terms of resources and finances).
- Do not aim to use new means of communication before exploiting the possible ones you already have at hand (even if perhaps more limited).
- Do not embark on mass communication ventures (aimed for the general public) before approaching practitioners and/or professionals in a more quiet, controlled and businesslike manner.
- Do not go for broad-spectrum, overhead exploits but be more incisive by targeting specific audiences.

The major benefits that can be secured

- Involving interested parties into the strategic plan goes hand in hand with the spirit of restorative justice, since this is a community-based process.
- Involving relevant criminal justice sectors is fundamental for the success of any restorative plan, since in most countries restorative justice still goes against the grain, and thus still needs to attract much support and reliance.
- Sustained attention to the media people is more than essential, it is vital – since the media can ‘make you or break you’.
- Public support by politicians puts you in the speed lane, since they are closely followed by the media, and carry considerable weight both with the public and with decision-making processes.

Thank you for your attention

**Your presenter was:
Dr Mark Montebello Ph.D. from Malta
“Mark” if you please**

**Your chairperson is:
Dr Sónia Sousa Pereira LL.D. from Portugal
“Sonia” if you please**

Some suggestions on how to begin

- Determine your main objective – *“What we want is ...”*
- Take cognisance of how much this may cost you, and where will the money come from – *“The x cost may come from ...”*
- Research and study the restorative justice theme well – *“What we know about RJ is ...”*
- Draw up a business plan stating your:
 - Vision – *“What we would ultimately like to see is ...”*
 - Mission – *“What we want to do is ...”*
 - Strategy – *“The way we’re to go about it is ...”*
 - Tactics – *“First, we need to do this ...; secondly, ...”*
- Identify who is to do what – *“X will do this, Y will do that, ...”*
- Get moving!