

Case Study

Restorative Justice Arts

Space2face Shetland

October 2020

Background

This case study is presented by Space2face Shetland, a Restorative Justice (RJ) Arts charity, a confidential and independent service based in Shetland, Scotland. We work with those who have been harmed (victims) by crime and conflict, those responsible for causing harm (offenders) through crime and conflict, as well as others affected by what has happened - the families and communities linked to those primarily involved.

All our services are delivered or overseen by Alyson Halcrow and Clair Aldington who are Accredited Restorative Practitioners with the Restorative Justice Council (UK). We work with all ages in the following areas:

- Individual Restorative Justice work
- Group Restorative Justice work
- Complex and sensitive cases
- Training in Restorative Practices (1, 2 or 3 days or tailored to your requirements)
- Professional Development sessions for schools, businesses and organisations
- Creative anger management courses
- Consultancy and research

Referrals are received from the Criminal Justice Social Work Department alongside hours of Community Payback.

The Space2face project was co-founded by Clair Aldington (Artist and Restorative Practitioner) and Alyson Halcrow (Mediator and Restorative Practitioner) in 2008 in partnership with the local Children's Reporter's Office, Justice Social Work, Shetland Arts and the Community Mediation Team. In 2016 we became an independent charity (SCIO) and are proud to have a board of trustees which includes former clients, who are people harmed through crime.

Our uniqueness is that we use the arts, the making and gifting of things, within RJ processes. You don't have to be 'creative' or 'arty' to use our service. We have just learned that through making, talking about difficult things is sometimes easier.

Space2face is not currently in receipt of any core funding, but we are grateful to the following funders who have successively funded us since 2009: the Paul Hamlyn Foundation; BBC Children in Need; Creative Scotland and the National Lottery Awards for All Community Fund with additional local funding from Shetland Arts; the Rotary Club; Shetland Islands Council Anti-Social Behaviour Working Group; and social work departments on an ad hoc basis. We also receive donations from private individuals.

Example of Good Practice

A young man in his 20s stole bankcards from his foster parents whilst they were away and used the cards to withdraw money from their accounts. He was ashamed of what he had done.

RJ process:

Space2face spent a year working through a restorative process with S whilst he made a bench as a gift for his foster parents.

During this time, in a parallel process, we also worked with his foster parents. Dad was, at first, unwilling to engage in an RJ process but as time progressed, this resolve changed and he decided that he would be prepared to meet his foster son with his wife in a restorative meeting.

The bench S made had design features that he knew would be meaningful for his foster father in particular. As part of the restorative work S did, he kept a scrapbook diary of the work he was involved with and the thinking and links he made to his foster family and their history together. It was a very personal account of what he was thinking, feeling and making.

After the year of making and preparatory meetings, Space2face facilitated a joint meeting between the foster parents and their son. Two restorative justice practitioners, the foster parents and S attended the conference. During the joint meeting, the foster father was still very reticent about being involved. He had been badly hurt by the fraudulent theft, and the upset, inconvenience and hassle it resulted in.

Whilst struggling to describe his experience, the scrapbook made by S was handed to the foster parents, helping to illustrate his work. They asked their son to talk through the book with them in the meeting. He did so, initially from the other side of a small table, until the foster father asked him to come and sit next to them to take them through the book. It was at this moment that the true connection occurred and a plan for the future of the family began. This was when the bench was gifted to Mum and Dad. They were overwhelmed.



“Going to prison would have been easier than taking part in Restorative Justice”

The gifted bench in the recipients’ garden
Photo: © Clair Aldington and Space2face

Benefits and Impact

The bench is a treasured reminder of the effort and commitment S displayed and the importance to him to make amends. The bench’s good works continue as other family members have re-connected with S, and several years on the bench plays an ongoing role in their lives, acting as a reminder of the positive experience of their RJ encounter.

Reflections

- Restorative Justice conferencing and work leading to it, should not be considered a ‘soft option’ for offenders. Facing up to what they have done, considering the hurt and harm they have inflicted can be “far more difficult than going to prison”.
- When one party is reluctant to be involved, a non-abrasive and gentle approach to tease out their concerns with decision making always in their hands, is essential. People are individuals and ‘move’ at their own pace.
- Preparation time is essential for practitioners and participants
- Training, supervision and ongoing professional development is paramount for restorative practitioners
- Never under-estimate the power of the meeting
- There are particular challenges with facilitating and participating in restorative processes in rural and remote areas, such as many people harmed and responsible either know or know of the other and their family and live within the same communities. Participation in professional development opportunities is a challenge due to travel time and costs to mainland Scotland, although the COVID-19 pandemic has assisted with making many activities, previously unavailable to us, available online.

- The making of a handmade object or a piece of artwork (in any art form - craft, visual art, creative writing, music and performance) can enable conversations and dialogue with people of all ages, both in the preparatory stages as well as during the joint meeting.
- The gift of the handmade object or artwork, such as the bench detailed in this case study, can be significant in helping everyone involved in the restorative process to move on. The gift can also help carry the restorative experience into the future lives of both the giver and the receiver. In the words of the recipients of the bench “the bench replaced the pain and harm caused” and both S and his foster parents have described the bench as a “way into a conversation”.

Further information

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