

Restorative Practices: A Whole Community Approach Towards Social Justice in Limerick City. (Slide 1)

Good morning everyone. I hope you are enjoying your conference so far. It is great to see so many people from such diversity of disciplines that are dedicated and to the development and expansion of restorative justice and practice across our communities and institutions. Opportunities to meet, share, dialogue and debate in such diversity makes a significant contribution to reflection on our own practices and the potential to integrate new learning and understanding about how and why we do what we do.

My name is Ingrid Colvin and I am the Restorative Practice Development Officer for the Limerick City Children's Service's Committee Restorative Practice Project. Together with some of my colleagues from across the justice and education sectors in Limerick City (John Brosnahan, Senior Probation Officer, Young People Probation Service, Elaine Slattery, Manager Céim ar Chéim and Mary Henihan, Regional Coordinator for Le Chéile Mentoring and Youth Justice Support Services) we are delighted that you have chosen to hear a little about what is happening in the field of restorative justice and practices in Limerick City.

Our presentation this morning will briefly introduce the restorative work that is taking place by outlining how this work has developed and is growing steadily across multiply sector, agencies and service. There will be sometime at the end of the presentation for questions and answers at which time John, Elaine and Mary will make some contributions.

Limerick City is located in the mid west region of the island and is second-largest city in Munster. The city lies on the River Shannon with the historic core of the city located on King's Island, bordered by the rivers Shannon and the Abbey. Limerick is the third most populous city in the state.

The Limerick City CSC brings together senior level representatives of all agencies that have a remit around delivering services to children and their families. Including

- Tusla Child and Family Services,
- Health Service Executive,
- An Garda Síochána,
- Probation Services,
- Department of Education and Skills,
- National Educational Welfare Board,
- Limerick City Council,
- City of Limerick VEC,
- PAUL Partnership,
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD),
- Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN).

It is charged with improving the well-being and safety of children by

- supporting and strengthening families,
- facilitating collaboration within Limerick services to provide a safe and nurturing environment for all children
- progressing strategic planning and policy in relation to children's services.

To this end, it has been assigned the following tasks:

- To facilitate, coordinate and maximise interagency collaboration in Limerick City in relation to child services

- To secure support for the joint implementation of policies and initiatives which require inter-agency action
- To assist the implementation of the National Children's Strategy and associated policies
- To foster cross-agency communication between the various associated agencies and service providers in Limerick City
- To evaluate and monitor the impact of interagency work

The introduction and development of Restorative Practices in Limerick City built on the experience of a number of different projects; developing it under the auspices of the Children's Services Committee meant that a number of different strands were drawn together and coordinated.

(Slide 2 – Trains)

There have been a number of key developments, which have contributed to the parallel growth of Restorative Justice and Practice in Limerick City, include:

In **2009** a national working group on restorative approaches within Young People Probation Service was established to progress the integration of Restorative Justice theory and practice approaches, promoting positive change through participation and engagement with victims, offenders and the wider community. This working group established an action plan to develop and embed a restorative practice approach in its engagement with young people and their families, an approach, which is now promoted across the wider Service. The Senior Probation Officer from Limerick City chaired this working group and was also a representative on the CSC. Arising from this, work a proposal to develop a pilot Restorative Justice Project for Young People in Limerick City began. This project was eventually be launched in 2010.

As a natural progression from what was happening in YPP, the CSC representatives from YPP and the Department of Education and Skills proposed making Restorative Practices a priority project for the CSC. The members of the CSC agreed that a Restorative Practices project that spanned the justice, education and community sectors could have a significant impact in supporting those working with children and young people to deal more effectively with challenging behaviour and, in the longer term, to support organisations to develop a sense of community that prevents conflict and wrongdoing.

A scoping group was established to develop how this might work in Limerick City; the group drew on learning from the then Vocational Education Committee (VEC) schools in County Kerry, many of which had successfully introduced Restorative Practices. The group also learned a great deal from a local youth justice project, Céim ar Chéim, which had successfully embedded Restorative Practices into the culture of their centre. An Garda Síochána were also represented on this group and made significant contributions through their support and the experience of the Juvenile Liaison Officers who had all been trained extensively in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices. They have also contributed significantly to the setting up of Victim Liaison Officers which were to emerge later in the development of Restorative Justice.

By Mid-2010

- The Scoping Group had become a formal sub-group of the CSC, and the membership and Terms of Reference were agreed.
- Two members of the YPP staff locally, the Senior Probation Officer and a Probation Officer, participated in accredited Restorative practice training. Both went on to complete a “Training of Trainers” Programme, which significantly enhanced local capacity for supporting Restorative Practices in Limerick City.

- A successful application to the Limerick Regeneration Agency for a Restorative Justice Coordinator led to the establishment of the pilot Restorative Justice Project. Le Chéile Youth Justice Mentoring and Support Service became the employer of this Coordinator.

