



Transforming lives through
Restorative Justice

Why me? response to the Independent Sentencing Review

January 2025

[Why me?](#) is the national charity championing Restorative Justice for everyone affected by crime and conflict, and we welcome the opportunity to feed into this review.

The sentencing framework has a key role to play in supporting delivery of an effective justice system, however many of the purposes of sentencing are not currently being met. Victims of crime are unsatisfied by the justice system. Reoffending is high. Our prisons are overcrowded. A different approach is needed to improve outcomes for both victims of crime and people who commit crimes.

Our response outlines how Restorative Justice can help meet the core principles of this review; it will relieve the pressure on prison places, it is proven to reduce recidivism, offers value for money, and supports victims recovery and healing.

Restorative Justice puts those most impacted by crime at the heart of the process and brings victim and offender into dialogue. A dialogue with the person they harmed can help a perpetrator to take accountability, see the real-life impact of their actions and incentivise them to make a change. It also provides transformative healing for the victim of crime who is able to get the answers they need to cope and recover.

Restorative Justice is a flexible, impartial, inherently safe and accessible process. It is a voluntary process that only goes ahead if everyone involved wants to take part. It should not be seen as a stand-alone tool but needs to be embedded into the whole criminal justice system and in particular the offender and victim management systems. Restorative Justice is a crucial tool that will help transform our justice system and improve the lives of everyone affected by crime.

Our response is structured as follows:

- Theme 1: History and trends in sentencing
- Theme 2: Structures
- Theme 3: Technology
- Theme 4: Community sentences
- Theme 5: Custodial sentences
- Theme 6: Progression of custodial sentences
- Theme 7: Individual needs of victims and offenders
- International Evidence
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Theme 1: History and trends in sentencing

The key drivers behind changes in sentencing have largely centred on tighter legislative measures and societal pressures for harsher consequences, resulting in longer sentences, particularly for violent crimes. While these changes have aimed to meet the statutory purposes of punishment, deterrence, and public protection, they have often overlooked crucial aspects of victim restoration and rehabilitation, especially for low-risk offenders whose backgrounds may not be adequately considered. A more balanced approach, informed by effective international practices, could enhance the efficacy of the sentencing framework, ultimately supporting safer communities and more responsive justice for victims and offenders alike.

There has been a growing public demand for tougher sentencing policies in response to high-profile crimes, particularly violent offences. This societal pressure has influenced lawmakers to implement stricter laws and increased penalties, aiming to show a 'tough on crime' approach. However there is a lack of evidence and research to show that longer sentences support victims' recovery and healing and therefore there should not be a presumption that longer sentences equate justice for victims. Instead, victims should have a chance to have their say and express what their needs are. This is in line with the Government's stated intention to put victim's at the heart of the justice system.

While punitive approaches have aimed to reduce crime through deterring offenders, rising sentence lengths do not necessarily correlate with lower reoffending rates. This indicates a potential misalignment between the punitive aspects of sentencing and the goals of rehabilitation and reform. Longer sentences have been advocated as a means of public safety, but without addressing the underlying issues of the causes of offending, such as mental health and substance abuse, longer sentences alone are unlikely to effectively reduce recidivism. Whilst longer sentences do not necessarily reduce reoffending (and is also argued, they do not deter first-time offending either), there are other options that have a proven effect on reoffending rates, such as Restorative Justice. By giving perpetrators of crime the opportunity to have a dialogue with the person they harmed and make amends for their actions, they are incentivised to make a change. Restorative Justice has been proven to reduce reoffending by up to 27%. By embedding Restorative Justice both alongside existing sentences and as an alternative for lower-level offences, we can reduce reoffending and help reintegrate people back into their communities.

Current sentencing practices do not prioritise victim restitution or holistic restorative approaches, which are essential for addressing the broader impacts of crime. At present, only 23% of respondents to the Victims Commissioner Survey were confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime, and only 27% were confident that the criminal justice system was effective. Therefore the current, punitive stance of the legal system is not meeting the needs of victims of crime. Alternatively, Restorative Justice has a victim satisfaction rate of 85% and, when used alongside the court system could help meet the purpose of reparation to victims far more effectively.

