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Meeting needs, making changes, improving outcomes

## Restorative Practices: Building and maintaining strong and effective organisations and communities

### Policy Brief

This policy brief reports on findings from the independent evaluation of the Restorative Practice (RP) Programme, which was implemented by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), one of the three Prevention and Early Intervention Programme organisations. The RP Programme aims to support organisations and individuals working with children and young people to consciously and consistently build relationships and resolve conflict in a transparent and effective manner in order to improve outcomes for children and families in disadvantaged areas. The findings of the evaluation and key implications for policy-makers and practitioners are presented here.



## Key Points

- Restorative practices have been proven internationally to provide a simple set of tools and an effective framework for building and maintaining relationships and for resolving conflict when it arises. Organisations that have taken on a restorative approach in their work have experienced a range of benefits, including greater productivity and improved outcomes for their service users.
- Recognition of, and evidence for, the effectiveness of restorative approaches in reducing and preventing crime and anti-social behaviour has been growing in Ireland over the last 15 years. More recently, other sectors, including education and youth work, have found that the use of restorative practices in their day-to-day business has improved working relationships and assisted in achieving better outcomes for the children and young people they work with.
- CDI implemented a Restorative Practice (RP) Programme as part of its Community Safety Initiative. This included training for almost 700 people working and living in Tallaght West; training for almost 100 young people; development of a cohort of locally based RP trainers; training and support to communities beyond Tallaght West; establishment and support of a number of networks of RP practitioners in order to enable reflective learning and continuing development of restorative activities; and development of a national forum to promote and develop Restorative Practices across Ireland.
- An independent evaluation of CDI's Restorative Practice Programme found that it had been successful in improving people's ability to handle conflict; in reducing the occurrence of conflict; in increasing collaboration between agencies; in improving relationships between service providers and service users, between work colleagues and between family members; and in supporting people to become more willing to report crime and anti-social behaviour.
- CDI strongly recommends the adoption of restorative practices as a way of working by all professionals responsible for the well-being of children and young people. Given the findings relating to improved productivity and reduced work-based conflict, this programme can usefully inform the Government's public service reform agenda.

## Background and Context

Restorative practices have their roots in restorative justice, which constitutes a way of looking at criminal justice that emphasises repairing the harm done to people and relationships, rather than simply punishing offenders (Zehr, 1990). Restorative practice (RP) expands on restorative justice approaches to actively encompass *prevention* strategies by aiming to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by building relationships and repairing harm (IIRP UK, 2011).

In essence, RP offers a set of tools and a framework for working with people of all ages in an inclusive and empowering manner, enabling an approach which fosters collective responsibility and stronger, healthier relationships. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) has built a body of evidence for the effectiveness of restorative practices in improving outcomes (Wachtel, 2012) and this demonstrates that the use of restorative practices helps to:

- reduce crime, violence and bullying;
- improve human behaviour;
- strengthen civil society;
- provide effective leadership;
- restore relationships;
- repair harm.

A recent evaluation of an Irish youth leadership training programme found that RP made a significant contribution to developing conflict resolution skills among the trainees and recommended accelerating the introduction of RP across the community (Northside Partnership, 2012). The evaluation of CDI's RP Programme (Fives *et al*, 2013) explains that this approach has been utilised by An Garda Síochána as a youth diversion strategy since the introduction of the Children Act 2001, which enshrined restorative conferencing (i.e. bringing together an offender and their victim) in Irish law (Kenny, 2008).

In terms of the policy context, the public reform agenda of the current Government emphasizes both ensuring greater productivity and increasing collaboration, and has 'leading, organising and working in new ways' as a core commitment (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2011, p. 3). Taking a restorative approach is a new way of leading, organising and working, and RP has been shown to support increased collaboration and greater productivity across a range of organisations and sectors, while also reducing tension in the workplace.

