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Positive evaluation of youth crime initiative shows it can reduce reoffending and help victims feel safer

The “*National Evaluation of Youth Restorative Justice Services in Scotland*”, published today, shows that having young offenders make amends to people affected by their crimes can help victims of crime feel safer and reduce re-offending. Carried out in 2008/2009, the evaluation looked at 1,420 Youth Restorative Justice cases in Scotland. The evaluation was funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by the Viewpoint organisation in co-operation with Sacro, Scotland’s leading community justice charity.

Almost all of the young people responsible who participated said that it gave them a better understanding of the harm they had caused by their offence. Persons harmed by their crimes particularly appreciated being able to speak directly with the young person, to explain how the offence harmed them and to hear the young person’s point of view. Over 90% of both young people responsible and the people harmed by the offending were satisfied with their experience of taking part in restorative justice. Previous research cited in the report also shows that people are generally more satisfied with restorative justice compared with standard criminal justice processes.

40% of the victims who participated said the service made them feel safer and 80% felt better about the young person responsible. Of those responsible, 90% said taking part in restorative justice made them want to change their behaviour for the better and 75% thought they would not re-offend again.

Research cited in the report has shown how restorative justice can reduce the chances of re-offending and encourage positive behaviour change.

The evaluation also involved a survey of local authorities who fund or refer young people to the services. The report states that: "Overall, most funders/referrers said Restorative Justice processes represented 'good' or 'excellent' value for money in provision of alternative diversionary disposals, provision of services to victims, improving offenders' attitudes to offending, creating safer communities and increasing public confidence in the Youth Justice system." However, most said that the services were given a moderate or low priority in terms of funding and most were uncertain about whether the services would continue to be funded because of increasing pressures on public spending.

Keith Simpson, Head of Development & Research for Sacro, said:

"This evaluation is the most extensive research carried out to date on the use of Restorative Justice in Scotland. It confirms findings from international research which have been overwhelmingly positive about the value of this method of dealing with crime as a means of addressing the harm caused to victims and reducing risks of re-offending. There are many positive lessons to be learned here in relation to the Scottish Government's proposals for improved community sentencing".

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