Non-custodial sentences

Another trend has been to move to more and shorter custodial sentences for low level offences. We support the argument to move away from short custodial sentences as the evidence shows that they do not deliver justice, they do not support rehabilitation but, instead, lead to higher reoffending rates, and they undermine the public's confidence in our criminal justice system.

Implementing non-custodial sentences for low-level crimes instead of short prison sentences aligns with restorative justice principles, and presents numerous benefits to reducing reoffending, public safety, and public confidence in the justice system. Non-custodial sentences more easily allow offenders to engage with victims and the community, improving public safety and restoring confidence in the justice system. By emphasising rehabilitation and community involvement over punitive measures, society can foster a more effective and equitable justice approach that promotes safety and supports positive outcomes for both offenders and the community. Benefits include:

- **Reduced Recidivism Rates:** Research indicates that individuals serving non-custodial sentences are less likely to reoffend compared to those who are imprisoned for extended and/or multiple periods. These sentences may allow offenders to maintain ties to their families and communities, facilitating reintegration and reducing the likelihood of returning to criminal behaviour
- **Focus on Rehabilitation:** Non-custodial sentences can be paired with rehabilitation programs such as counselling, job training, or educational opportunities, enabling offenders to address underlying issues (e.g. substance abuse, mental health) that contribute to criminal behaviour. Early intervention can be more effective in preventing future offences. Dialogue with family, neighbours or the local community can also help to reintegrate people who have caused harm. This can be done through Restorative Justice.
- **Avoiding Institutionalisation:** For low-level offenders, lengthy imprisonment can lead to a cycle of institutionalisation, where individuals become entrenched in criminal culture. Non-custodial sentences can help prevent this cycle and allow for more positive paths forward.
- **Resource Allocation:** Non-custodial sentences for low-level crimes enables the police and prison service to allocate resources more effectively. This could lead to improved monitoring and management of more serious offenders and enhance community safety.
- **Community Supervision:** Offenders serving shorter sentences can be placed under community supervision instead of in prison, allowing for a combination of monitoring and support. This dual approach strengthens community ties, promotes accountability, and keeps lower-risk individuals engaged in society.
- **Reduction in Overcrowding:** The use of non-custodial sentences will alleviate prison overcrowding. Greater use of diversion from court and Out Of Court Resolutions (OOCRs) should be used, which should include conditions to engage with the local restorative justice service.
- **Validating Alternatives to Prison:** By successfully implementing non-custodial sentences for low-level offences, the justice system can validate and promote alternative approaches (e.g., fines, community service, or restorative practices) and demonstrate it prioritises rehabilitation over punishment.
- **Lower Crime Rates:** With non-custodial sentences effectively reducing reoffending, crime rates will decline

Theme 2: Structures

According to the [Sentencing Council](#), there are 5 purposes of sentencing; Punish the offender, reduce crime, reform and rehabilitate offenders, protect the public and make the offender give something back. Restorative Justice fulfils all of these goals, in a way that current, punitive sentencing measures do not:

- **‘Punishment’ of offenders** - Restorative Justice requires that the perpetrator takes accountability, confronts the feelings of shame that often arise and faces the consequences of their actions. These are all difficult experiences for the person that caused the crime, with many perpetrators who have gone through the process stating that it is harder to go through than the ‘punishment’ itself. The restorative process is also not just an alternative to a custodial sentence, it can be done during or after someone has served their sentence in prison. This means that participation in Restorative Justice does not preclude the person from receiving custodial ‘punishment’ too.
- **Reduction of crime** - Restorative Justice has been proven to reduce reoffending by up to 27%.
- **Reforming and rehabilitating offenders** - Restorative Justice is transformative for the lives of people who have committed crimes and is an opportunity for them to reform their behaviour and avoid future offending. Having a dialogue with someone they harmed can be the first time they understand the impact of their actions and can support them to completely change the course of their lives.

Why me? was set up by two people who had been through the restorative process and wanted to bring the transformative effect to more people affected by crime. Peter Woolf burgled and assaulted Will Riley in his home. He was arrested and, whilst serving his sentence in Pentonville prison, met Will in a restorative meeting. Having previously committed, by his own reckoning, over 20,000 crimes, Peter never offended again after meeting Will. Seeing the damage he had done [encouraged Peter to change his life](#).

