

## **Restorative Practices in Action: Tallaght West – A Case Study**

### **Introduction**

This article aims to share learning about the use of Restorative Practices in an Irish community setting. It will begin by offering a definition of Restorative Practices and an outline of relevant research in this area. It will go on to describe the origins and content of the Restorative Practices Programme implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative in Tallaght West since 2010; and to share some of the findings of the independent evaluation carried out by the Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, between 2011 and 2012. A case study of how restorative practices have assisted in resolving conflict in a community setting is then presented. The article concludes with some of the main learning by stakeholders to the Tallaght West Restorative Practices Programme and an outline of plans for the immediate future.

### **Context**

The aim of restorative practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships (IIRP UK, 2011). The International Institute of Restorative Practices<sup>1</sup> defines Restorative Practices (RP) as ‘a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making’ (Watchel, 2012). RP has its roots in restorative justice ideas and practices (Shaw, 2007) which in turn originated in the criminal justice arena and is based on a belief that crime is a violation of people and interpersonal relationships (Zehr and Mika, 1997). Such violation harms the victim, offender and others, and therefore creates problems that need to be addressed and resolved (Ibid).

However, while restorative justice deals mostly with providing an effective response to crime or wrongdoing, RP also includes preventative practices such as building positive relationships and a sense of community (Watchel, 2012). RP places a strong emphasis on having a relational approach to problem solving: Drewery et al. (2010) highlight that RP is not only aimed at resolving conflict but ‘is about maintaining the basic values of a diverse and civil society, including generosity, care, and respect for difference’. Other key aspects of Restorative Practice include an emphasis on the importance of dialogue and fair process, demonstrating and maintaining respect for each other, and developing social collaboration and supports (Macready, 2009).

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iirp.edu/>

As such, RP can challenge deeply held beliefs about how best to approach wrongdoing or harm, causing discomfort for professionals and practitioners used to more traditional approaches to discipline and authority (Blood & Thorsborne, 2005). A shift in thinking and practice with regard to adopting a restorative approach is difficult to achieve, as it requires cultural change. Most studies on the effectiveness of RP in reducing problem behaviours and improving outcomes come from school studies where RP have been deeply embedded and fully integrated into school policy. Schools offer an opportunity to fully embed a restorative approach at all levels and are particularly successful when strong leadership is in place (Drewery et al., 2010). Along with strong leadership, the successful adoption of RP throughout an organisation, such as a school, requires gaining commitment from key stakeholders in an organisation, developing a shared vision, developing effective restorative mechanisms and systems, ensuring a whole-organisational approach, and building positive, professional relationships (Ibid).

A notable exception to school studies is found in the evaluation of a community RP programme run in Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown (Wilson, 2011). In this formative evaluation, Wilson (2011) found beneficial effects of training strategies implemented by the programme which included a number of staff in various organisations engaging well with restorative practices and concepts. The programme was found to be positive in giving people a voice and encouraging greater inter-agency working (Ibid). Given the scarcity of research on non-school settings, a case study outlining the experiences of implementing restorative practice in a local youth service, as part of the Childhood Development Initiative's (CDI) RP Programme, is presented in the following section. Preliminary findings from an independent evaluation of the CDI RP programme (Fives et al., forthcoming 2013) will also be highlighted.

### **Background to the Tallaght West Restorative Practices Programme**

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) began as a planning initiative in 2003 to support better outcomes for children in Tallaght West. A consortium of 23 members representing community leaders, residents, and professionals working in Tallaght West developed the outcomes-focused 10 year strategy, *A Place for Children* (CDI, 2005). Based on this long term strategy, a detailed implementation plan was agreed for 2007-2011, against which a major investment of 15 million euro was made<sup>2</sup>.

The need for an initiative aimed at improving community safety was identified in research and consultation conducted by the Dartington Social Research Unit (CDI, 2004) which found that safety

---

<sup>2</sup> Co-funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (through the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme) and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

in the community, particularly in relation to children's safety, was a shared concern among residents. Consequently this became a key focus of the CDI strategy, with the Community Safety Initiative adopting a new approach to building and enhancing a sense of belonging to the community. Residents, the Gardaí, the local authority and other stakeholders worked on developing and implementing activities to identify and address the most common factors that negatively impacted on the community's experience of safety. Restorative Practices became a key element of this approach.

