

PRESS RELEASE

To: News Desk

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Page: 1 of 1

Europe Looks to Scotland for Best Practice in Restorative Justice.

Scotland's leading provider of Restorative Justice services, Sacro, is being studied by other European counties looking for best practice in this field of expertise.

Sacro, a community justice organisation, receives over 600 referrals* per year. The wealth of experience gained over the years through dealing with this number of referrals, has attracted the attention of Criminal Justice practitioners across Europe. Their attention has resulted in the organisation's Niall Kearney lecturing at a summer school in Latvia in June to representatives from 9 European countries. In addition, Sacro hosted a group of visiting lawyers from Turkey earlier in 2007. They had been directed only to Scotland and Belgium, countries respected for best practice, by the European Forum for Restorative Justice. The trip was funded by the European Commission. Sacro also continues to be involved in international restorative justice conferences and consultations with practitioners from Portugal, Latvia, Serbia and Japan.

Restorative Justice gives a voice to the victim, reduces re-offending and gives confidence in the justice system. Although it is readily available in the youth justice system in Scotland, in the criminal justice system it is only offered as a diversion from prosecution in 5 local authority areas. Restorative Justice offers an alternative to prosecution, thereby freeing up court time and leaving greater resources to deal with serious crime and those who are a danger to the public. It can be used at pre and post sentencing stages.

Niall Kearney, Restorative Development Officer at Sacro, and a Board Member of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, said,

"There is no doubt that restorative measures, where the victim and the offender are brought together by mutual consent, offer enormous benefits for both parties. In 2005, out of 236 cases considered suitable for Diversion, 191 (over 80%) ended in a positive conclusion on both sides. These figures are very encouraging and experience in this field has only made us more committed to expanding these services so they are available at all stage of the criminal justice system. We will be working hard to persuade the new administration to support this, through legislation if necessary".

Sacro operates Restorative Justice services in Edinburgh, Midlothian, North and South Lanarkshire and Aberdeen City. The organisation has been heavily involved with the Scottish Executive in drawing up the Best Practice Guidelines for Restorative Justice, due to be finalised in 2007.

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[Delete *Referrals do not always proceed to cases as cases studies need to be deemed suitable and both parties must wish to participate.]For further information please call Lisa Stewart on 0131 624 7295 or Niall Kearney on 0131 624 7270.