“It was his determination to change his life around that convinced us that our attacker was truly sorry for what he had done.” - [Paul](#), Restorative Justice participant

- **Protecting the public** - Restorative Justice protects the public by reducing reoffending and changing behaviour, preventing future victims by reducing the risk of more crimes being committed by them. Restorative Justice can work alongside other interventions such as prison, restriction of activities or supervision by probation.
- **Offenders giving back** - Restorative Justice helps offenders ‘give back’. The Sentencing Council directly suggests Restorative Justice can support this – “for example, by the payment of compensation or through restorative justice. Restorative justice gives victims the chance to tell offenders about the impact of their crime and get an apology.”
Reparation and Restorative Justice can go hand in hand. It provides the opportunity for perpetrators to commit to actions that will make amends, as well as answering the questions of the person they harmed.

“It wasn’t something that I felt that I had to do, or was obliged to do, it was something I wanted to do. I didn’t do it for me... I did it for them.” – [David](#), convicted for murder and later a Restorative Justice participant

Sustainability

Our current system is not 'sustainable' and has been shown to be ineffective in preventing reoffending. The punitive approach to changes in criminal justice, particularly sentencing, have increased prison populations with no increase in reform or rehabilitation of offenders and therefore no corresponding reduction in reoffending. Prisons are overcrowded, courts are backlogged, and victims of crime are often retraumatised. Restorative Justice can help give everyone involved in the justice system the resources they need to move forward in a positive way.

Embedding Restorative Justice in the criminal justice system

Restorative Justice is based on the key principle of voluntarism; however this does not preclude it from being embedded within the criminal justice system, including within a revised sentencing framework. Key referral points, and opportunities to make Restorative Justice available for victims, include by the VLO service in probation, via FLOs, during attendance at court as a witness, via the Victim and Witness service and by commissioned support services. For offenders, Restorative Justice can be discussed by the police at arrest, in detention, by the CPS, at the charging decision, at the notification of decision to send to court/OOCR, post-verdict/pre-sentence, during sentencing, in prison and during probation.

Restorative Justice for all

Restorative Justice is suitable for all crime types, and this principle should be reflected in any new sentencing framework. Assessing the suitability of Restorative Justice should be done on a case-by-case basis and appropriately trained Restorative Justice practitioners are the best ways to do this.

Alternative forms of punishment

Why me? supports the greater use of alternative forms of punishment encompassing non-custodial measures that can achieve similar objectives without resorting to imprisonment. These alternatives can include a referral to a Restorative Justice service which focuses on repairing the harm done to victims and the community, allowing for dialogue between offenders and those affected by their actions. A Sentencing Framework that prioritises rehabilitation and addressing underlying issues (e.g., addiction, mental health) that contribute to offending are an indicator of a fairer and more compassionate criminal justice system.

In order to effectively embed Restorative Justice and other non-custodial alternatives, judges should be provided with ongoing training and access to data that reflect the outcomes of various sentencing types. This might foster greater judicial confidence in employing non-custodial sanctions and alternatives.

Using Restorative Justice to address the harms from IPP sentences

IPP sentences, which have been found to be in breach of the Right to Liberty under the European Convention of Human Rights, have crucially not yet been retroactively abolished. As a result, thousands of people have been left serving IPP sentences or recalled on strict license conditions. We believe that Restorative Justice could be used to repair some of the harm caused by these

unjust sentences. [One IPP prisoner said](#), “One day I’d like to tell my side of the story, but not right now, when my freedom is at stake.” The first priority is to fill the gaps that have allowed so many people to fall through the net and be left in prison without an end in sight. But, after this has been done, and people serving an IPP sentence have been resentenced or released, they may want to share their experience and the impact it has had on their lives. [A restorative process, involving people who served IPP sentences](#) and a representative of the Criminal Justice System that harmed them, could be transformative on both an individual and institutional level.

Learning lessons from Youth Justice

The huge drop in custody figures and first-time entrants in Youth Justice is partly down to the increase in out of court disposal structures. Probation, CPS, and police should replicate this in the adult world. There is also a requirement to listen to victim voices when making decisions around out of court disposals, so this would increase the likelihood of Restorative Justice involvement if replicated for adults.

