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Top UK award for a unique Scottish service that repairs the harm caused by offenders.

The Aberdeen Community Based Reparation Service has received an “Outstanding Scheme” award from the Howard League for Penal Reform. This is the third year running Sacro have received a Howard League Award and representatives from Sacro were there to receive the award at a ceremony in the House of Lords on Tuesday 24 June.

The Community Based Reparation (CBR) Service was established in Aberdeen in May 2004. The service is managed by Sacro, Scotland’s leading community justice organisation and funded by the Scottish Government through Aberdeen City Council’s “Building Strong, Safe and Attractive Communities” Initiative.

CBR gives the person harmed by a crime a voice in how they would like the harm caused to them to be addressed. Young people and adults accused of crime are given the opportunity to take responsibility, apologise and take some action to repair the harm caused by their behaviour.

CBR becomes appropriate, within the restorative justice process, when all parties agree that the person responsible for an offence could repair the harm caused by undertaking some voluntary work, either directly for the person harmed or indirectly within the local community. This voluntary work is called a reparative task and it focuses on repairing the harm.

A Sacro CBR worker facilitates this part of the restorative justice process by ensuring the negotiation, monitoring and administration of the reparative task. They provide appropriate support and supervision to enable the client to complete the task and ensure that all health and safety requirements are fulfilled for any work undertaken by a service user.

Sacro's Chief Executive, Susan Matheson said:

"I am delighted that this innovative and successful Sacro service has been recognised by the Howard League for Penal Reform. Aberdeen is in the unique position of being the only local authority in Scotland with such a service. It has the opportunity to develop and lead this approach further locally by widening the referral route. Now that the Scottish Government is advocating more use of reparative community disposals, this service is a model of good practice for elsewhere in Scotland."

Kate Dean, Leader of Aberdeen City Council commented, "We are delighted that the Howard League Penal Reform decided to acknowledge this innovative and successful service by awarding it an outstanding award. The partnership with Sacro has worked very well and the Community Based Reparation scheme is a great success."

Case Study: Aberdeen Community Based Reparation

Introduction

This case study gives an example of the work done by the Community Based Reparation (CBR) service. It shows how CBR operates within Sacro's (adult) Restorative Justice Service and the role the Community Based Reparation Service plays in the Restorative Justice process.

Background

The Procurator Fiscal received a report from the police in relation to an incident of vandalism at a local hospital. A young man had been caught on CCTV. He was observed damaging the car park barrier. This caused £374 worth of damage as well as great inconvenience to patients, visitors and staff using the car park. The person that had been accused of the offence was referred to the Restorative Justice Service as a diversion from the court prosecution.

A Restorative Justice Service worker visited the person responsible and discussed the service. The person explained the incident was a result of too much alcohol and wanted to make amends in some way. The case worker then approached the hospital and explained the aim and purpose of the service. The car park manager was very keen to explain the consequence of the damage to person responsible and also wanted financial reparation. He also felt that it was important for the person responsible to make a practical contribution to the hospital to show he was sorry for the damage caused.

Process

The case worker then began to organise a Restorative Justice Meeting to allow both parties to talk about the facts of what happened, the consequences for everyone involved and to agree on what needed to happen for the future. The caseworker approached the Community Based Reparation (CBR) service worker at this point and discussed the case and the possibility of doing some form of practical reparation. The CBR worker co-facilitated the Restorative Justice Meeting and was able to help facilitate the agreement made at the meeting. The person responsible agreed to pay for the damage caused and help out at the hospital as a positive way of moving forward. The CBR worker checked out exactly how much work was considered appropriate by both the person responsible and car park manager and helped to agree dates for this to take place. The person responsible agreed to help out at the office for the car park department.

The CBR worker then met with the car park manager to discuss in detail the task to be undertaken and obtained a risk assessment for the task. The worker then met with the person responsible to discuss it. This was to ensure the client had a clear concept of the task to be undertaken and the risks involved. The worker also obtained written consent, relevant medical information and emergency contact details from the person responsible.

Resolution

The person responsible worked at an office within the hospital for three days. He assisted with data inputting and other general office tasks. The Community Based Reparation Worker contacted both the hospital and the person responsible at the end of each day in order to check that the task was progressing satisfactorily.

Comment

By meeting together and agreeing on how best to repair the harm, all the people involved could move forward. The person responsible became accountable for what they had done and the persons harmed had the opportunity to hear an explanation, apology and receive direct reparation for the harm caused.

The Aberdeen Community Based Reparation Service can be distinguished between ‘Community Reparation Orders’ and ‘Community Service Orders’. Individuals that undertake Community Based Reparation do so voluntarily and in the spirit of the Restorative Justice Process. Sacro’s restorative practice provides clients with the opportunity to make positive, practical reparation. It also promotes social inclusion by allowing clients to reintegrate back into their local communities, while reducing fear and encouraging community as well as personal responsibility.

The service “provided the opportunity to settle the matter outside of court with me being able to repay my debt whilst avoiding a criminal record”

Person responsible RJ

“It is apparent after meeting the person that the action was out of character which will never be repeated. The service, advice and assistance I received from Sacro was outstanding and I would have no hesitation in participating in the scheme again in the future”

Person harmed RJ

Background

CBR Service

The service receives referrals from Sacro's Youth Justice and Restorative Justice (Adult) Services. Young people responsible, aged 8 to 17 years are referred to Sacro's Youth Justice Service by the Children's Reporter, as a diversion from the Children's Hearing System. Adult persons responsible, aged 16 years and over, are referred to Sacro's Restorative Justice (Adult) Service by the Procurator Fiscal, as a diversion from prosecution.

Sacro

Sacro is a national community justice voluntary organisation working across Scotland to make communities safer by reducing conflict and offending. Sacro operates in the community in partnership with others who share its values. It works with communities, those in conflict, victims and offenders. It does this in four key ways:

- > by being a leading provider of direct, innovative services in community mediation (CM), including schools work, restorative justice (RJ) and criminal justice (CJ)
- > through consultancy and training services, which equip Sacro and other organisations to deliver best practice, to extend the impact of Sacro's specialist expertise across Scotland
- > through research which monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of Sacro's services and keeps it abreast of research in the field, and
- > by seeking to influence policy and legislation, on the basis of research evidence, so that: the use of restorative justice and of constructive conflict resolution are extended; and the use of imprisonment is restricted to those who have committed serious crimes or are a danger to the public.

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Photographs

Photographs are available on the Sacro website at:
http://www.sacro.org.uk/html/press_photographs.html