

‘I’m a good person. I like to be good’: The benefits of a restorative approach in the charitable sector. The case of Includem.

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## **Introduction**

Restorative Justice (RJ) is seen as a valuable tool in addressing issues such as difficulties that arise after people have been victimised, victims' satisfaction with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and reoffending (Scottish Government, 2019). This success of RJ has possibly caused discussions for implementation in other settings such as schools and organisations that offer support to children and their families (Hopkins, 2009; Restorative Justice Council, 2016). RJ has another name in those settings: Restorative Practices (RPs) (Williams & Segrott, 2018). RPs are influenced by the values and tools of the RJ but are used in a more informal way (Hopkins, 2009). The benefit of RPs is based on their ability to teach people ways of creating positive relationships, which could be argued that can act as prevention for more significant issues such as offending and victimisation (Hopkins, 2009). The concepts of RJ and RPs will be explored here.

The literature review that follows will initially present theory and research regarding the benefits of RJ. The next part will focus on the benefits of RPs and on research that shows the effectiveness of RPs in schools and family services. Finally, this section will display the preventative value of RPs. This characteristic of RPs will be used to argue that they might be a beneficial tool to be incorporated in the Scottish Government's attempts to address the needs of children and their families at an early stage. However, the need to conduct further research to ensure the effectiveness of RPs and consider the impact of inequality in relationships will also be expressed.

The second part of this report will present the student's research during the work placement in Includem. This project aimed to explore how the restorative approach is implemented in Includem and its benefits. For this reason, the following research

questions were explored: How do practitioners implement the restorative approach in Includem? What are the benefits of this approach for young people, families and practitioners?

The findings show that the restorative approach has many advantages. This approach helped young people, their families, and practitioners in various ways and enabled practitioners to connect and forge positive relationships with those they support and better understand their experiences. Therefore, working in a restorative way in contexts beyond the criminal justice system can improve the quality of services that young people and their families receive and prevent reoffending. Scottish Government aspires to prevent reoffending and help children and their families that face difficulties (Scottish Government, n.d.-a; Scottish Government, n.d.-b). It could be argued that the restorative approach is a model that can address those two issues simultaneously. For that reason, the Scottish Government should consider the preventative and nurturing value of the restorative approach. However, further research is suggested to explore how a restorative approach can help young people and their families when implemented in contexts beyond the criminal justice system.

## Literature review

### **What does restorative justice mean?**

According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), restorative justice is an approach that offers offenders, victims and the community an alternative pathway to justice. It promotes the safe participation of victims in resolving the situation and offers people who accept responsibility for the harm caused by their actions an opportunity to make themselves accountable to those they have harmed. It is based on the recognition that criminal behaviour violates the law and harms victims and the community (UNODC, 2020, p.4).

### **What does restorative justice have to offer?**

#### **Victims' satisfaction.**

RJ can change the criminal justice system to a more victim-centred system (Braithwaite, 2000). When a victim experiences a crime, this means that the victim feels a sense of powerlessness and shame (Braithwaite, 2000). Within the current system, where a judge will decide the punishment of the crime based on the evidence and the law, these feelings are not addressed (Wensel et al., 2008). As a result, the victim might feel even more disempowered within this system (Braithwaite, 2000). Restorative justice gives victims a chance to express the impact that a crime had on them and ask questions that might reduce feelings of shame or guilt (Braithwaite, 2000; Lloyd & Borrill, 2020; UNODC, 2020).

Research shows victims' satisfaction with the processes of restorative justice.

According to Shapland et al. (2007), who evaluated three restorative justice schemes,

CONNECT, the Justice Research Consortium (JRC), and REMEDI funded by the Home Office, 85 per cent of victims were satisfied with the conferences provided by the JRC. The CONNECT and REMEDI schemes, offered direct and indirect mediation, which are parts of RJ, and had positive views from the participants (Shapland et al., 2007). Additionally, 62 per cent of victims reported that they had found the conference beneficial, but only 39 per cent reported feeling more secure after the conference (Shapland et al., 2007).

Other studies also demonstrate the benefits of restorative justice for victims. For example, Angel et al. (2014) found that conferencing had a positive impact on victims of burglary and assault because it helped them experience fewer post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS). Their research included one group of victims who participated in both the ordinary justice process and the restorative justice conference and another group that only experienced justice through the court (Angel et al., 2014). The researchers found 49 per cent fewer cases of PTSS in the first group (Angel et al., 2014). However, it should be mentioned that their results refer to an evaluation after a short period from the time that victims participated in the two forms of distribution of justice (Angel et al., 2014). Despite this, the researchers still say that restorative conferencing is a low-cost way to positively affect people's physical and emotional health (Angel et al., 2014).

Lloyd & Borrill (2020) conducted a systematic review and discovered that the evidence regarding the effect of restorative justice on post-traumatic stress disorder is moderate. However, these findings might indicate the need for additional psychological support to victims except for the support that restorative justice offers. Finally, some studies demonstrate the importance of good preparation before a restorative conference (Shapland et al., 2007). For example, Shapland et al. (2007)

found that a small number of victims in the evaluation of the restorative schemes did not hold positive views about the conference due to reasons such as arguments between victim and offender, disability of offender, which might have created difficulties for the victim, and disappointment regarding the outcome of the conference. Practitioners should consider these findings because it will help them improve their choice criteria regarding participation eligibility.

### **Reducing reoffending.**

Restorative justice can also positively affect offenders. RJ can reduce reoffending when used within a rehabilitative plan (UNODC, 2020). Furthermore, restorative justice can reduce offenders' stigmatisation and help them with to reintegrate into their community (UNODC, 2020). Braithwaite (1996) explains that reducing crime is to make people feel ashamed of their actions. Still, this shaming process needs to facilitate the offender's reintegration and not the stigmatisation (Braithwaite, 1996).

