

Restorative justice works



Information for victims

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The Restorative Justice Council would like to thank everybody who features in this pack for sharing their stories with us.

About the Restorative Justice Council

The Restorative Justice Council (RJC) is the independent third sector membership body for the field of restorative practice. It provides quality assurance and a national voice advocating the widespread use of all forms of restorative practice, including restorative justice.

Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offenders to tell them the real impact of their crime. This enables victims to get answers to their questions and an apology – it empowers them by giving them a voice.

The RJC's vision is of a restorative society where everyone has access to safe, high quality restorative justice wherever and whenever it is needed.

Introduction

This booklet has been developed by the Restorative Justice Council to help victims understand restorative justice.

“For me, restorative justice turned the tables and I don’t feel like I’m a victim any more. I’m in control now.”

These are the words of a woman who took part in a restorative justice conference. Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offender to explain the real impact of the crime – it empowers victims by giving them a voice.

Many people find that after they have been a victim of crime they have questions they want to ask or things they would like to say to the offender. When the case goes to court, there is rarely a chance to do this. Too often, victims are left feeling frustrated and marginalised. Restorative justice can help to address this by giving you the opportunity to

have your say, ask any questions that you have, and potentially receive an explanation and an apology.

This pack aims to answer the questions that you may have about restorative justice and explain how the process works. If you want to find out more or would like to watch a short video about the restorative justice process, there is more information on the RJC’s website www.restorativejustice.org.uk.

The pack also tells the stories of people who have been through restorative justice, explaining why they chose to take part, how it worked in their case, and what they gained from the experience. They reflect on how restorative justice has given them the opportunity to have their say and to move on.



Restorative justice works – that’s clear from the experiences of the people who share their stories in this pack. We also know from research that 85% of victims who go through the process find it beneficial. I hope that this pack will help you decide whether it could work for you.

Jon Collins
Chief Executive Officer
Restorative Justice Council

Is restorative justice for you?

If you have been a victim of crime and are considering restorative justice, you are likely to have questions about what it will involve and why it might work for you. The information below will give you the answers you need and help you to make an informed decision about taking part.

1. What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offender to explain the real impact of the crime – it empowers victims by giving them a voice. It also holds offenders to account for what they have done and helps them to take responsibility and make amends. Restorative justice often involves a conference, where a victim meets their offender face to face. Sometimes, when a face to face meeting is not the best way forward, the victim and offender will communicate via letters, recorded interviews or video instead.

2. Why would I take part?

Many victims feel that the criminal justice system does not give them a chance to get involved. Restorative justice puts victims at the heart of the justice process – it gives you a chance to ask the offender any questions that you have and get anything that you want to say about the impact of the crime off your chest. Government research demonstrates that 85% of victims who take part in restorative justice find the process helpful. For many victims meeting the person who has harmed them can be a huge step in moving forward in recovering from the crime. Restorative justice also helps to cut crime – research shows that it reduces reoffending by 14%.

3. How will I know what to do?

The restorative justice process is led by a facilitator who supports and prepares the people taking part and makes sure that it is safe. They will be able to talk you through the process, answer any questions that you may have and explain what will happen every step of the way. This will be a chance to explore what will work best for you and it is entirely up to you to decide whether to go through with it. You can drop out at any time.

4. When can restorative justice take place?

Restorative justice can take place at any point in the criminal justice system. For minor offences, the police sometimes deal with the offence without going to court. Restorative justice can be part of this. If the case does go to court, and the offender pleads guilty, the judge or magistrate can sometimes decide to delay sentencing so restorative justice can happen. In most instances, however, they are likely to proceed with sentencing and restorative justice can form a part of a community or suspended sentence. If the offender is sent to prison restorative justice can take place while they are in prison or after release. The important thing is that it can happen at any stage but it must be the right time for you.

5. Which offences can restorative justice be used for?

Restorative justice can potentially be used for any type of crime. It can help victims of low level crime and people who have experienced the most serious offences. There are certain offences which can pose particular challenges for the restorative process, for example sexual offences, hate crime and domestic violence. However, restorative justice can still help victims of these offences. It is important that these types of cases are handled by senior practitioners who have relevant skills and experience.

6. Is restorative justice safe?

Yes. Facilitators are trained in assessing risks and making sure that the process is safe for everybody involved. They would never let a restorative justice conference go ahead if they were not confident that it could be done safely. You would never be left alone with the offender and the facilitator would support you every step of the way.

