

Elyn's Story

Elyn Mitchell is the Clerk of a Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Meeting. When their Meeting House was damaged in an arson attack, the effects were felt across the local community. Here, she talks about using restorative justice to repair the harm, and build a more positive future.

“I think what we hoped to achieve from a restorative justice meeting was the knowledge of why this had been done – that it wasn't an attack against Quakers. The other thing that was uppermost in our minds was that we wanted him to know that we'd forgiven him for what he did. That was the way we felt we could have healing for what had happened.

When the meeting finally came around, I went with my friend Maggi, who had also been affected by the fire. Seeing him in person was a complete shock. This is what comes of imagining what people look like - in no way did he look like what I'd thought he was going to look like. I had to get over that, because otherwise, he made a good impression.

It was very difficult for me to still feel angry with him. We'd forgiven him even before the meeting, but there was still a sort of, “how on earth could you have done this?” feeling. It was difficult to maintain that and not go over entirely to his side. I had to tell him that he'd caused over £100,000 of damage, and I had to tell him about all the people who'd been affected - it sounded like a very long list. Although he knew part of it already, you could almost see him visibly sinking under the weight of that. I had to stop myself from trying to minimize that or reassure him. “The meeting wasn't closure for us. We didn't think, “Right, we've done this.” It was almost the start of a process we're now on, myself in particular.

I would say to anyone considering going through RJ, please do it for your own sake and for the sake of the offender. I'd encourage anybody to at least try and do it, and I hope in the future to be able to facilitate that.” I've now trained as an RJ facilitator and will be volunteering for Restorative Gloucestershire. We're giving talks about RJ, and we're hoping to make the Meeting House a centre for RJ for our area.”

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What is Restorative Justice?

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Restorative Justice gives victims the chance to explain to offenders the real impact of their crime and to get answers to their questions. It holds offenders to account for what they have done, helps them understand the real impact of their crime, take responsibility and make amends. Restorative Justice really does have the power to change people's lives by facilitating contact between a victim and offender in a safe environment.

A Restorative Justice meeting (often called a conference), includes support for both the victim and offender. A trained facilitator guides the participants in a dialogue about the crime and its impact. The facilitator ensures that each participant has a voice in the proceedings but doesn't participate in the discussion.

Restorative Justice may be offered at any stage of the justice process. The Victims' Code explains what support and information victims of crime can expect, from the moment they report a crime to after a trial has finished. It includes an entitlement for all victims of crime to receive information about Restorative Justice.

There are three basic requirements that must be met before a conference can take place:

- the offender must accept responsibility for the crime
- both the victim and the offender must be willing to participate
- both the victim and the offender must consider it safe to be involved in the process

Restorative Justice works

Many people find the idea of meeting or being in contact with a person who has committed a crime against them a strange one. At the same time however, many victims feel that they are left out of the criminal justice process altogether and don't have the chance to convey their feelings and views.

Restorative Justice gives victims a voice and the opportunity to play a part in preventing others from becoming a victim of crime. Research funded by the Ministry of Justice has found that:

- when offered by a trained facilitator, the majority of victims chose to participate in face to face Restorative Justice meetings
- 85% of victims who take part are satisfied with the process
- Restorative Justice reduces the frequency of criminals re-offending by 14%



Who are Restorative Gloucestershire?

Restorative Gloucestershire is a group of statutory, non statutory and voluntary sector partners that have joined with the aim of offering all people who come into contact with the criminal justice system (CJS) or who come into conflict in the community an opportunity to participate in a restorative intervention.

We aim to:-

- Develop the use of Restorative Practices across services operating in Gloucestershire and throughout communities in Gloucestershire.
- Build on existing work where Restorative Practices impact positively on outcomes in order to develop a strategy designed to embed Restorative Practices county-wide.
- Implement the use of Restorative Practice Philosophy, not just Restorative Justice Interventions.
- Place an emphasis on the proactive, community and relationship building side of Restorative Practice as well as dealing with reactive side of Restorative Practice.
- Employ agreed protocols that strengthen relationships and seek to repair harm when relationships break down.
- Be a central hub and centre of excellence for Restorative Practices in Gloucestershire by:
 - Providing training, advice and guidance
 - Offering Restorative Interventions service using qualified, experienced volunteer facilitators
 - Promoting and supporting the use of restorative practice across the County
 - Setting up a system of support for all Restorative Practitioners operating within Gloucestershire