



MINISTER FOR EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MINISTER FOR TOURISM

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Ms Mary Porter MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Porter

Thank you for your letter dated 20 April 2005 regarding your Standing Committee's inquiry into restorative justice practices in schools and youth justice settings.

Please find enclosed a summary of restorative justice programs in Department of Education and Children's Services schools in South Australia for the Standing Committee.

Yours sincerely

Jane Lomax-Smith
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
MINISTER FOR TOURISM

24/6/05

Encl.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY OF INVOLVEMENT WITH RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

Background

Restorative justice principles advocate that the people most effective at finding a solution to a problem are those on whom it has the impact. Opportunities are created for those involved in a conflict to work together to understand, clarify, resolve the incident and work together to repair the harm caused.

The principles of Restorative Justice are not new to Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) sites and are in operation to varying degrees in schools to resolve issues between students, staff and parents/carers. Schools create opportunities for this to occur by convening a meeting between the affected parties to enable each member to relate their perspective of the incident and its effect on them and to reach a decision regarding actions or consequences required to repair damaged relationships. The skills of the meeting facilitator in conducting the meeting in a non-threatening, 'no blame' environment are crucial to the success of the process in satisfying the needs of all participants. Meetings are conducted in the following contexts:

- discussion circles in classroom situations
- impromptu resolution meetings in playground situations
- group conferences to address bullying issues
- formal meetings as part of a suspension re-entry process.

Examples of supportive practices are found within peer mediation and peer support processes. School counsellors are frequently involved in resolving issues using processes similar to those used in the restorative justice process.

Restorative practices are congruent with the processes and principles of the DECS School Discipline Policy. The DECS Suspension, Exclusion, Expulsion Procedures clearly describe the need for natural justice and procedural fairness in ensuring that:

- Students have a right to be heard
- Support people for students and families are invited to be part of the process
- Goals that aim to resolve the issues between the aggrieved parties are determined and agreed to by those involved
- A student development plan detailing the responsibilities of various people to support the re-engagement of the student in a safe environment is developed
- Grievance procedures are explained.

In November 2003 the Centre for Restorative Justice, a subsidiary of the Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Services of SA Incorporated, formed an Education Sub Committee which had two primary functions:

- To provide relevant policy advice to the Centre for Restorative Justice advisory committee about aspects of restorative justice and its relevance to education
- To provide a forum for discussion and networking amongst individuals supportive of restorative justice.

The Department of Education and Children's Services is represented on that sub committee. The sub committee also has representatives from the SA Primary Principals Association, SA Secondary Principals Association and the Juvenile Justice system.

Mr Leigh Garrett, Chief Executive and Ms Debbie Laycock, Restorative Services Coordinator represent the Centre for Restorative Justice. The sub-committee meets quarterly to share ideas and discuss developments in the use of restorative practices in schools. It has no formal decision-making authority from DECS.

In April 2004 Mr Terry O'Connell, Director Australian Centre for Real Justice, visited South Australia at the invitation of the Centre For Restorative Justice, to run a half-day awareness-raising workshop for interested persons in the education sector.

A general meeting of the SA Primary Principals Association was organised to coincide with this visit to enable Mr O'Connell to also address primary principals. The responses to his sessions were positive with a high degree of interest being registered by the Centre For Restorative Justice from schools for follow up sessions.

Restorative Practices in Schools Trial

In July 2004 Mr Garrett and Ms Laycock met with the Chief Executive of DECS to inform him of the interest being shown by DECS schools and to discuss the relevance of the use of restorative practices in schools.

In October 2004 the Chief Executive approved a project to trial the Use of Restorative Practices in DECS schools during 2005.

The purpose of the trial is to evaluate the use of restorative practices in schools as an effective behaviour management strategy to resolve issues and reduce recidivist behaviour as well as to provide advice to the Chief Executive regarding System implementation.

NOTE: Whilst the process is generally referred to as 'restorative justice' the term favoured for this trial, and the application in schools in general, is 'restorative practices.' This is considered a more appropriate term for the educational context to distance the process from any connection with the justice system.

The trial is operating with a cluster of 6 schools in the Salisbury district in the northern suburbs of Adelaide as well as a cluster of 7 schools in the Christies Beach area in the southern suburbs.

The training provider is the Centre for Restorative Justice.

The training units involve sessions with whole staff, leadership personnel, teaching staff, governing council members and the parent community at various stages. They cover:

- awareness raising
- leadership and team building
- foundations and principles of restorative practices for daily use – school context
- applications for parenting
- restorative practices in formal conferencing
- train-the-trainer in facilitating conferences

The training and development program aims to raise awareness of the process within the school community, support teaching staff to develop strategies to apply the process in classroom management and to train at least two school-based personnel at each site in the skills of facilitating meetings to enable the school to be independent in its effective use of the process.

In January 2005, trial schools commenced involvement in the training and development sessions.

A report on the trial will be completed in December 2005.

The DECS contact person for further information regarding the use of restorative practices in SA schools is;

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