7. Where would a meeting take place?

A restorative justice meeting will take place in a safe and neutral venue. It could be a police station, a probation office or a local community centre. If the offender is in prison then the conference could take place in a suitable room in the prison. The facilitator will discuss the venue with you so you know what to expect, and you can also have a say on how the room is set up and even where everybody sits.



8. Can I have a friend or family member with me?

Yes. Some people prefer to attend a restorative justice meeting on their own but others have a friend or family member with them to provide support. This will be discussed with the facilitator and agreed in advance, so that the supporter is fully prepared. Even if you decide not to bring anybody with you, the facilitator would always be there. You would never be left on your own with the offender.

9. Do I have to meet the offender face to face?

No. Sometimes, when a face to face meeting is not the best way forward, the facilitator will arrange for the victim and offender to communicate via letters, recorded interviews or video. It is up to you whether you want to meet the offender in person. However research has demonstrated

that meeting face to face is the most satisfying form of restorative justice for victims.

10. Can I stop the process at any time?

Yes. Restorative justice is entirely voluntary and you can pull out at any time, including on the day of a conference or even while the meeting is going on. The facilitator will support you and try to make sure that there are no surprises as you go through the process, but whether you go through with it is entirely up to you.

11. Do I need to forgive my offender to take part in restorative justice?

No. Restorative justice does not require you to forgive your offender. During the preparation the facilitator will make sure that you feel comfortable meeting your offender and that you are in the right frame

of mind to go through the process. However the facilitator will not stop you from taking part if you have negative feelings towards the offender. Being angry with an offender is natural and expressing your feelings to them is an important part of the process.

12. How can I find out more?

If you want to find out more about restorative justice, there is lots of information on the RJC's website www.restorativejustice.org.uk, including details on how to access restorative justice where you live. You may also be able to access restorative justice by asking your victim liaison officer or witness care officer. If you live in England or Wales, you will have a local Police and Crime Commissioner who may also be able to help you get in touch with a local restorative justice service provider.

Ruth's story



Ruth was burgled when she and her seven year old granddaughter were in the house. Restorative justice helped her feel safe in her home again.

It was 2am and I heard a noise. My first thought was for my granddaughter. She was seven years old at the time and I went straight to her room to check that she was asleep, which thankfully she was.

I crept downstairs, trying not to wake my granddaughter or make any noise that the burglar might hear. I could see that he'd smashed the patio door and broken the locks and I could hear him going through the drawers and cupboards in the kitchen. I got my phone and crept back upstairs, relieved not to have to confront him on my own.

I called my brother who said he'd be there in a couple of minutes and then I called 999. The operator did his best to calm me down and keep me on the line, because I was so afraid for my granddaughter. He reassured me that the police were on their way.

The next thing I heard was an almighty scream. I was petrified but I was quickly told that the police had tasered the burglar – the source of the scream – before arresting him on the spot.

Once I realised that the police had control of the situation, I asked them if I could see the burglar. I was very angry and told him to his face what I thought of him. He made excuses and said that he didn't know what he was

doing, that he'd taken drugs and that he hadn't meant to break into my house.

I next saw the burglar – Joseph* – in court around four months later. The judge said that in 99 cases in 100 he would recommend a custodial sentence but that he would give him this one chance. The burglar pleaded to see me but I couldn't face it so my daughter and sister in law went to see him. He was full of remorse and I felt better that they'd spoken to him. They could tell that he was very sorry but I just couldn't see him.

Several months later, Joseph's probation officer got in touch to say that he'd still really like to meet me in a restorative justice conference and I agreed. The probation officer facilitated the meeting and prepared me for it and talked to me about what would happen. I felt supported and reassured by the time I went into the meeting and my sister in law came with me.

Joseph looked very nervous. I told the story of what had happened from my point of view. He kept apologising over and over and repeating in disbelief that my granddaughter was asleep in bed – he seemed shocked by his actions. Joseph said he remembered going out but he was so out of it [on

drugs] that he didn't remember breaking in or where I lived. It was very emotional and we even hugged at the end.