The Community Safety Initiative (CSI) was developed as part of CDI's overall strategy to improve outcomes for children and families in Tallaght West. The aim of the CSI is to work with the community to develop and implement a programme designed to identify and address the factors that negatively impact on the community's sense of and experience of safety. The objectives of the CSI are:

- Improved safety and pro-social behaviour across Tallaght West;
- Improved community awareness of and participation in local activities and services; and
- Wide community engagement in maintaining a safe environment.

CDI's Community Safety Initiative got underway in 2006 with a comprehensive consultation and research process with the community and key stakeholders about how safety in the community could be improved. The process included consultations with, and surveys of, community groups, service providers, residents, young people and children. The report (Cahill, Guerin, & Murphy, 2008) highlighted three key action themes for the CSI to focus on: young people (including facilities, services and pro-social activities); physical environment; and community engagement. Work began in 2008 to engage with residents in a number of small pilot sites (approximately 100 households each) about priority safety needs in their neighbourhood. Over the next two years, various activities<sup>3</sup> were undertaken on pilot sites and in Tallaght West generally to develop community engagement with the CSI, to build relationships between residents and service providers and to address a number of safety issues identified through local surveys.

In 2010, CDI became aware of RP from the work of the Hull Centre for Restorative Practices<sup>4</sup> who presented at a conference organised by the Irish Youth Justice Service<sup>5</sup>. It was explained that the restorative way is a solution focused approach which supports everyone to build healthy relationships, to look at where we are accountable, and to take responsibility for our actions. Evidence was

---

<sup>3</sup> Examples of community engagement activities included community clean-up's, Family Fun Days, Children's Good Behaviour Awards, football tournaments, and volley ball leagues.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hullcentreforrestorativepractice.co.uk>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.iyjs.ie>

presented relating to a range of organisations in Hull that had taken on a restorative approach to their work that indicated extremely positive results in very short time frames. For example, after only one year, the nine schools where restorative practices were initially piloted reported a:

- 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<sup>6</sup>.

CDI recognised RP as an approach with the potential to greatly assist the work of the CSI by equipping people with a set of highly effective skills for building strong relationships and resolving conflict in a healthy manner. It was agreed by the CSI Steering Committee to develop a Restorative Practice Programme of training and support which would support Tallaght West to become a restorative community. A series of meetings were held with the CDI team and key stakeholders<sup>7</sup> to promote the concepts of RP and achieve buy-in to the idea of working to develop a restorative community.

### **Overview of the RP Programme in Tallaght West**

The RP Programme in Tallaght West got underway in 2010 when an RP Programme Management Committee was established to oversee the roll out of training, the development of supports and the independent evaluation of the work.

The anticipated outcomes of the RP Programme were:

- Improved collaboration between agencies and groups working with children and young people;
- Improved relationships between residents and the providers of services to children and young people;
- Increased use of a common language among services providers from different agencies;

---

<sup>6</sup> Irish Youth Justice Service, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> These included members of the Local Authority, Gardaí, Youth Service, Health Service Executive, Schools, Community Organisations and Residents.

- Increased satisfactory resolution of neighbourhood disputes in Community Safety Initiative (CSI) Pilot Sites;
- Reduced anti-social behaviour and crime in CSI Pilot Sites;
- Improved pupil attendance within participating schools;
- Reduced disciplinary issues within participating schools; and
- Improved staff morale within participating schools.

Training was delivered by the UK Office of the International Institute for Restorative Practices<sup>8</sup> on a monthly basis and was targeted at all of the agencies with responsibility for children and young people<sup>9</sup> as well as at parents and young people themselves. Between July 2010 and February 2013, more than 800 people from Tallaght West and other communities received training (including 90 young people and 80 parents) and 15 people living or working in TW were accredited as RP trainers as part of building capacity to sustain the programme in Tallaght and Ireland.