Consideration should be given to extending the Youth Justice framework to include 18-25 year olds, given the extensive evidence base around the brain development of this cohort. Instead of punitive approaches which often lead to a life of crime and harm, the justice system should support young people to ‘grow out of crime’.

To find out more about how Restorative Justice has been used in Youth Justice, see Why me?’s [Good Practice Guide for Youth Justice Services](#) and our report on [barriers to Restorative Justice for young people](#).

Evidence

There is an established evidence base that Restorative Justice works:

Effectiveness in Reducing Recidivism - A study by the UK Ministry of Justice (2018) found that restorative justice can significantly reduce reoffending rates. Offenders who participated in restorative justice meetings were 14% less likely to reoffend compared to those who did not take part. The Restorative Justice Council (2019) reported that 85% of victims felt the process had a positive impact on them, and offenders reported a greater understanding of the harm they had caused.

Victim Satisfaction - The Victim Satisfaction Survey (2017) indicated that victims’ satisfaction with the justice system increased when restorative approaches were implemented. Participants in restorative justice processes reported a higher sense of closure and victim empowerment.

Cost-effectiveness - A report by Why me? on the [Economic Evaluation of Restorative Justice](#) and was also published in [Frontiers](#). The [Sherman/Strang evaluation](#) showed a savings of £9 per £1 investment in Restorative Justice. Not supporting people harmed by crime to cope, recover and heal can cost more money in the long run, through increased demand for other public services like mental health services and welfare support.

Theme 3: Technology

The integration of technology in the criminal justice system offers numerous opportunities to innovate sentencing options, enhance offender management in the community, enhance public safety and expand access to Restorative Justice.

Technology can enhance access to Restorative Justice practices making it easier to organise and conduct restorative meetings, track progress, and connect offenders with community resources. This could include facilitating virtual restorative circles or mediation sessions, and supporting initial assessment, preparation, and shuttle meetings between Restorative Justice practitioners and offenders, allowing victims and offenders to engage in dialogue regardless of geographic limitations. This can lead to more inclusive participation, especially for victims who may feel unsafe attending in person, and for any victims under 18, who currently are not allowed into prisons to engage in any Restorative Justice with offenders in custody. Why me? published a [Good Practice guide to Virtual conferencing](#) to help bridge gaps for those who may have difficulty attending in person.

Theme 4: Community sentences

There is huge potential for using Restorative Justice within the given framework of community sentences and the existing probation system. Encouraging the use of Restorative Justice through community sentencing can help people confront the harm they have caused, and redirect “minor offenders” onto a better path.

The evidence from the UK and internationally highlights the effectiveness of Restorative Justice in community sentencing. It demonstrates a significant potential to [reduce recidivism](#), [enhance victim satisfaction](#), and [offer cost-effective alternatives to traditional punitive measures](#). By fostering dialogue, accountability, and community involvement, Restorative Justice can make a meaningful contribution to improving the criminal justice system and supporting the rehabilitation of offenders.

A referral to a Restorative Justice service should be included as a condition of a community sentence, with an appropriately trained facilitator then assessing the suitability to proceed. This respects the voluntary nature of Restorative Justice, means that the assessment is made by an appropriately trained Restorative Justice professional, the victims views are respected (i.e. they may not wish to engage), and the offender benefits from engagement with a Restorative Justice professional.

Restorative Justice enables the involvement of the community in addressing crime and supporting rehabilitation. With current community sentences, Restorative Justice could enhance community engagement by involving local residents in the rehabilitation process, fostering a sense of responsibility and collective action. For non-violent offences, community Restorative Justice can

be a more constructive and less stigmatising approach, allowing offenders to make amends and learn from their actions.

Restorative Justice can be individualised to fit the specific needs of offenders, taking into account their backgrounds and the context of their offences. This could involve tailored programs that emphasise reconciliation and personal responsibility.

Engaging offenders with victims through Restorative Justice can restore public confidence in community sentences, illustrating that they contribute not just to punitive measures but also to meaningful restitution and healing.