After meeting Joseph I felt such relief – it meant I could finally get to sleep at night. Before, I used to take down anything hanging on the wall in case it fell and made a noise that would scare me. I even peered in through the windows from the outside to see what someone outside could see. It really damaged my sense of safety in my own house and I considered moving. Since the meeting, I feel a lot better.

Joseph has said that he will keep in touch and I hope that he will keep me updated. I really hope it helps him to get on with his life. He has a lot of support and as he has a child of his own to look after now, he has every reason not to break the law again.

The RJC would like to thank Ruth Lambert for sharing her story with us.

* Joseph's name has been changed.

Tania's story

When Tania* was robbed on a busy street, her confidence was destroyed. Restorative justice helped her get back her peace of mind.

I was on my way to the local shops when I felt what I thought was someone bumping into me. It took me a few seconds to realise that someone had grabbed my handbag and I was dragged, screaming, along the pavement. A lady who had seen everything contacted the police straight away. The police came and took me home but were unable to track the mugger down.

Two weeks later the mugger was arrested on a separate drug-related matter. At the time of his arrest he said that he wanted to confess to my robbery because he had been feeling so guilty about it. About a month later I was contacted by PC Nick Hughes – Craig, the mugger, had asked to take part in a restorative conference with me. My first reaction was to wonder if he'd get anything out of it – why should I help him get time off his sentence? I soon learned that wouldn't be the case. I spoke with PC Nick at length and he explained everything and gave me time to think about it. I decided to go ahead with the meeting.

On the day of the conference, I felt I was thoroughly prepared – I was nervous but happy I was going to get some answers. It was obvious from Craig's demeanour and attitude that he felt much more uncomfortable and far, far more stressed than I

was. Craig told me he had asked for the meeting because he felt so guilty. He said that he couldn't get the sound of my screaming out of his head – he woke up with it in the morning and couldn't stop thinking about it. He said he'd never committed a robbery before and although there was no excuse, his drug addiction was the sole reason for what he'd done.

Afterwards, I felt relief. I felt like I could draw a line under my experience. I would recommend restorative justice to other victims. For me it definitely worked. I think it goes a long way to putting the incident into perspective and starts to give you closure. You see the person for who they are and it gives you back control over what happens

to you. Every decision about what happens is yours. You are free to tell them exactly what you think of them, the ball is in your court.

I had become really withdrawn after the robbery, but I feel I've got my self-confidence back faster since the restorative justice meeting. I've got my peace of mind back, my stability. In a strange way, I admire the courage it took for Craig to meet me. He didn't have to take part but he did, and I think it made him realise what it feels like to be a victim.

I feel that restorative justice should be available for everyone. Anything that helps the victim to feel better can only be a good thing, whatever the crime.

The RJC would like to thank Tania for sharing her story with us.

* Tania's name has been changed.



Restorative justice – the facilitator’s story

Charlotte Calkin has been a restorative justice facilitator for five years, and is an RJC Accredited Practitioner. Here, she talks about the role of facilitators and what victims can expect if they take part in restorative justice.

I work on all kinds of cases, and I’ve seen first-hand how powerful restorative justice can be in turning victims’ lives around, even in cases as serious as murder. Restorative justice is a subject very close to my heart.

If your offender is caught, a trained restorative justice facilitator may contact you asking you whether you would like to find out more about the process. Alternatively, you can ask any of the professionals involved in your case, who should be able to help.

If you are interested it’s much better to have this conversation face to face, and at this first meeting the facilitator will encourage you to talk about the incident and discover whether a restorative approach could help you. This meeting will be arranged either in your home or in a safe and quiet space that’s convenient for you. You might want to have someone with you to support you, which is fine. The facilitator will ask lots of questions but this is your opportunity to ask them lots of questions, too.

At this meeting a few key points will be explained to you. The first is that restorative justice has to be voluntary for both parties and that this applies all the way through the process. That means that you, or the offender, can change your mind – you can back out at any stage. The main point of this first meeting with your facilitator is to talk about what happened and to gain a really clear understanding of

what your needs are and whether restorative justice is for you.

It will be explained that a restorative approach might result in contact via letter, shuttle mediation (where messages are passed between you and the offender via the facilitator, or through video or audio recordings) or a face to face meeting, which is referred to as a conference. Evidence shows that face to face conferences, while the most challenging, also give the most satisfaction to the victim.