The qualitative difference between the two types of shaming will affect offending behaviour. The type of shaming that facilitates reintegration is part of restorative justice because, as Braithwaite (1996) says, the offender has the opportunity to restore their dignity by admitting responsibility and apologising. In contrast, the shaming that creates stigmatisation passes the message to people who have harmed someone and society that their very nature is bad (Braithwaite, 1996). Unlike stigmatisation, “reintegrative shaming” sends the message that the action is bad (Braithwaite, 1996, p. 12). However, the person still deserves humane treatment, whereas the second type of shaming presents the person as all bad and, therefore, inhumane treatment might be used (ibid.). So, the “reintegrative shaming” might reduce reoffending (Braithwaite,

1996, p. 12). According to the Ministry of Justice (2010), which analysed data from the evaluation earlier mentioned regarding the effectiveness of restorative schemes, restorative justice reduced reoffending by 14 per cent. Therefore, there is evidence that restorative justice helps both victims and offenders.

Is RJ an answer to everything? The answer will probably be negative. It is important to remember that restorative justice is not a panacea and needs to be accompanied by other methods such as psychological support and rehabilitation programs, while high standards need always to be upheld (Angel et al., 2004; Chapman & Torzs, 2018, UNODC, 2020). Finally, one should not forget that sometimes crimes are the outcome of victimised people who succumb to offending behaviour (Braithwaite, 1996). Therefore, victimisation caused by social injustice needs to be looked at when thinking about offending

### **What values and principles does underpin restorative justice?**

According to Chapman & Törzs (2018), the values that underpin restorative justice are the following: “justice, solidarity and responsibility, respect for human dignity and truth” (p. 5). Additionally, principles that should be part of restorative justice are authenticity in communication, person-centred approach, active listening skills, respect for the needs of participants, informed and voluntary participation, and open, non-domineering communication (Chapman & Torzs, 2018, Restorative Justice Council, 2016). These values and principles might increase victim satisfaction, reduce reoffending, and facilitate good citizenship (Chapman & Torzs, 2018).

### **What does the restorative process include?**

UNODC (2020) presents three forms of restorative justice processes: mediation, conferencing, and circles.



**Victim-offender mediation (VOM):** During this process, the victim and the offender discuss what has happened during the criminal incident. A trained person will facilitate this process but remains neutral. VOM might be conducted face-to-face or by indirect communication (UNODC, 2020). This process aims to provide a place where the victim will express their needs, and both victim and offender will communicate their feelings (UNODC, 2020; Zinsstag, Teunkens & Pali., 2011).

**Restorative conference:** The difference between VOM and restorative conferences is that the latter consists of not only the victim and the offender, but it might also include family, friends, and people from the community or professionals (UNODC, 2020). A trained person with a neutral position facilitates the process (UNODC, 2020). In restorative conferences, offenders need to accept that they are responsible for their action before participating in the conference, and everyone should have the right to deny participation (Zinsstag et al., 2011). During the conference, the person representing the community gives all the necessary information about the event (Zinsstag et al., 2011). Then the victim and offender explain the impact of crime on them and their relatives or friends (Zinsstag et al., 2011). Finally, in the conference, the offender hears how that their actions affected the victim, their families, and the offender's family (Zinsstag et al., 2011). In the end, a collective decision regarding the actions that the offender needs to take to do things better is taken. The people participating in the conference suggest sources of support that the offender might need (ibid.).

**Circles:** Circles can be used for different matters, such as in neighbourhoods when concerns about crime arise, in education, when a child returns to school after exclusion or in the criminal justice system for sentencing reasons (UNODC, 2020). However, in the latter case, the judge is not obligated to follow the group's decision

and facilitators must be very well trained (MacKinnon, 2018; UNODC, 2020). During a circle, participants must show respect and listen to each other and discuss only the topic of the circle, not judge the opinion of others (MacKinnon, 2018). People use a symbolic stick in the circle, and only the person with the stick can talk. After the person has expressed their opinion, they pass the stick, and as such, everyone gets the chance to speak (MacKinnon, 2018).

### **Restorative justice beyond the criminal justice system.**

The Scottish Government aspires to reduce reoffending, improve the criminal justice system and the services that victims and witnesses receive (Scottish Government, n.d.-b; Scottish Government, n.d.-c). Simultaneously, it aspires to help children and their families by addressing their needs early to prevent more significant problems from arising (Scottish Government, n.d.-a). For the first two promises, the Scottish Government has indeed included the use of RJ in policies and, in the restorative justice action plan, commits to making restorative justice "widely available across Scotland by 2023" (Scottish Government, 2019, p.3). In this plan, the Scottish Government mentions that RJ might also benefit children who have caused harm because RJ can protect their interests (Scottish Government, 2019).

However, the plan refers to a reactive form of RJ, which addresses reoffending and the experience of victimisation. While this is a positive step, a more proactive form of RJ might positively impact children's and their families' lives. A form of RJ focused on prevention would potentially address offending and victimisation before they even happen and would positively contribute to the attempts of the Scottish Government to satisfy children's needs for love and respect early (Scottish Government, n.d.-a).

## **What does a restorative approach offer?**

The restorative approach (RA) and restorative practices (RP) have benefited both schools and family and children services (Kehoe et al., 2018; Williams, 2019).

Hopkins (2009) says that RJ is strongly connected with conferencing, which is a formal way of applying the principles of RJ to address offending. However, the daily life of practitioners and the people they work with do not always include serious violations of rules but might consist of fights or arguments (ibid.). For that reason, a restorative approach inspired by RJ is much more effective because it addresses more issues than offending (Hopkins, 2009).

