



Minister for Children Minister for Community Services

The Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP

555 Collins Street
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
DX210081
www.dhs.vic.gov.au
Telephone: (03) 9616 7500
Facsimile: (03) 9616 7818
TTY: (03) 9616 6143

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A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE	
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The Honourable Mary Porter MLA
Chair
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Porter

I am writing to you to provide you with information about restorative justice programs operating within the juvenile justice program of the Department of Human Services in Victoria.

Your Committee made a request to the Honourable Lynne Kosky MP, Minister for Education and Training on 20 April 2005 in relation to this information. As these programs come under my responsibility as Minister for Children & Minister for Community Services, Minister Kosky's office has forwarded this request to me for reply.

The attached information has been provided to your Committee according to the terms of reference provided.

Please contact Jan Noblett, Director, Juvenile Justice and Youth Services on (03)9616 7533 if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP
Minister for Children
Minister for Community Services

cc: The Hon Lynne Kosky, Minister for Education and Training

Restorative Justice Programs In Juvenile Justice In Victoria

The Juvenile Justice Reform Strategy outlined in the Ministerial Statement *A Balanced Approach to Juvenile Justice in Victoria August 2000* outlines a range of strategies to prevent and divert young people from penetrating the criminal justice system.

This Strategy recognised that the most socially responsible and cost effective response to young offenders is to establish appropriate community-based services where most young offenders are dealt with in their own communities.

Information is provided below about two restorative justice programs currently operating within the juvenile justice program in Victoria: the Group Conferencing and Mentoring programs.

Group Conferencing

As noted above, the juvenile justice system in Victoria has a strong focus on diversion and this is one of the aims of the Group Conferencing Program.

The Group Conferencing Program was originally established in Victoria under the auspice of a community service organisation and funded by a philanthropic trust. The Program was later funded by the Department of Justice between 1998 and 2001.

In July 2001, responsibility for the pilot program transferred from the Department of Justice to the Department of Human Services (DHS), Juvenile Justice. In 2002/03, the DHS provided additional funding to expand the Group Conferencing Program to cover all metropolitan Children's Courts and two rural programs.

The Victorian Group Conferencing Program is a pre-sentence diversionary intervention with voluntary participation of all parties. It is a restorative justice initiative, which brings together the young offender, their family, victims and community supports that aims to address the young person's offending behaviour and increase the understanding of the impact of their offending.

A state-wide advisory committee, which includes representatives from the Children's Court, Victoria Police, Victoria Legal Aid and the Department of Justice, advocates for and supports the development of the program.

The effectiveness of the pilot Program is currently being reviewed.

It is proposed that Group Conferencing be embedded in legislation in Victoria. This proposal is currently being considered as part of a suite of legislative amendments for Spring 2005.

Mentoring Program

The Restorative Justice Mentoring Program commenced operation through a community service organisation in November 2004 in the southern and eastern metropolitan regions of Victoria. The State 'Community Support Fund' has provided \$1.2 million over three years to deliver this program.

The Restorative Justice Mentoring Program's purpose is to connect eligible young people on custodial sentences or on a Youth Attendance or Supervision orders to employment, education and training opportunities. For young people on custodial orders, this forms part of their post release support services.

The Mentoring Program aims to build a relationship with a young person with the purpose of linking them to employment, education and training. By linking mentoring with employment, education and training, the Juvenile Justice Mentoring Program is combining identified and powerful elements that reduce recidivism.

The mentoring program also has a strong evaluation focus that examines whether involvement in the program enhanced the employment, education and training opportunities and/or the achievements of young people and provided young people with the opportunity to participate in community activities that seek to develop their health, wellbeing and social connection.