It’s the facilitator’s role to risk assess the restorative process to make sure that it’s safe and appropriate for everyone, and sometimes they might decide that a face to face conference isn’t the best option. If that’s the case, they will explain why not and offer an alternative wherever possible. Sometimes, contact is made via shuttle or letter first and then a face to face conference takes place at a later date.

Once the facilitator has met you and you’ve decided you’d like to go ahead with the process, they will talk to the offender. If he or she is interested in a restorative justice conference and the facilitator has risk assessed that it is appropriate then there will probably be a second meeting with you to talk in more detail. The facilitator will also talk to you about the outcomes you would like from the conference. It’s very important that we manage people’s expectations of the outcomes of restorative justice so we need to

discuss this carefully with you. I get asked lots of things about the actual conference and some people ask if it’s necessary to forgive the offender. The answer is definitely no – that’s not what restorative justice is about.

Every detail of the conference will be discussed with you in advance. Your facilitator will arrange with you where it will take place and talk to you about who will arrive first, where everyone will sit – even transport and childcare arrangements, if necessary. The facilitator will want to find out as much as possible in order to make the process work for you. Depending on the severity and complexity of the crime you may have several meetings with your facilitator before you meet the offender. It’s important to know that whatever happens, you should be thoroughly prepared.

You will be asked if you want to bring a supporter to the conference and they will also meet with your facilitator in advance. The conference itself will normally take place in a safe environment like a police station, probation office, or even sometimes in a prison.

No one will be brought together until the facilitator is sure it will be beneficial to all parties, and that’s why they do such careful preparation. Once that has been done, the conference itself is all yours – it’s your chance to have your say and get the answers that you need. The facilitator will begin by laying down some ground rules about how people are expected to behave towards one another, and will also manage the structure of the meeting. Then it’s over to you – you can say what you need to knowing that you’re in a safe, controlled environment.

Most of the people whom I have worked with chose to do restorative justice because they wanted to get answers to questions that had been plaguing them or because they wanted to get some of their feelings off their chest to the person who directly affected them. Sometimes they feel that they haven't been heard during their journey through the

criminal justice system and restorative justice can give them a voice. There are lots of different reasons for wanting to do restorative justice, and the process will be tailor made to fit your needs.

I have facilitated all sorts of cases and all the victims I have worked with have felt better about the crime after they

have taken part in this process. I know that because I have kept in touch with them! Restorative justice isn't suitable in every case but, in my experience, those who have done it have found it has given them tremendous closure and allowed them to move on with their lives.



Shad's story

In July 2008, Shad Ali was the victim of a violent attack. Here, he talks about his five-year quest to meet his attacker, and how restorative justice changed his life.

It was the middle of the afternoon on a hot, sunny day and I was on my bike running some errands in central Nottingham. As I rode along, a man was shouting racist abuse at two Pakistani women. His fists were clenched, and his manner was very threatening and aggressive. I was concerned that he was going to attack the women, so I stopped my bike in case I needed to intervene.

The man continued to shout, but by then he'd passed the women and was walking in my direction. He saw me looking at him and shouted: 'What the f***ing hell are you looking at, Paki?' I responded by telling him that it wasn't OK to use language like that, but he carried on shouting. By that time, he'd reached where I was standing with my bike, and he put his face right up against mine and continued abusing me – basically, he wanted a fight.

I was frightened, but my social work training had taught me that when someone's really losing control, the most important thing is to remain calm yourself. The verbal abuse carried on for a few minutes, and eventually I said to him, 'Look, I'm not interested in fighting, I'm going to leave.' I turned my bike around to ride away. That was the last thing I remember.

I woke up with a huge, dull ache on the right hand side of my face and no vision in my right eye. My bike was 10 yards away, and there were lots of people around me trying to help me into an ambulance. I found out later that when I'd turned to leave, the man had run up behind me and punched

me in the face hard enough to knock me out. He then kicked me so hard he shattered the bone underneath my eye in four places. After that, he started to stamp on my head repeatedly. My only saving grace in all of this was that I was out cold – I have no recollection of it.

By the time I got to hospital, I was in horrific pain. My wife arrived to find me with half my face caved in, and my right eye sunken out of its socket. She was incredibly traumatised by seeing me like that, but we were both trying to comfort and reassure each other. Luckily, my sight started to return after a few hours, but I was told I needed major reconstructive facial surgery.