In keeping with its' commitment to being evidence-informed and to identifying 'what works' in order to influence policy and practice, CDI commissioned the Child and Family Research Centre<sup>10</sup> at the National University of Ireland, Galway, to undertake an independent evaluation of the CDI RP Programme (Fives et al., forthcoming 2013). The research was carried out between 2011 and 2012 and the evaluation report will be published later this year. The findings of this report will contribute an Irish perspective to the international research on the implementation of, and outcomes arising from, RP in a community setting. Preliminary findings indicate that the training has been of benefit in a number of ways to those who have participated:

- 87% of trainees reported being better able to deal with conflict as a result of taking a restorative approach;
- Trainees reported an overall reduction by 43% of disputes in the workplace, home and community;
- Trainees reported that RP had helped to significantly improve relationships with users of their services (up 61%), their work colleagues (up 47%) and their family members (up 47%); and
- To a lesser extent, RP was found to help improve relationships with neighbours (up 14%) (Fives et al., forthcoming 2013).

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://uk.iirp.edu>

<sup>9</sup> These agencies included schools, early year's services, youth services, educational welfare staff, local authority staff, probation services, community centres, community Gardaí, adult education services, etc.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie>

The researchers also found that the RP Programme had contributed to improved collaboration between agencies and organisations, and that the programme has had positive impacts in a range of work settings and at home (Fives et al., forthcoming 2013). For example, people's capacity to manage and resolve conflict was found to have increased in both arenas as a result of their participation in the RP training programme.

### **Case Study: RP in Action**

In keeping with the research literature on restorative practices, the greatest gains have been found to occur in agencies that have taken on RP as a way of working and have sought to embed this approach throughout the organisation. Once such agency is Foróige Tallaght, a local youth service which provides a wide range of supports for young people living in Tallaght.

Foróige Tallaght work with all young people aged 10-25 years through their general services and also with vulnerable young people who require additional support through a full range of targeted services. General services such as clubs, special interest groups, volunteer-led youth cafés, feeder clubs and youth fora, enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their own development and encourage young people to take responsibility for and be part of shaping the world around them while developing their talents, skills and character. Targeted services such as Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Teen Health Initiatives and Drug Use Prevention Projects, help young people to deal with issues associated with poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion, such as under-achievement at school, early school leaving, youth crime, substance misuse and family difficulties in a safe friendly environment.

Foróige Tallaght became a member of the RP Management Committee when it was established and supported its frontline Youth Workers to undertake RP training as part of their continuing professional development. Youth Workers found the RP skills that they developed to be very useful in managing the clubs, groups and targeted interventions that they were working with and many have made the use of restorative circles, conferences and communications “business as usual” for their on-going work. Foróige Tallaght also supported three of their Youth Workers in becoming accredited as RP Trainers through CDI's RP Programme. These Trainers are proving a very valuable resource as they have particular skills in providing the training to young people and fellow Youth Workers, thus supporting a sustainable approach within the organisation.

A very concrete example of where RP supported the work of both Foróige Tallaght and CDI occurred in June 2012 at a community resource centre in Tallaght West where Foróige Tallaght operate a number of youth clubs and targeted programmes/interventions. In June 2011 CDI began work with an

Estate Management Group based in the community centre to develop a Community Safety Initiative (CSI) within the centre's catchment area. The Estate Management Group identified a small neighbourhood of relatively new housing as the priority for a CSI as this was a neighbourhood that was experiencing high levels of anti-social behaviour (ASB). Work began with a local survey which identified the priority safety issues for residents and also identified the small group of young people who were principally responsible for incidents of ASB that were causing residents to feel very unsafe in their own homes and neighbourhood.

The CSI group undertook a series of actions to respond to the issues identified by residents including a variety of interventions with the young people and some small security-related investments (e.g. one CCTV camera, locks for refuse bins). Over the space of 12 months, the young people were challenged to examine their own behaviour (their families received visits from the Gardaí and the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour officers) and were supported to get involved with alternative pro-social activities and groups. Foróige Tallaght had engaged 6 young people aged 10-12 years of age, who were referred by the Garda Junior Liaison Officers and Community Gardaí in 2011. A number of the young people were amongst the group of identified through the CSI as being involved in anti-social behaviour in the community. When these young people were accessing their local community centre, problems arose with what centre staff found to be disruptive behaviour and following a number of incidents the young people were on the verge of being excluded from the premises.