A restorative approach has multiple functions. Hopkins (2009) mentions that restorative approaches have reactive and proactive utility. The restorative approach focuses not only on ways to repair relationships, as RJ does but also on facilitating and sustaining relationships (Hopkins, 2009). Furthermore, practitioners who adopt a restorative approach embrace the restorative values and principles, and this has a significantly positive effect on their identity as according to Hopkins (2009), "restorative justice and restorative approach is not just what you do but also who you are" (p.27). The ideas that accompany the restorative approach are the ones that influence the essence and practice of practitioners (Hopkins, 2009).

Hopkins (2009) mentions five primary themes influenced by a restorative approach that underpin practitioners and the job they do. These are:

1. Practitioners and clients are encouraged to acknowledge and consider the point of view of each person.

2. Practitioners and clients are encouraged to understand their and others' feelings and thoughts, and actions. This practice increases empathy.
3. Clients are encouraged to understand the impact of their actions when they have caused harm to someone and are also encouraged to cultivate a general understanding of how their daily actions affect others. This daily consideration demonstrates the proactive value of a restorative approach because it promotes empathy and respect for others.
4. Practitioners and clients work towards understanding that each person has different needs. This also promotes empathy.
5. Clients are encouraged to be accountable for their actions. However, RJ and approaches create an environment where all people who participate in this should think of ways to prevent a harmful action from happening again. In that way, everyone accepts their responsibility for what has happened because everyone admits that things need to change so the act will not occur again in the future. As a result, people are held accountable but without attributing blame. However, the author clarifies that always people share responsibility for an action (Hopkins, 2009).

These themes influence how practitioners think about relationships, accountability and power (Hopkins, 2009). As the author calls it, a restorative mindset encourages practitioners to be empathetic, show compassion, and demonstrate a law-abiding attitude (Hopkins, 2009). What differentiates the restorative approach from an authoritarian approach is that practitioners will continue to accept and love young people and allow them to make things better when they make mistakes (Hopkins, 2009).

The language and tone that practitioners adopt when they work with young people are also influenced by the themes above (Hopkins, 2009). Practitioners and parents can use restorative language for minor to severe incidents (Hopkins, 2009). The author refers to restorative questions when she talks about restorative language. These questions can be used between a practitioner or a parent and a young person and motivate them to express their feelings, perspectives, and solutions to problems and teach them techniques to handle conflict (Hopkins, 2009).

Practitioners can use restorative meetings to resolve issues such as bullying (Hopkins, 2009). These need good preparation by the facilitator, and potential risks need to be assessed (Hopkins, 2009). This person first needs to speak to everyone involved in the incident individually before the official meeting (ibid.). Discussing with young people before the meeting is beneficial because trust between them and the facilitator will be developed (Hopkins, 2009). The practitioner who does the initial individual discussion should be the one who facilitates the restorative meeting. Finally, participation should always be voluntary (Hopkins, 2009).

Restorative conferencing is the more formal part of the restorative approach, and practitioners can use it for conflict, bullying or when someone has damaged property in any setting (Hopkins, 2009). The same principles apply here regarding good preparation and the principle of voluntary participation (Hopkins, 2009). The contribution of the restorative approach is that if people are already familiar with its benefits because practitioners have used it in less serious matters, they might be more favourable to a restorative conference (ibid.).

Finally, restorative circles are the cornerstone of the restorative approach (Hopkins, 2009). Hopkins (2009) refers to its use in residential homes, but she mentions that

they are also used in schools. Practitioners can use circles for reasons such as taking decisions or finding a solution to an issue or for more specific purposes such as allowing children to talk about their day (Hopkins, 2009). The benefits of the circles are numerous. It can teach children and young people to be respectful, good listeners, make them realise and appreciate that multiple perspectives exist, and understand that actions might have positive or negative consequences (Hopkins, 2009). Finally, circles facilitate developing a sense of belonging, empathy and self-esteem (ibid.).

Overall, Hopkins (2009) suggests that these themes can influence the services that practitioners provide at any stage, from the formal to more informal parts of their jobs. The formal parts of RJ, such as a conference, might be even more successful if an organisation or an educational institution operates in general under the four initial themes (Hopkins, 2009). Finally, the author mentions that to effectively handle conflict among people or antisocial behaviour, there is a need to work under a specific framework that will secure a consistent response to these issues. Consequently, a restorative approach is beneficial because it addresses multiple issues and its values have a transformative effect on practitioners. In addition, a restorative approach framework would increase the effects of the approach because it would secure consistency in how people see and handle conflict (Hopkins, 2009).

The Restorative Justice Council (2016) also makes a distinction between RJ and restorative practice (or restorative approach as it was named before) (Williams & Segrott, 2018). The website mentions that the difference between the two is that practitioners can use restorative practices in different contexts such as in education, in the healthcare sector and in organisations that provide services to children (Restorative Justice Council, 2016). Finally, the benefits of restorative practice are also highlighted, which are the preventative aspect of RP to prevent conflict and the

educational part of it that is to teach people accountability, consequential thinking and reflective thinking (Restorative Justice Council, 2016). Although RP is beneficial, Williams & Segrott (2018) mention the need for research regarding the effectiveness of RP in sectors beyond the CJS. This is a crucial request because, as Strang & Sherman (2015) say, the priority of every practitioner is to not cause any harm to the people they work with.

### **WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?**

Williams (2019) conducted research to investigate if adopting a restorative approach in family and children services in Wales enhances other models that practitioners use, such as whole-family approaches and models that focus on the strength and the relationships in families. The findings suggest the following:

**Principles of restorative justice.** The research found that principles of RJ relating to communication benefited practitioners. Effective communication helped practitioners forge better relationships, address their needs, and identify families' strengths (Williams, 2019).