2011 saw Restorative Practice training for staff from across the justice and community take place through the Restorative Justice Project and Limerick Education Centre. 90 people from 27 different organisations took part in Introduction to Restorative Practice training. A further 33 people went on to participate in Restorative Practices and Conferencing Skills Training. 320 people from schools, Education and Welfare Services and youth services participated in Restorative Practices briefing and information session. Of these 177 were teaching staff from six DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). In addition 15 teachers from these six schools trained to Restorative Practice Facilitator Skills level.

Later 2011 the Limerick City CSC was invited to become part of the Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF) Programme, a funding initiative of Atlantic Philanthropies and Government. The overarching objective of this initiative is to support sustainable, systemic change. Together with three other partner agencies we are taking a cooperative and coordinated approach to the implementation of a number of interrelated initiatives, which can effect improved outcomes for children. Together with the other projects funded by the PIDF the Restorative Practice Project is an intentional effort to advance the achievement of the national outcomes for children: to contribute to improved health, learning, safety, economic well being and participation of children and their families.

Funding was approved for the appointment of a Restorative Practices Development Officer by **Mid 2012**. It was envisioned that this would allow significant development

and enhancement of the existing work across the community and education sectors. This work was also be closely aligned with Le Cheile's work in the justice sector. A Mapping exercise completed communities of Moyross/Ballynanty and Southill were prioritised for the next phase of work.

In June 2013 I took up the post of Restorative Practice Development officer

Embedding and Nurturing Restorative Practices (Slide

The capacity building work of YPP, the Restorative Justice Project and the Department of Education and Skills ensured a firm foundation, on which the CSC Restorative Practice Project could continue to develop.

Local Vision

The Children's Services Committee Restorative Practices Project aims to embed and nurture Restorative Practices in services working with children, young people and families in Limerick City. The initial starting point for the CSC Restorative Practice Project is:

1. Supporting the six DEIS schools (St. Nessian's Community College, Coláiste Mhichíl (CBS), Ardscoil Mhuire, St. Enda's Community School, Presentation Secondary School, Salesian Secondary School). Together these schools represent a student population of 2040 and a teaching staff of 165
2. Supporting services from the communities of Moyross, Ballynanty and Southill. These services work with children, young people and families with diverse needs and include social care, youth work, alternative education, advocacy, drugs, sports and recreational services. In the communities of Moyross,

Ballynanty, and Southill there are approximately 50 services identified for potential support.

In the context of the Limerick City CSC Restorative Practices Project Restorative Practices can be defined as:

A framework for building, maintaining and strengthening relationships and responding to conflict through authentic conversations, that facilitates a shared understanding of what happened and how things can be made right.

It embraces the vision of the project, which is embedding and nurturing Restorative Practices in all services working with children, young people and families. A consequence of the scope of the project is the diversity of settings, services and the broad range of target groups using restorative practices. The definition also highlights the range of Restorative Practice processes, which can be used informally and integrated into a diverse range of professional and volunteer work. It encompasses the potential for skills development with children, young people and families that reflect a restorative ethos and model of communication.

The International Institute of Restorative Practices Europe (IIRP) was identified as a provider of credible evidence based training and material that could provide consistency in training, terminology and restorative processes. Young Persons Probation and Le Chéile had previously used their training programmes in Limerick. As a result the project has adopted some core restorative practice processes used by IIRP.

Shared responsibility and collaboration

A key factor in the success of the project to date has been collaboration between statutory and voluntary services who have committed time and resources to ensuring that the project meets community and education needs.

The Children's Services Committee has overall responsibility for the project and four key groups contribute to the implementation of the project. These consist of key decision makers and influencers from statutory and voluntary services within the community and education sectors. They include; education and community working groups, an implementation group and the restorative practices sub group.

Each group meets once every two months in a cycle that facilitated the education and community working groups to feed into the implementation group which in turn feeds into the CSC Restorative practice sub group. Each representative participates in a voluntary capacity.

The Education and Community Working Groups have a mandate to assist in planning and support the implementation of the Restorative Practices Project in their respective sectors. The Implementation Group oversees the day-to-day operations of the project, makes key decisions, and garners support from other statutory and voluntary services not directly associated with the project. The Restorative Practice Development Officer makes reports based on the implementation plan every two months.

Line Management of Project Staff

The project has one paid employee, the Restorative Practices Development Officer. She is employed by Céim ar Chéim (Irish Youth Justice/Probation Service) who provide line management, office and administrative support voluntarily.

Local leaders and advocates

As a first step in building on the work which had begun prior to the appointment of the Restorative Practice Development Officer, the project employed a strategy of identifying local Restorative Practice leaders and advocates already trained and using Restorative Practices in their day - to - day work. In July 2013, eight people from six organisations were identified and trained as Restorative Practices Trainer of Trainers through IIRP Europe. Each trainer and their respective organisations have given a voluntary commitment to support the development of the project over the next two years. This voluntary commitment is primarily human resources. To date this has included making staff available to participate in training as trainers, a collective contribution of 35 working days. A subsequent contribution of over 23 working days to deliver training has also been given voluntarily. This is in addition to staff participation in trainers Community of Practice meetings and some additional continuous professional development events. In addition four people from services across Limerick were trained as assessors for IIRP Europe, increasing the sustainability of local training capacity.