I stayed awake in my hospital bed all night, completely focused on my attacker. I couldn't get my head around how someone could carry out such horrific violence with no justification. Although he'd been using foul, racist language, I didn't believe that the attack was racially motivated – he was so full of rage that I think he would have reacted in the same way if I had been white. As I lay there, I couldn't help feeling that he was also a victim of some kind. Something had happened in his life which had manifested itself in this horrific, violent outburst. By the time the nurses were bringing round the breakfast trolleys, I'd decided to forgive him.

I had surgery two days later – it took five hours for the doctors to put my face back together, and I still have four titanium plates holding the bones in place. I felt incredibly lucky to be alive.

I spent 10 weeks at home recuperating. It was very difficult for my wife, who had to look after me round the clock. Meanwhile, Glenn – my attacker – was on the run. It took six weeks for the police to finally identify and arrest him. It turned out that Glenn had a history of violence and was also wanted for an earlier attack with a machete.

The trial was the most difficult thing I went through. I decided to go alone because I didn't want to put anyone else through having to listen to the details of the attack. I knew that Glenn was pleading not guilty, and his lawyer really laid into the witnesses – myself included – to discredit their evidence. I started to feel that I was nothing more than a bystander in this process, even though I was the victim.

For the whole week we were in court, Glenn refused to make eye contact with me. I'd already forgiven him, but I had to watch him lie as he refused to admit what he'd done. His heavily pregnant girlfriend was also in court, and I had to sit a few feet away from her. It was all very distressing, and Glenn's lawyer was so effective at casting doubt on the evidence that it ended up with a hung jury. I had to go through the whole process again.

The second trial had a completely different judge, and this time, it quickly became apparent that things weren't going well for Glenn. As he was pleading not guilty, he was facing 10 to 14 years in prison if convicted. I knew he needed to be locked up for his own – and others' – safety, but the idea of keeping someone inside for that long was quite abhorrent to me.

Halfway through the trial, Glenn stood up in court and changed his plea to guilty. For the first time, he looked

at me, and put his hands together in a gesture which clearly asked for forgiveness. He was sentenced to five years, and both his girlfriend and I broke down when we heard. I left the courtroom and was physically sick at the thought of Glenn going to prison, and possibly never recovering from the experience.

After the trial, I was appointed a victim liaison officer by the probation service. I told them that I wanted to visit Glenn, but they made excuses about why that wouldn't be possible. Meanwhile, my story had attracted a lot of media attention, and I was contacted by an organisation called The Forgiveness Project. They run a three-day restorative programme in prisons called RESTORE, and I started to go into prisons to share my story with groups of prisoners. The first time I did it, I sat in front of a group of 20 hardened criminals – I was incredibly nervous about telling my story to them. But I went ahead, and by the end, some of the men had tears in their eyes. The impact on me was profound.

I kept persisting with my request to visit Glenn, but it was four years before I was even allowed to send him a letter. After months of chasing, I found out that Glenn had written back – he was full of remorse, and wanted to meet me too. Finally, after years of badgering and pestering, I was referred to an organisation in Nottingham called REBUILD. A week later, I met with Colin Wilson, a restorative justice facilitator. Suddenly, everything changed.

Within a few months, Colin had managed to set up a meeting. At that point, I threw a bit of a spanner in the works. Having been involved in restorative work myself, I was aware of how powerful it might be for people to actually see a conference taking place. I suggested that my meeting with Glenn could be filmed, and then used as a resource for training and awareness.

It took months to set up the film, but finally, in April 2014, the day of the meeting arrived. I woke up that morning with a huge sense of relief, but I was also conscious that I needed to try not to have any

expectations of what the day would bring. My heart was racing and I was anxious and nervous, but excited – I wanted to go into the meeting with an open heart and mind.

The prison had gone to a lot of effort to make everyone comfortable, and the film crew had already been allowed into the prison to meet Glenn. They filmed Glenn's walk from his cell to the meeting room, but the moment he walked through the door it was as if the cameras completely disappeared.

We shook hands, and then, spontaneously, we hugged. It was totally unexpected, and I became very emotional and started crying. Colin started the conference by asking Glenn what had happened on the day he'd attacked me. Glenn, who'd been thinking about his answer for some time, started to blurt out his story as fast as possible – he was so keen to get to the point at which he could apologise. He broke down, and had to leave the room.