**Values of restorative justice.** Practitioners were also benefited by incorporating the values of RJ, such as honesty, empathy and democratic relationships (Williams, 2019). For instance, when clients disagreed with proposals by professionals, this was not seen as resistance, and due to that, practitioners engaged in a dialogue to address the family's reservations. This approach demonstrates the respect value (Williams, 2019). Finally, these values influenced practitioners' relationships with children because practitioners included them in the conversation and heard their views (Williams, 2019).

**“Restorative tools”** (Williams, 2019, p.559): Practitioners said that using restorative questions such as ‘what has happened’ and ‘how did this make you feel?’ helped them facilitate communication among family members and encouraged clients to express their opinion on what needs to happen to resolve issues in the family (Williams, 2019). Furthermore, they used practices that resemble the restorative circle when they visited families for the first time. This tool enhanced communication and helped them to build a relationship with families (Williams, 2019). Finally, practitioners used restorative circles in team meetings to create a plan to address the family's needs and assign responsibilities to practitioners (William, 2019).

**The role of professionals:** Experienced practitioners said that restorative approaches helped them reflect on their role as authority figures and helped them cultivate a more collaborative relationship with families.

**The link between the restorative approach and other models used by**

**practitioners:** Restorative approaches promote the voluntary participation of all family members in conversations regarding the family's needs (Williams, 2019). This approach is connected with the “whole-family” model (Williams, 2019, p. 561). Furthermore, the principles of RP and its tools, such as the restorative questions, promoted the use of “strengths-based” models (Williams, 2019, p. 562). Moreover, the author suggests that applying the values of restorative approaches can enhance the “relationship-based” models that practitioners use and that this approach includes components of “motivational interviewing, solution-focused therapy, and social modelling” (Williams, 2019, p. 562). Therefore, it could be argued that the restorative approach is a holistic model since it incorporates components of all the above methods.



**Clients' satisfaction:** Williams (2019) mentions that clients were satisfied with the use of the restorative approach. This finding shows that this model can enhance engagement with services (Williams, 2019).

In another study, Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor and Broderick (2015) conducted research to identify how RPs influenced the way children behave in schools by asking pupils and their teachers. The results indicated that teachers and pupils recognised that RPs had positively impacted their relationships because they gained skills to handle different situations (ibid.). As a result, schools were transformed into more peaceful places (Kehoe et al., 2015). RPs helped schools in the following ways:

**“Harmony”** (Kehoe et al., 2015, p. 197): The educational staff and the pupils said they learned new skills through RPs (Kehoe et al., 2015). Teachers reported having a calmer approach towards children's behaviour and communicating better with them (Kehoe et al., 2015). As a result, the school environment was improved (ibid.). Pupils also mentioned that teachers' different approaches made them feel more positive and safer (ibid.).

**“Empathy”** (Kehoe et al., 2015, p. 198): Teachers said that children learned to be more empathetic and recognise that their actions impact others (Kehoe et al., 2015). Pupils also seemed to have adopted a compassionate attitude towards their classmates and understood empathy's meaning (Kehoe et al., 2015).

**“Awareness and accountability”** (Kehoe et al., 2015, p. 199): The use of circles taught pupils that their actions affect others and take responsibility for their actions (Kehoe et al., 2015). One teacher mentioned that these changes were fundamental since they were apparent in the general behaviour of pupils in the school, not only during the circles (ibid.).

**“Respectful Relationships”** (Kehoe et al., 2015, p. 199): Educational staff said that RPs helped them forge better relationships with pupils and among colleagues (Kehoe et al., 2015). Finally, using circles helped pupils develop respect for others and improve their communication (ibid.).

**“Reflective thinking”** (Kehoe et al., 2015, p. 200): RPs helped teachers and pupils be more reflective of their actions either through the discussions they had with their teachers when an issue arose or in general through using RPs (Kehoe et al., 2015).

## **This project**

### **Methodology**

This study aims to understand how a restorative approach is being implemented in the organisation Includem and its benefits on young people, their families, and practitioners. For these reasons, the student interviewed two practitioners and two young people and observed the Level 1 training that project workers and assistant project workers receive in Includem. Finally, the student attended one meeting and observed a shift with a practitioner from Includem.

### **Participants**

The number of participants included in this project was four. The number of participants was decided based on the duration of the work placement, which was very short (10 weeks).

### **Recruitment**

Managers from Includem nominated the people who would like to participate in this project. The student and the work placement supervisor decided that because of the length of the work placement. The student contacted the young people via phone to inform them about the project and inform them that they could decline participation. After that, the student sent information sheets and informed consent forms via emails. Practitioners were contacted via email, and the student provided information sheets and informed consent. All participants agreed to participate in the project. All interviews were conducted online. Finally, participants were informed about the limits of confidentiality and anonymity.

## Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. The student asked different sets of questions to practitioners and young people. This was done because the project's purpose was to identify the experience that the participants have with the restorative approach. Therefore, the student wanted to explore the perspective of practitioners and young people. However, the research questions related to the usage of a restorative approach in Includem and the impact that a restorative approach has on people guided the different sets of questions.

## Data Analysis

The student employed the method of thematic analysis to analyse the data. After transcribing the interviews, the student read the data to find codes and themes. The following themes emerged: How practitioners implement a restorative approach in Includem, the impact of the restorative approach, restorative approach as a storytelling engine, and advice to practitioners and organisations.



## Findings.

### **Theme 1: How practitioners implement a restorative approach in Includem.**

Practitioners described how they use the tools of restorative justice in the work they do with young people and their families. The title of this theme refers to the restorative approach because practitioners and young people mentioned the informal use of restorative justice, which is called the restorative approach (Hopkins, 2009).

Practitioners mentioned three main ways of implementing a restorative approach: mediation, informal conferences, and one-to-one conversations with young people, families and people from the community or schools. For instance, a practitioner describes facilitating a family conference because the young person and the carer were experiencing difficulties with their relationships.