Key Support Elements (Slide 3 – Watering Can)

There are three key support elements to the project; **training, support for implementation and local resource development**. Training has been a priority in the first 12 months of the project. This focused on increasing capacity in schools and organisations identified as having a strong motivation towards Restorative Practices.

Following training collective and individual support for implementing Restorative Practices has taken place. Through this support examples of the use of restorative practices in specific organisations and schools are identified and being developed as local resources for promoting the benefits, modeling practice and sharing resources.

Training

In keeping with training already started in the city the project's primary model of training is the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP). In addition the project can provide a level of bespoke training, which meets organisations specific needs, and training which focuses on using a restorative process in parenting.

Since November 2013, when training began, 81 people from 28 schools and services have participated in IIRP accredited training. This has included:

1. Introduction to Restorative Practices, which provides the participants with background knowledge, and the skills to use informal restorative practice in their day to day work.
2. Restorative Practice and Conferencing Skills, which provides participants with the knowledge and practical skills to run a formal restorative process. Participants in this training are introduced to, and given the opportunity to practice the skills they have learned.

Services community focus

Of these training participants 49% were working with services supporting children, young people or families in the communities of Moyross and Ballynanty and other communities. 38 % were working in services supporting children, young people or families in the communities specifically in Southill and other communities. 13% were working in services in other communities across the city.

Sectors

Of those trained 33% were working in the education sector either as teachers in one of the six DEIS schools supported by the project or in services such as the Schools Completion Programme

Support for implementation (Slide)

Six to eight weeks after each Restorative Practices and Conferencing Skills training programme all participants are invited to a sharing and learning session, which provides an opportunity for people to:

1. Reflect on their restorative practice by sharing their experience on how they have been implementing Restorative Practices in their day-to-day work.
2. Share resources and tools that they are using in their work environment.
3. Reflect and grow as restorative practitioners.
4. Networking and encourage each other.

In addition to this each organisation is provided with additional support through on site support visits from the Restorative Practice Development Officer. These support visits focus on the bespoke application of restorative practices. The plan is to supplement these supports with community of practice meetings in the future.

Local Resource and Practice Development

Call back sessions and on site support visits are used to identify demonstration or local practices models and include Southill Area Centre which is working towards being a restorative community centre (detailed below), integrating circles into youth work, teaching restorative practices through classroom circles and integrating circles into anger management programmes. Staff and practitioners are offered support to write their practices up to share with other services.

Other elements

As well as these the core elements the project is also contributing to the national policy dialogue in relation to restorative justice and practice by making submission to the Joint Committee on Justice, through representation on the Restorative Practice Strategic Forum and contributing to local and national conferences.

What's next?

Moving into the second year of the project we will be focusing on consolidating the capacity already developed by ensuring that the experiences of schools, services and individuals are shared through communities of practice, local case studies and materials developed.

We are also developing ways to spread awareness to support schools in their progress. One of the ways we are doing this is by offering training through the Limerick Education Centre to Primary School teachers.

Limerick city has embarked upon a significant and ambitious programme in it's efforts to introduce and secure restorative practice as an ethos and philosophy that informs and guides all services for children and young people. Whilst the project has achieved a number of milestones to date, it's full potential to create real and lasting positive change becomes clearer at every juncture.

A number of critical success factors have emerged along the way

1. The twin track development of Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice. This approach has allowed for greater awareness in services and schools, generated greater interest and understanding across the justice, education and community sectors of the of the applications of restorative principals, values and processes.

2. The ongoing identification of leaders and champions at every stage and at every level both within and across agencies and organisations. The passion and commitment these individuals bring has been invaluable.
3. The collaboration of statutory and voluntary services in envisioning a whole community approach to restorative practices, developing and using existing structures and relationships to plan, draw down funding and implement a project of the size and scale of what is been undertaken in Limerick City.
4. A strong teamwork approach embodied in a real sense of shared and joint endeavour in the pursuit of mutually beneficial goals. This has been harnessed and sustained by the promotion of inclusion and ownership amongst everyone involved in the project.
5. The voluntary commitment of time, expertise and resources from people responsible for managing services/schools at senior levels to people who are working on the ground who have taken on additional responsibilities and duties to bring about change in the way services work.
6. The dedicated human resource of a Restorative Practice Development Officer, which creates momentum and focused energy.

Our experience thus far suggests emphatically that restorative practice offers an easy and accessible approach that very simply makes sense in all aspects of our work and we would encourage other areas of the country to follow our example.