I thought he wasn't going to come back, but he pulled himself together and we carried on talking for another hour and a half. We talked about

everything – what had happened that day, the trial, Glenn's background, my background. And then we talked about the future – it seemed very natural to discuss how we were going to move forward, together. Glenn asked if I would write to him, and I offered to visit him. He said he wanted to move away from Nottingham when he got out, so I offered to help him with that. By the end of the meeting, it felt like we had become friends. That chapter had closed, and a new one had begun.

I was ecstatic. I couldn't have asked for anything more, and I think Glenn probably had his best night's sleep in five years that night. Restorative justice introduced an element of humanity into a situation which had dehumanised both Glenn and myself. The process may seem difficult, but I think victims and offenders can get so much out of it. The only way to resolve conflicts between people is to sit together, talk, and find a way to move forward. Not everyone will get out of it what I did, but restorative justice has an invaluable part to play in resolving conflict.

The RJC would like to thank Shad for sharing his story with us.



Ed and Rumbie's story

When Ed and Rumbie were burgled two weeks after moving into their flat, their optimism about their new life together was ruined. As part of a pre-sentence restorative justice trial taking place at Wood Green Crown Court they were given the opportunity to meet their offender at Pentonville Prison.

Rumbie: Ed and I had just moved in to our first flat together. We were in the middle of unpacking and settling in. Ed had just been promoted and I'd just got a new job, so it was a really exciting time. Ed came home one day and found a brick on the kitchen floor. He rang me and said: 'I think we've been burgled.'

Ed: I had a quick look around the flat, and at first it didn't look too bad. Then I noticed that our iPads were gone, and so was my hard drive. All of the drawers in our bedroom had been tipped out and everything had been rifled through.

I called Rumbie at work and she came straight home. I felt very upset. I knew Rumbie already had doubts about our new neighbourhood, and moving there had been my idea. I felt really guilty and I expected her to be very distraught.

Rumbie: Because the flat was still new to us it hadn't started to feel like home yet and I felt completely invaded by the burglary. We'd had great plans when we moved in and it was really frustrating to hit such a bump in the road. I already felt a bit unsafe, because our area isn't the safest in London, and the burglary made me really angry.

For me, the worst thing I lost was my backpack, which I took to work every

day. Everything else was replaceable, but that one thing was so personal to me that I felt furious that the burglar had taken it.

Ed: The burglar hadn't taken anything which was dear to me, like my guitars, but I didn't feel like the flat was home anymore. As it was our first proper place together, it was the first time we'd been able to leave things lying around where we wanted them. After the burglary we started to put everything away before going out – I stopped feeling like our house was our personal space.

In those first few weeks afterwards my sleep was disrupted – the slightest noise would wake me up instantly. I was very nervous. I no longer felt as if I could take our privacy for granted.

Rumbie: What followed was weeks of visits from the police to keep us informed of what was happening. They caught the burglar through traces of his DNA which were on the brick. He was already known to the police as a prolific offender.

One day, we had a visit from PC Mark Davies and Kate Renshaw from Only Connect, a local charity. They explained that the burglar – Fabian – had been caught, and was willing to meet us in a restorative justice conference. After they left we started to look on the internet to find out

more about restorative justice – we were really curious to know more about it and what it involved, and we found some films about the process.

After watching the films, we felt like it was our duty to take part in restorative justice. We were never pressured into it, but it seemed like the right thing to do.

Ed: Once we decided to go ahead with the conference, we were told exactly where it would take place and what would happen. I felt fine until a few days before the conference, but on the day, it was definitely nerve racking.

Rumbie: I was really nervous on the day of the meeting, too. But the police had reassured us that if Fabian was violent or we were at risk, they wouldn't allow the meeting to go ahead. We trusted the people who were organising the meeting.

Ed: It was the first time either of us had seen the inside of a prison, which was interesting. We went into the chapel, where the conference was taking place, and took a while deciding exactly how we wanted the seating arranged. Then we chatted awkwardly until Fabian, the burglar, was brought in.

Rumbie: We were initially quite taken aback because we'd expected someone very different. Fabian was well dressed and well spoken – he seemed like a really normal guy and we couldn't get our heads around what was going on with him to make him do what he did.