*Practitioner 1: So when I went I was asked by the [carer] if I would mediate between them, but it was not just [the carer], it was [other relatives], and then was myself and the young person, and then it has been very mindful that you're not taking sides, but you have a clear structure and a clear boundary, but you are there to facilitate discussions between them as well.*

Here, the practitioner describes a process that resembles the restorative conference. The conferences in restorative justice include people such as friends or family members and not only the person who has been harmed and has caused harm (UNODC, 2020). In this example, the participation of extended family members is apparent. The purpose of the conference is also mentioned here: to “facilitate discussions”, and the role of the facilitator is also explained with the phrase “you’re

not taking sides”. This example illustrates well the use of elements taken from restorative justice to more informal situations.

Practitioners used other examples that resemble mediation and the use of restorative questions. For instance, a practitioner describes a case of conflict between a young person and relatives. The practitioner describes how the use of mediation via phone and restorative questions led to the resolution of the issue.

*Practitioner 2: Talking on the phone because I couldn't go out cause of [safety issues]. So, basically, I tried to talk to [the young person] on the phone 'calm down, calm [the relative] down' and having this three-way discussion to say that this is really important [the young person] needs to get back home otherwise [the young person] is going to breach [the young person's] curfew and [the relative] started realising that...and say to [the young person] as well, 'you know, what you've done'... [the young person] became more aware of what [the young person] has done as well and took ownership for what [the young person] has done to the point that [the young person] actually apologised to [the relative] ..., [the young person] went to speak to a lawyer this morning about things.*

This example shows how a practitioner tries to facilitate a conversation between a relative and a young person. In that case, the relative had the opportunity to express the impact that the young person's behaviour had on them. Furthermore, the practitioners seem to use the restorative question “Who has been affected by what you have done?” (Wachtel, 2016, p.7). This is illustrated in the extract with the expression “*you know, what you've done...*”. The impact of this question is apparent in the outcome of this case which was the apology and the willingness to take steps to

improve the young person's life. This is illustrated by the phrase "*[the young person] went to speak to a lawyer this morning about things*".

This incident demonstrates the benefits of a restorative approach. This young person had a curfew, and the restorative process of this incident prevented curfew violation, which might have had negative consequences for the young person and the family members. Therefore, it is apparent here that a restorative approach in charitable organisations can prevent involvement with the law, strengthen relationships with family members and equip family members and young people with the skill of perspective-taking.

Practitioners use restorative tools to facilitate conversations between family members and between young people and community members. For instance, a practitioner describes the use of mediation when a young person has caused harm to a service provider by not paying for a particular service several times.

Practitioner 1: *A young person we were supporting recently, who [was using a particular service] was not paying for it. Part of the work we done we contacted the [provider of that service] we agreed that the young person will return the money to the office and we set up a kind of meeting with the [service provider] so bring the wider community and we explained to that young person that the consequences of the behaviour and became more real for [the young person] that [the young person] was taking money from people who were trying to make a living to support their own families.*

Finally, the restorative approach is used in one-to-one conversations. In these cases, practitioners will use restorative questions to identify the needs of the family and young people and increase awareness to young people regarding crime. Moreover,



during these conversations, practitioners will help young people to understand the reasons behind their behaviours. The example that follows demonstrates several conversations a practitioner has with young people to make them more aware and reflective.

Practitioner 2: *We use restorative justice in every single one conversation we have with young people in a daily basis. We have conversation about attitudes to crime...we go through different things like the ABC what happened before the actual situation and the consequences to the end of it and then we have reflective discussion as well to say, alright 'where do you think you should have stopped, where do you think at this point I shouldn't have done that'. We look at the triggers from behind what they have actually done. We look at the trauma, they had in their life as well, the gang culture as well and their peers, their education as well. So we're looking at everything, it's not just 'ok so you did this tell me all about it', it is looking back, scraping back and say why do you think this happened?.*

The practitioner here describes the use of restorative questions such as “What happened?” demonstrated by the “*what happened before the actual situation*” part of this extract (Wachtel, 2016, p.7). Furthermore, the restorative question “Who has been affected by what you have done?” could be linked with the “*the consequences to the end of it*” phrase (Wachtel, 2016, p.7). Finally, practitioners encourage young people to be reflective by looking at the impact of trauma, friends, and gangs on the behaviour they exhibit. This approach demonstrates one of the restorative themes that Hopkins (2009) suggests permeates the practice of professionals who adopt a restorative approach and refers to the awareness of the impact of the inner world on behaviour.

## **Theme 2: The impact of the restorative approach on young people, families, and practitioners.**

Practitioners and young people expressed the impact of a restorative approach on themselves and families. Practitioners mentioned how the restorative approach helped them to understand their clients and to empower them. Furthermore, they stated the benefits of involving family members in the restorative process. Moreover, young people expressed the transformative effect that the relationships they developed with practitioners had on them. Finally, young people mentioned how practitioners helped them understand the impact of their actions on themselves and others.

### **Impact on young people.**

**Building positive relationships and positive sense of self:** Young people mention that practitioners helped them by listening to their experience, showing understanding, and being non-judgmental, which led to strong relationships between practitioners and young people and helped young people see themselves through a more positive lens.