## CDI's Restorative Practice Programme

CDI's Restorative Practice (RP) Programme was introduced in 2010 as part of its Community Safety Initiative (Reddy *et al*, 2013), resulting in the provision of training to the management and staff of statutory agencies, community and voluntary organisations with responsibility for the well being of children and young people, and to parents, residents and young people themselves. The RP Programme also involved the accreditation of 16 locally based RP trainers (to develop capacity and sustainability) and the development of support networks for sharing learning and developing joint activities to promote the use of RP.

CDI's interagency RP Management Committee identified the following intended outcomes for the RP Programme:

- improved interagency collaboration;
- improved relationships between service providers and residents;
- increased use of a common language across sectors;
- increased satisfactory resolution of neighbourhood disputes on Community Safety Initiative (CSI) pilot sites;
- reduced anti-social behaviour and crime on CSI pilot sites;
- improved pupil attendance within participating schools;
- reduced disciplinary issues within participating schools;
- improved staff morale within participating schools.



## Evaluation of CDI's Restorative Practice Programme

The Child and Family Research Centre at the National University of Ireland, Galway, conducted an evaluation of the RP Programme between 2010 and 2012. Fives *et al* (2013), the authors of the evaluation report, conclude: *'The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the RP Programme for the management of conflict in Tallaght West. There were improvements in people's ability to deal with conflict in work, school, in the home, in the community and in interagency settings.'*

### Key findings include:

- A restorative approach is being used frequently across a range of sectors in Tallaght West. 75% of those surveyed reported that they had experienced RP being used at work, home or in the community.
- For those who had undertaken RP training, there were significant improvements in their ability to manage conflict – 87% reported being better able to manage conflict and 82% found that they were better able to manage other difficulties by using a restorative approach.
- In terms of prevention, 43% of those surveyed reported experiencing a reduction in disputes, with the greatest gain made in the reduction of disputes at work (reported by 23% of those surveyed).
- Prevention of conflict was supported by the reported improvements in a variety of relationships. 61% of those surveyed reported that taking a restorative approach had improved relationships between service providers and service users. 47% reported improved relationships with their work colleagues as a result of using RP and an equal proportion of those surveyed (47%) said that relationships with their family members had improved through using RP. The lowest (yet still significant) gain in this respect was the reported improvement in relationships with neighbours (14%).
- Significantly, from a community safety point of view, 36% of those surveyed said that they were more willing to report crime and/or anti-social behaviour as a result of restorative approaches being employed across the community.



## Recommendations

Based on the learning from the evaluation of the Restorative Practice (RP) Programme, CDI recommends:

1. That all children and young people be dealt with restoratively by the adults in their lives;
2. That RP training modules be included in all teacher training courses in order to build the capacity of teachers to deliver on the objectives of the *School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2012);
3. That relevant professional associations and support organisations recognise RP as a core skill for the continuing professional development of people with responsibility for the well-being of children and young people;
4. That RP comprise an integral element of training for all those working with children, young people and communities;
5. That consideration be given to the opportunities for RP to support the public reform agenda, particularly in relation to the reduction of work-based conflict;
6. The establishment of a national framework of support for the development and promotion of restorative practices, such a framework to include a national office for coordinating the development of capacity, systems and infrastructures which support the growth, evolution and quality of RP and build their sustainability;
7. The further development of accredited training for restorative practices and the establishment of a national system for the accreditation and professional development of RP trainers;
8. That all Government Departments continue to commit to using evidence to inform planning and service delivery, and give serious consideration to the implications of this evaluation for professional training, service planning and service integration.

### Further information:

For further details on the CDI Restorative Practice Programme evaluation report, please see: Fives, A., Keenaghan, C., Canavan, J., Moran, L. and Coen, L. (2013) *Evaluation of the Restorative Practice Programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

For further information on CDI's Restorative Practice Programme, please visit: <http://www.twcdi.ie/our-programmes/restorative-practice>

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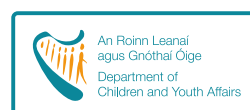
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