Ed: I didn't know in advance what I wanted to ask him – I figured it would come to me on the day. We'd been encouraged not to plan too much. Fabian had brought a letter he'd

prepared for us and he started by reading that out. It talked about how he understood it must be strange for us to meet him and that we probably hated him. He then went on to talk about the burglary. He'd been in the park next to our house using drugs, and when he'd run out he'd seen our road, which is quiet and secluded.

Rumbie: For me, the personal impact of the burglary was lessened by meeting him. I realised that it had been a spur of the moment decision – he was off his face – whereas before I had thought it was premeditated. I learned that he wasn't watching us, he wasn't following us, which are things you think when someone's been in your house.

Ed: I told Fabian how the crime had affected us, and how I felt about my home after he'd been in it. I didn't think it was worth asking him to go into a programme for his drug addiction – I felt that was something he was only ever going to be able to

do for himself, and not because I told him to. What I did suggest was that he didn't go back to his flat – which he'd managed to keep for a decade while going in and out of prison – as that was associated with his old life.

I think I got through to him a little bit, but Rumbie was more effective. She said to him: 'If someone asks me what this guy is like, what should I tell them?' That was the first time he was lost for words – maybe it was a little ray of light coming through a crack. He couldn't answer – it challenged him.

Rumbie: When we left the meeting I felt really sorry for Fabian, but personally, I felt a lot safer in our home and our neighbourhood. We felt empowered, but we'll definitely think about Fabian for a long time and wonder how he's doing.

Ed: The conference definitely helped me to move on – it was a valuable experience. It made both of us less worried that we'd been targeted, but it

also concluded some of the emotional aspects – it closed a chapter for us. Now, I've got a sense of perspective on what happened to us, but it's also given me some insight into the criminal justice process – it involved me. We were assured that restorative justice does not necessarily lead to a more lenient sentence, and in fact, we could request that the judge didn't take it into account when considering Fabian's sentence. I felt that if the conference was going to be helpful to the judge in making a decision, then it should definitely be considered.

If someone else was considering restorative justice, I would tell them to go for it. It offers you emotional closure and it puts a perspective on a crime – it seems less sinister. And it involves people – citizens – in the justice process. They come face to face with it and understand how it works.

The RJC would like to thank Restorative Solutions CIC, Wood Green Crown Court and Ed and Rumbie for sharing their story with us.



Paula's story

Paula Donohoe became the victim of sexually harmful behaviour when a young man exposed himself to her. Here, she talks about why she wanted to meet the offender, and why other victims should have the same opportunity.

It was January, and I was walking my dog some time after 4pm – it was almost dark. It was absolutely freezing, and I was walking along a well-lit footpath near where I live. My phone rang, and I dug it out of my pocket – I was so wrapped up against the cold that only my eyes and nose were uncovered.

At first, I didn't notice that there was someone walking behind me. I finished my phone call, but I was so cold that I barely noticed what was going on around me. Suddenly, I decided that it was too cold to go on. I stopped in my tracks, and turned round to walk home again, calling the dog. I walked straight past someone who'd been behind me before I turned round. As I went on, I heard a noise, so I looked back and saw the same person I'd just passed, who was now also walking the same way as me.

I carried on walking, and then I heard another noise. I looked back again and the same figure was behind me, but he'd also stopped. At that point, I started to get uneasy. I walked a few more paces and turned round a third time – the figure behind me stopped again. I realised there was something really wrong. I knew he was following me, and I was starting to feel scared.

My first thought was that he was going to steal my phone. Although I was on a busy footpath, at that particular moment, there was nobody in sight other than this man. To make matters

worse, there was no way off the footpath for some distance – I didn't have anywhere to run to. I shouted, 'What do you want?', and he walked right up to me. I could see he was wearing school uniform, so he was a boy, but he was big, and strong-looking. He wasn't wearing a coat, which was odd, and he had his arms crossed in front of him.

I still thought he was going to steal my phone, but then he slowly moved his hands away, and exposed himself to me. I didn't know what to do – my immediate reaction was nervous laughter. At that point I'd been single for a while, and it was the first male anatomy I'd seen for some time. I think I said, 'You have got to be joking – how old are you?', and he was so indignant.

I suddenly realised that I should call the police, and as I fumbled in my pocket for my phone he started to run away. I half wanted to chase after him, because I was really angry by that point. Then I wondered whether calling the police was an overreaction.