Young person 1: *They listened to what I had to say, whereas at that point, I thought that the world was against me. So they were just there, a listening ear. They helped realise the underlying problem [of my behaviour], and they make me realise that I did not do that because I was a bad person but because there was an [underlying problem], and they helped me with counselling...*

Young person 2: *Includem helped me, like the future, not just now, they said to me, they said to my family, we do not look at the person profile, we want to get to know them first, they do not look, it is not like the polis, polis look at my profile and go "this [person] is a f\*cking criminal, this [person] here, psychopath, [this person] 'll end up in jail". Includem did not do that. Includem didn't even look at my paperwork,*

*they just looked at my name, looked at the stuff they needed to know and came and see me... That was a really good time with [the practitioner], saying a better understanding. You look at my paperwork, you will think this is a bad [person]...until you sit and talk to me and go and realise 'Nahhh it is not a bad [person]'. That was a lot of people. I did get a lot of stereotyping but Includem did not stereotype me, Includem did not look at me and go 'that's a bad [person]'. Includem gave me a chance, a better chance, and you got to know them and you get to being friends with them, so you'll know them and they will know you. You can sit in a car one day and you will cheering happy and they will cheering happy... and then you will be sitting in the car the next day, you'll be all angry, they will know, before you even walk in that car...That's a good time.*

Those two examples show the impact that a non-judgmental and respectful attitude had on young people. The young people shifted their attitudes towards themselves because practitioners did not judge them as “bad people” or “criminals” but helped them to understand the reasons behind their behaviour. Moreover, the relationship that practitioners and young people had and the attunement to their needs and feelings seemed to contribute to the quality of their relationship. The restorative approach is apparent here through the values that practitioners have demonstrated by being non-judgmental and respectful and focusing on the needs of young people.

**Communication and perspective-taking:** Young people said that practitioners helped them get closer with their families by encouraging them to communicate, which was sometimes done by facilitating family meetings. As a result, young people gained more confidence, felt more secure, and understood how their behaviour impacted their loved ones. For instance, a young person said:

Young person 2: *After [working with a particular practitioner], I talked more with my family. [The practitioner] brought me and my family together, helping the relationships and stuff like that. It was a huge turning point watching my family trusting me...After a while, it helped a lot...Now, I've got my family with me. I can move on in my head...And that's what I did. I work [in a good place]. So, it was a huge turning point, between [my past] life and working [in this good place].*

Young person 1: *Yeah, and now I am closer like my relationships with my family and all that back to what it should be... cause even when I had arguments they were like 'make amends'... They basically tell me like, if I've done something...tell me a different perspective like what my [relatives] were seeing, cause my [my relatives] were obviously like angry so were seeing things... like they made me see [my relatives] point of view.*

The importance of working with the whole family is apparent here. The young person describes the effects that this had on confidence and sense of security (“*Now, I've got my family with me*”). Furthermore, young people mentioned how conversations with family members helped them to get closer with their families, for instance by talking and “making amends”, understanding their perspective (“*what my [relatives] were seeing*”) and reflecting on the psychological impact that some of their behaviours had on them. In this extract, the application of the restorative approach is apparent through family meetings and the words of young people who used restorative terminology (“*make amends*”). Restorative justice and the restorative approach support the idea of involving family and friends in the restorative processes (UNOCD, 2020). Therefore, it seems that a restorative approach that involves and facilitates communication among family members is beneficial for young people.

**Awareness.** Young people mentioned that practitioners helped them understand the impact that their past life had on their future and the impact that their behaviour had on others. This was achieved by having one-to-one discussions or explaining how their behaviour affected other members of their families. For instance, a young person said

Young person 2: *I almost killed my [relatives] due to stress. That was real. I did not see that. My family seen that, my friends, my [romantic partner]. I did not see that, how one day they could all wake up and get a phone call, I'm in a box, I ain't coming back for Christmas. To me that was not there. It was not in my head... But is all changed now. You look back how stupid it really was. How just not right. That was not a way of living.*

The young person seemed not to be aware of their actions. However, the young person mentions that by later understanding their actions, they started to consider other's feelings ("*But it all changed now*"). Furthermore, it looks like the young person reflects on the past lifestyle ("*You look back how stupid it really was*"). This extract demonstrates the importance of a restorative approach because it seems that through this, practitioners had helped the young person recognise other people's feelings and to reflect on their life.

## **Impact on families.**

**Parenting skills, confidence, and good citizenship:** The impact on families seemed to operate in two ways; the restorative approach benefited the family as a system and each individual in the family, including parents, extended family, and young people. First, the interviews with young people and practitioners showed that including the whole family in the process of helping children and young people was beneficial. During the interviews, the young people repeatedly mentioned that they felt closer with their families and got a better insight into their perspectives and feelings. Therefore, a restorative approach strengthens the relationships among family members.

Secondly, practitioners mentioned that parents were also benefited from the restorative approach. This happened because practitioners had one-to-one conversations to understand their perspective and their experience in the family. For instance, one practitioner said:

*Practitioner 1: We work one to one with the young people to work out what they're feeling, what is going on for them and then we'd work one-to-one with families, for instance, mum or dad, get their opinion to see what is happening how young people put themselves at risk and over time by building these relationships, we can then bring it together.*

Practitioners also mentioned that parents had gained more confidence in dealing with difficult situations at home. Parents observed how practitioners work and relate with their children and, as a result, adopted these skills that practitioners demonstrate in the house. Finally, practitioners mentioned that parents whose confidence has increased and the relationships with their young people have improved, develop a desire to

improve their personal lives by having romantic relationships after years or even by helping other children in the community. Hence, through the restorative approach and its values, such as a respectful attitude towards people, parents have become more empowered and active in protecting children in their community (Chapman & Törzs, 2018). Chapman and Törzs (2018) mentioned that restorative justice's values might increase good citizenship, which is also demonstrated here by the desire of some parents to help others.