At the suggestion of Foróige Tallaght Youth Workers, the young people and centre staff agreed to participate in a restorative conference about the incidents involving the young people and this was organised and facilitated by two of the RP Trainers (who were independent of all of the groups within the community centre). The conference was attended by all of the young people involved and some of their supporters (family or friends), by all of the staff of the community centre and some of the voluntary Board of Management. The restorative process gave everyone a chance to say what had happened from their point of view and, as importantly, to hear how what had happened impacted everyone else. In this instance, the young people got to hear how their behaviour had impacted centre staff and the centre staff got to hear what had prompted the young people to behave in the way that they had.

The group as a whole came to a set of agreements about both how the young people would behave while in the community centre and about how they would be treated by centre staff. These agreements made it possible for the young people to begin using their community centre and the agreements have been held to by everybody ever since. Residents of the CSI neighbourhood have reported a positive sea-change in their experience of safety in their homes and community and the community centre has reported an increase in the use of its services by young people in the area.

Foróige Tallaght staff continue to use RP approaches in their day-to-day engagement with young people across Tallaght. Staff find the tools effective in supporting good communication, in establishing the expectations of young people and adults and in resolving problems within and across the communities in which they provide services.

## **Conclusion**

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. Both the independent evaluation and CDI's experience to date confirm that consistent use of a restorative approach will do both of these things and more. CDI and Foróige Tallaght have found that young people have taken to RP with enthusiasm and are some of the biggest advocates for its use across the community. CDI and Foróige Tallaght have also found that RP helps strengthen all relationships, and has been of particular use to service providers in both managing their relationships with service users (young people and adults) and in more effectively managing conflict within the workplace. The skills and approach encompassed by RP have been found to be readily transferable and, once they become an integral element of practice and part of the organisational culture, they appear to filter through to all relationships and types of engagement.

CDI is now working towards launching Tallaght West as Ireland's first Restorative Community and on the longer-term sustainability of this very effective approach to community safety work. The learning from the independent evaluation of CDI's RP Programme will also be widely shared in the next few months<sup>11</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> (Please see <http://www.twcdi.ie/our-programmes/restorative-practice> for developments in this area).



## References

- Blood, P. & Thorsborne, M. (2005). The Challenge of Culture Change: Embedding Restorative Practice in Schools. Paper presented at the Sixth International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices: "Building a Global Alliance for Restorative Practices and Family Empowerment". Sydney, Australia, March 3-5.
- Cahill, J., Guerin, S. & Murphy, T. (2008). *Community Safety Initiative: Consultation Report*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.
- CDI (2004). *How are Our Kids? Children and Families in Tallaght West, Co. Dublin*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.
- CDI (2005). *A Place for Children: Tallaght West*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.
- Drewery, W. & Kecskemeti, M. (2010). Restorative practice and behaviour management in schools: discipline meets care. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 15(3), 101-113.
- Fives, A., Keenaghan, C., Canavan, J., Moran L., Coen, L. (forthcoming, 2013). *Evaluation of the Childhood Development Initiative's Restorative Practice Programme*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).
- International Institute for Restorative Practices, UK (2011). *Introduction to Restorative Practices: Training Script*. UK: International Institute for Restorative Practices, UK.
- Irish Youth Justice Service 2010. *Young People and Crime – Where to Now? Conference Report*. Irish Youth Justice Service Conference 2010.
- Macready, T. (2009). Learning social responsibility in schools: a restorative practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 25(3), 211-220.
- McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon, E. (2008). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review*, 60(4), 405-417.
- Shaw, G. (2007). Restorative practices in Australian schools: Changing relationships, changing culture. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 25(1), 127-135.
- Wachtel, Ted. (2013) "*Defining Restorative*". International Institute for Restorative Practices. Retrieved 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2013.
- Wilson, D. (2011). *Dún Laoghaire / Rathdown Comenius Regio 'Restorative Approaches' Programme 2010-2011: A Formative Evaluation*. Belfast: University of Ulster.
- Zehr, H., and Mika, H. (1997). Fundamental Concepts of Restorative Justice. *Contemporary Justice Review: Issues in Criminal, Social and Restorative Justice*, 1(1), 47-56.