

Towards a restorative city, county, authority or community

Mark Finnis was instrumental in developing a whole local authority approach at Sefton Centre for Restorative Practice and a city-wide approach with Hull Centre for Restorative Practice. He has extensive experience of implementing restorative practices in a range of local authorities around the country and is currently working closely with the City of Leeds to realise their vision to become a restorative city. Here, he considers what it means to fully integrate a restorative model across organisations and communities.



W

hat if organisations were committed to adopting behaviours that promoted consistency in the building and management of all relationships? What if they articulated explicitly the basis of their personal practice and that of their organisations? All involved would be

required to challenge and support each using their explicit practice as a point of reference. There would need to be agreed protocols that strengthened relationships and sought to repair harm when those relationships broke down. In other words what if there was an agreed way of how we do things around here.

So, we need a shared vision and strategy for building a restorative community - a bold vision, which is owned by everyone. The vision needs to be understood by all, and clearly communicated with strong leadership.

This in turn requires clear priorities for the entire staff community, with key actions and targets owned by everyone. To grow, this requires the development of local thinking, with specialist and bespoke training for all contexts. It also needs explicit published standards with good management oversight and supervision. It needs to be driven from the top.

In this thinking we need to consider the language used - is it restorative 'justice' or a move to restorative 'practice' or 'approaches'. For me, restorative practice is about building healthy communities. Within that we need to concentrate on people's connections, a sense of belonging, increasing social capital and repairing harm and restoring relationships.

This restorative world will use models that share 'power' across communities and with families, and that acknowledge people and communities as experts on their own solutions. It

will utilise restorative conferences, family group conferencing and community problem solving informally in everyday situations and proactive or responsive circles in ways that address concerns safely, empowering change and maximizing personal responsibility.

The ultimate goal is the adoption of restorative values and principles to inspire communities to feel empowered to shape their own futures. This is aimed at providing communities with the confidence to resolve their own problems and generate their own set of community values. Professionals, children, families and all need to spend time investing in their own social capital, being proactive in capitalising on relationships and putting the repair of harm and relationship breakdowns as a key priority. Encouraging a further shift away from being reactive, which is often emotional and un-thought through, to a more responsive approach when needed.

Our work generates a consistent approach through which children, young people, and adults experience all services in a way that is collaborative and solution focused. My experience of this way of working over the last decade has been very powerful. I am beginning to see a joined up way of working, with common aims, a common language and a common approach. There are increasing areas of the UK where agencies and communities are working collaboratively to make better places to work and to live.

All of our work around the word 'restorative' will focus on key priorities in a number of key areas including reducing the number of young people on the fringes of the looked after system, people involved with offending, victim engagement, poor attendance at school, low attainment, antisocial behavior and young people at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), just to name a few. This needs



everyone to be explicit across all settings including our behaviours and regular practices which treat others respectfully. We must involve others in decisions that affect them, actively listen to each other, be empathic and deal with conflicts and tensions in a way that repairs harm and relationships. Changing attitudes is just as important as changing behaviour.

Outcomes in the broadest sense could be increased trust, inclusiveness, better communication, less crime, greater victim initiated and community led approaches, improved relationships, reduced exclusions, raised attainment, fewer family breakdowns and less workplace conflict to name but a few. It would also have greater social cohesion, greater understanding and respect.

Professionals must be supported, supportive and committed to the concept of providing people from local communities with the tools they need to be involved in dealing with the problems that they face.

I am proposing, then, that 'restorative' and 'relational' become the central delivery concept in everything a community does. It is the 'glue' that binds together all services with common values owned by all and builds the bridge between professionals and communities.

Neighbourhood Justice Panels are wonderful examples of how we can deal with conflict, crime and antisocial behaviour but

We need a shared vision and strategy for building a restorative community - a bold vision, which is owned by everyone. The vision needs to be understood by all, and clearly communicated with strong leadership.

also be capable of increasing the social capital that's often missing across our communities. The approach shows further commitment to communities to provide them with the tools they need to be involved in dealing with the crime and anti-social behaviour problems that they face.

At a time of shortage, resources need to be focused on responses to offending or wrongdoing that are efficient, effective and which meet the needs of victims and harmed persons, communities and our wider society. This must be a multi-agency cross service approach involving criminal justice, education, social care, housing, police, health, voluntary sector and all other key partners.

There are more and more areas around the country embracing this

way of working, some of which I have had the pleasure to be involved in and this can only be exciting for the country as a whole.

Just be careful though - it's not just about just having a vision to become a restorative community, city, county or authority. After all, a vision without action is just hallucination.

Mark Finnis
Restorative Practice Consultant

To connect, please email markfinnis@mac.com or follow on Twitter @markfinnis