### **Impact on practitioners.**

**Reflective practice and better understanding.** During the interviews, practitioners described the benefits of the restorative approach on them. Practitioners said that adopting a restorative approach and listening to the stories of young people developed a better understanding of their situations, which provided them with better insights into their feelings and thoughts and helped them avoid stereotyping them. For instance, one practitioner said:

Practitioner 1: *I think it is something that makes you to reflect on your practice. I think it can be very easy to fall into the trap to judge a young person when you take on referrals where a lot of the information can often be quite negative information can be easy to fall into the trap of criminalising the young person and kind of labelling them having that stigma attached to them. So, I think with the restorative approach it is very important that you're hearing everybody's story, you're listening to the young people and unpicking some of the stuff that is going on. The wider community often point the finger at a young person again often demanding kind of*

*punitive approaches are taken, and that young person is punished so I think having a restorative approach makes you take a step back and really think of the best process to resolve a situation.*

Here the practitioner seems to refer to the impact that stigmatisation can have on a young person. The restorative approach helps them avoid further stigmatising young people and resolve situations in ways beyond punishment that potentially can perpetuate the stigmatisation of young people. As Braithwaite (1996) mentions, stigmatisation leads to further offending. In contrast, with restorative justice, a different kind of shaming is achieved, leading to reintegrating people into society instead of pushing them out of it (Braithwaite, 1996).

Finally, practitioners mentioned that by discussing their consequences of their actions with young people, they gained a better insight into their experience. For instance, a practitioner said:

*Practitioner 2: I learn from the young people. As much they probably learn from me, I learn every day from them. It was a [vehicle] they had stopped and we had broken it down to see who was affected and it was [the driver], [the people in the vehicle], [the young person] put themselves down as a victim as well and when I asked [the young person] 'why did you put yourself' cause [the young person said] 'I'm a victim to society' [the young person] said 'What happened to me in the past, what I've dealt with that's why I am just now', which I thought was really insightful as well. It baffled me, but I never had a young person saying that before.*

This extract demonstrates the insight that the practitioner gained into this young person's experience. The restorative questions allowed practitioners to discuss with young people, and this conversation presents the impact that social injustice has on



young people. This is an important finding because it shows that other factors at a macro-level affect young people and the way they act.

### **Theme 3. Restorative approach as a storytelling engine.**

This theme presents the young people's stories. These stories exhibit the difficulties that young people and their families face and the positive characteristics of young people. For instance, a young person said:

*Young person 2: Growing up, I always had a good family. My family was working-class ... I was a lucky person, but because my family was aaalways working, I did not have time to sit them down and talk.*

The young person describes here the impact that their parents' work circumstances had on parenting. It is important to note that the young person acknowledges that their parents cared about the young person, but conditions beyond their control (working many hours) affected their parenting. This information is vital because it shows how social problems affect the lives of young people and consequently their behaviour. Therefore, a restorative approach which allows these stories to be told might enable practitioners to understand young people and their families better. It will also allow young people and their families to express how certain circumstances affect them.

Another young person mentions the impact that emotional difficulties had on them:

*Young person 1: I didn't understand why I was doing what I was doing, but that was all [emotional difficulties] building up, and I was not dealing with my emotions building up, building up, building up, I was just really bad.*

Again, this extract shows that by listening to the stories of young people, practitioners can enhance their understanding of their experiences. Therefore, this might impact the quality of services.

Young people also shared how they perceived their involvement in gangs and stories about their friends during the interviews. Specifically, a young person shared a story about a childhood friend whom the young person used to help by giving them clothes. Also, a young person said about involvement in gangs:

*Young person 2: I am not a gangster. I was just trying to survive in the street. I am trying to survive in [the city]. That what it is. But to anybody else who seen it and heard about it, they went “Oh that is a bad [person] that is a very dangerous [person]”, and all realness, I was not dangerous, I was trying to protect myself, I was protecting my friends.*

Giving young people space to talk about their personal experiences seems to be necessary. This is because prosocial behaviour is apparent (helping friends) here, and therefore knowing that elements like the above exist can help practitioners in two ways. Firstly, practitioners can focus on those and help young people channel their positive characteristics in safer ways and secondly, these stories can help practitioners see young people as a whole even if they are involved with the law. The restorative approach enables practitioners to get involved in conversations with young people, and these conversations might be enlightening for them regarding the character of young people. As a young person said, *“what is the person itself? Is it a person who is or is a person who just being somebody else just because is getting taught to be somebody else?”* demonstrating in that way the need to focus on the person instead of the behaviour.

#### **Theme 4. Advice for practitioners.**

Young people shared their opinions on what practitioners can do to help children, young people and their families.

Young person 1: *Just basically be there, like do not like judge them, take them for who they are cause nobody really knows what people have gone through. So, just be there and do not judge them because they probably have been judged enough, like I was from my family.*

Young person 2: *Do your homework. Do your homework in the area...You can't understand somebody else unless you've done it, unless you've seen it, unless you've done your homework. If [practitioners] know the area, then they know the person they are working with, what he is thinking, what she is thinking...They have to know what a person has gone through. See, if they don't, they never going to understand it. Never.*

The young person mentions five things that practitioners should know.

Young person 2: *Five things. The family, if it is a good family, if it is a bad family... The second thing is what is the area like. Is it filled with gangs, is it filled with kids playing around?... The other thing is what is the person itself, is it a person who is or is a person who just being somebody else just because is getting taught to be somebody else? and the last two things... you don't always need to do these two last things... go around the area, yourself, go in the car, go around the area that the person dies, you can actually learn there, cause you're seeing, you're looking, you're hearing, and talk to them to, people tell you what the area is like, and then you can really understand...*

Young people express two things. First, avoid judgement and second, get to know the person and their circumstances. These will help practitioners and young people because a non-judgmental attitude will probably make young people more cooperative and will help to build positive relationships. Secondly, getting to know people will help practitioners to fully understand the impact of different factors, such as the impact of neighbourhoods on young people. Therefore, it could be argued that this will result in less judgement. Finally, a young person mentions that it is crucial to know the family because the type of family will affect children and young people in different ways. For instance, a young person mentions that there are families who care about their children, but they have to work many hours, which affects parenting. There are other families with deeper issues, and, as a result, they might respond in a less caring way towards their children.