I walked home, still unsure of what to do. I started to worry about what he might go on to do – he could hurt someone – so I called the non-emergency police number. The police were amazing – within 24 hours of my call, I had an interview with a CID officer. I still thought that what had happened wasn't very serious because I hadn't been hurt, but they took it completely seriously.

I'm a strong, independent woman, and I was really shocked at how I went to pieces afterwards. The thing that really bothered me was that he'd been following me, and I'd changed the circumstances by turning around. Before that, I'd been heading towards an underpass, and I was tormented with thoughts of what might have happened if I hadn't changed direction. What were his intentions? Would he have raped me?

About a week later, my designated CID officer took me to the local school to see if I could identify the boy. By this time I was feeling terrible. I felt a huge responsibility to identify him because I was really worried about what he might do to someone else, or what he might have done previously. We didn't spot the boy at the school, but afterwards we walked around town, and I saw him standing on his own. I had been concerned that I wouldn't recognise him, but when I spotted him I knew without a shadow of doubt who he was.

The boy was interviewed, and immediately admitted what he'd done, but I still had lots of questions I needed answers to. I felt I really needed closure, because everything was done on his terms, and I never really had a say.

Two or three months later, I got a letter out of the blue from Jodie, a restorative justice facilitator. It was a really nice, personal letter giving me some information about restorative justice and asking whether I'd be interested in talking further about it. I contacted Jodie, who came to meet me.

In everything that had happened, none of it had been about my emotional

reaction. The police were amazing, but it's their job to deal in facts, not feelings. Jodie listened – many times – to how I felt, and what I'd gone through emotionally. For the first time, I was given a voice and a chance to make decisions. I knew that restorative justice was the way forward.

I wanted to ask the boy what his intentions had been, and I also wanted him to hear what he'd done to me. I still get very anxious whenever someone's walking behind me. Even if it's a woman, I have to stop and let them walk past me. I'm always checking over my shoulder.

When I found out that he didn't want to meet me, I was furious – it felt like he had power and control over me all over again. But Jodie was fantastic, and she suggested video recordings as an alternative. It was imperative to me that that boy listened to what I had to say, and how that happened wasn't really important.

Jodie gave me a lot of preparation before we recorded my video. I was able to choose not to film it in my house, because I didn't want him to see where I live. Another issue was my anonymity. Because

I'd been so wrapped up against the cold the day the offence happened, the boy had no idea what I looked like. By making the film, he would be able to see me, and Jodie took a long time counselling me about that. I'd actually seen him around town a couple of times already, and he didn't recognise me at all. It was a horrible feeling – I had to walk past him, but he had no idea who I was or what he'd done to me. I was nobody to him.

Although I had really wanted a face to face meeting, with hindsight I think the video idea was probably better. If we'd met face to face, I might have had difficulty picking the right words. Worse, I might have become emotional, and I was absolutely determined not to let him see any vulnerability. With a video, you can do as many takes as you need to get your message across. I knew some of my questions might be futile if he chose to answer untruthfully, but I told him how upset and traumatised I was by what he'd done. It was so liberating just to have a voice, and to know he'd have to listen to what I was saying.

Two weeks later, he made his film for me. I wanted to watch it but

dreaded watching it at the same time. In my mind, he was a big chap – and he is a lot taller and broader than me – but in the video, he was just this pathetic little person. That was really amazing, because all his power over me suddenly dissolved. He was extremely uncomfortable and agitated throughout the video. He was very evasive, and didn't answer my questions, but it made me realise he was nothing to be afraid of – it humanised him.

I felt like a weight had been lifted off me, and that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been offered restorative justice. I know some people don't think it should be used in cases of sexually harmful behaviour, but I think it should be up to the victim to make that choice, or their power to make decisions is being taken away, again. It wouldn't suit everyone, but the only person who can legitimately make that decision is the victim.

I'm still in touch with Jodie, and I'm about to start volunteering as a community panel member. For me, restorative justice has been incredibly empowering. I've regained control by turning a negative, frightening experience into a positive, life-changing one. I'll always be grateful for that.

The RJC would like to thank Paula for sharing her story with us.



Restorative justice works

“For me, restorative justice turned the tables and I don’t feel like I’m a victim any more. I’m in control now.”

Find out more at www.restorativejustice.org.uk