The advice that young people give align with the restorative approach. A restorative approach encourages practitioners to listen to people, include the whole family in conversations, and understand everybody's perspective. Finally, values derived from restorative justice, such as respect towards humans, can inform practice and satisfy the young people's need for less judgement (Chapman & Torzs, 2018).

Finally, part of this project was to observe a shadow shift, training and a team meeting to better understand the use of the restorative approach in Includem.

### **Training.**

During this project, the student participated and observed the Restorative Justice training Level 1. This training is provided to project workers and assistant project workers. It lasted four days and focused on different topics such as the values of restorative justice, its benefits and ways to incorporate restorative justice within the

daily interaction of practitioners with their clients. During the interviews and the training, practitioners said that the restorative justice training was very beneficial for their practice.

During the training, the trainer covered various aspects of restorative justice, stressing the importance of values, authentic and equal communication and the significance of understanding young people's experiences. These were demonstrated by examples of the trainer's professional experience, the trainer's interaction with the participants, and role-playing. The trainer's choice to comment many times on the principles and values of restorative justice was significant since, as Hopkins (2009) says, "restorative justice and restorative approach is not just what you do but also who you are" (p.27).

### **Shadow shift.**

During the shadow shift, the student observed how practitioners build relationships with young people and implement the restorative approach. During the shift, the practitioner spent time with the young person talking about the young person's hobbies and interests, singing and reminiscing on positive experiences that the practitioner and the young person had together. After this initial interaction, the practitioners tried to initiate a conversation with the young person about relationships with family members, personal safety and sexual relationships. Finally, the practitioners used the restorative questions to explore the young person's needs, feelings, and thoughts on handling family issues.

The use of restorative questions, in this case, is beneficial for various reasons. First, as Hopkins (2009) suggests, by using restorative language, young people are encouraged to think of their needs and feelings and learn ways to respond to conflicts effectively. Second, building positive relationships and developing a bond with young people,

which is facilitated due to the restorative approach, seems to benefit both practitioners and young people. On the one hand, it allows practitioners to talk about sensitive issues. On the other hand, it might make young people more willing to talk about personal matters. Therefore, it seems that a restorative approach helps young people to be more reflective, explore their feelings, needs and thoughts, learn new ways to handle disagreements with people in their lives, and be open in discussing complex issues. Finally, this approach helps practitioners bond with young people, which allows them to initiate difficult conversations.

### **Team meeting.**

During the team meeting, the practitioners stressed the importance of encouraging young people to express their opinions and be active participants in Includem's projects. Encouraging young people to communicate their feelings and thoughts and taking into account their points of view is essential and aligns with the restorative approach, as one of its aims is to motivate young people to express their thoughts (Hopkins, 2009).

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested:

1. **Collect young people's experiences.** During the interviews, young people talked about important issues such as the impact of stereotypes, parents' work conditions, neighbourhood and police behaviour. It might be beneficial to collect this information and use it as part of academic papers with similar topics or themes for public events for raising awareness in the community.
2. **Use restorative circles with staff members.** During the interviews, participants mentioned that restorative circles are used only with young people in Includem. However, based on my observations and my experience with training, where restorative circles were used as a tool to make participants feel more relaxed, it might be beneficial to use restorative circles with staff members as a way to bond or resolve potential tensions between staff members or to discuss plans about young people and families.

Recommendations about training.

1. **More time dedicated to role-playing.** Role-playing was beneficial for practitioners, so it might be helpful to increase the time devoted to this part of training.
2. **Refresher training.** Repeating the training after a certain amount of time might be helpful for practitioners as it will probably allow them to gain a different insight from the training since they will have experienced using the theory and tools they learned the first time in practice.
3. **Include mentors in the restorative justice training.** Even though mentors receive training on the restorative approach through the Better Life module, it

might be beneficial to incorporate them in this training since it has many significant aspects such as values and principles of restorative training. At the same time, they might also benefit from role-playing.



## Conclusion

This project aimed to explore the uses and benefits of the restorative approach in Includem. Practitioners said that they use tools from restorative justice such as mediation, informal conferences, and elements of the restorative approach such as one-to-one conversations. Practitioners said that the restorative approach helped them reflect on their practice and better understand young people's experiences. Moreover, they mentioned the positive effects of the restorative approach on parents who learned new parenting skills, gained confidence and developed a desire to help others.

The interviews and the shadow shift revealed the advantages of the restorative approach for young people. Young people said they benefited from the restorative approach because they built a better relationship with practitioners since they did not judge them and paid attention to their thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, they said that they became closer with their families and understood how their actions affected them. In addition, young people became more aware of the consequences of their actions on them and others. Finally, the interviews showed that by using a restorative approach and therefore listening to young people's stories, practitioners might be able to identify young people's positive qualities and minimise the risk of stigmatising or criminalising them.

However, this project has limitations. Firstly, the student interviewed only four participants (two young people and two practitioners). For that reason, further interviews were necessary to understand the implementation and the potential advantages of the restorative approach in Includem. Furthermore, the participants were suggested by Includem. As it was mentioned before, both decisions were made due to the short duration of the placement. Therefore, there is a potential risk that

these participants might have been the ones that had positive experiences or were supporters of this approach. Hence, further research is needed on this topic, and the findings of this project might not represent the experience of other practitioners or young people in Includem. Finally, as Williams & Segrott (2018) suggest, further research is needed regarding implementing restorative justice in contexts beyond the criminal justice system. During these interviews, practitioners mentioned a case where facilitating a conference did not have the expected results. This does not mean that a restorative approach is not beneficial for organisations but shows the need for further research to identify the best possible ways of implementing it to benefit young people, families, practitioners, and organisations.

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