Alternative to Court

Restorative Justice can be used as part of diversionary measures, allowing for quicker resolutions and reducing the burden on courts. We acknowledge that Out of Court Resolutions (OOCR) are out of the scope of this review, but we believe this is a missed opportunity to see OOCR principles as part of the wider criminal justice framework. For minor offences, Restorative Justice provides a viable alternative that addresses harm without the formalities of the judicial process. Evidence shows the [increased effectiveness of OoCD \(now OOCR\)](#) when delivered restoratively. Why me? has published a number of reports/resources to outline how OOCR can support an effective criminal justice system:

- [Out of Court Resolutions - a New Framework](#).
- [Restorative Justice for Out of Court Disposals – a rapid review](#) to increase and improve the use of Restorative Justice in Out of Court Disposals (now Out of Court Resolutions)
- The [wider international context](#).
- Why me? [Good Practice Guide](#) with examples from across the UK of how OOCR can help with court backlogs.

A flexible framework around guilty pleas is also required. There have been great strides in innovative offender management in the last few years. An example is Surrey Police's 'Checkpoint' system where, under strictly controlled circumstances, the offender doesn't always have to admit guilt before being allowed to participate in a non-punishment rehabilitation process. The time is ripe for a similar trial involving Restorative Justice.

Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) as a condition of a sentence: Many community sentences contain a number of RAR days to be used at the discretion of Community Offender Managers. This should include the requirement to attend a Restorative Justice assessment or engagement session with a locally commissioned Restorative Justice service, who will provide an effective access point to Restorative Justice for both victims and offenders. Credit can be given in the form of RAR days where offenders agree voluntarily to engage in Restorative Justice with their victim.

Theme 5: Custodial sentences

Custodial sentences should be infused with Restorative Justice principles, ensuring that the processes focus on repairing harm and meeting the needs of victims, offenders, and the community.

Reforming custodial sentences to align with a Restorative Justice model is essential for creating a more equitable and humane criminal justice system. These reforms can enhance offender rehabilitation, address victims' needs through meaningful restitution, and improve community safety by reducing recidivism. By prioritising flexibility, community involvement, and transparency, the justice system can adopt a more inclusive approach that benefits all stakeholders.

Exploring non-traditional settings, like open prisons and home detention, can facilitate reintegration for lower-risk offenders. Open prisons offer work and educational opportunities, while home detention with electronic monitoring allows non-violent offenders to maintain family connections. Integrating restorative justice principles into custodial sentences emphasises repairing harm and meeting the needs of victims and the community. Establishing structured victim-offender dialogues and facilitating restorative circles can enhance satisfaction and accountability.

Victim-Offender Dialogue: Restorative Justice enables structured opportunities for dialogue between victims and offenders during and after imprisonment. Recognising and addressing the impact of crime on victims can enhance victims' satisfaction with the justice process and foster meaningful insights for the offender.

Community Involvement: Involve the community in the rehabilitation process by facilitating restorative circles, where offenders can engage with community members to understand the impact of their actions and agree on restitution measures.

In order for restorative values to be effectively incorporated into the justice system, information on Restorative Justice needs to be readily available to both those who have committed crimes and victims of crime. Criminal justice professionals such as police, family liaison officers, the CPS and criminal lawyers, judges and magistrates, prison officers, probation officers and victim support services should be trained in Restorative Justice and how to offer a referral to a local Restorative Justice service to the people they work with.

The reform should focus on making the sentencing process more transparent and accountable to the public, improving trust in the justice system:

- **Clear Guidelines:** Develop comprehensive guidelines that clearly outline how restorative elements can be factored into sentencing decisions, thereby ensuring consistency and fairness.
- **Public Involvement:** Engage victims and community members in discussions about appropriate sentencing options and expected outcomes, fostering a sense of ownership over local justice processes.

- **Focus on Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** Prioritise rehabilitation to prevent recidivism, ensuring that custodial sentences contribute to positive outcomes for offenders and society.
- **Integrated Support Services:** Incorporate a range of support services within the custodial framework, such as addiction treatment, mental health services, skills training, and educational opportunities, including a referral to a Restorative Justice service. This comprehensive support will support rehabilitation and equip offenders with the tools they need to reintegrate successfully post-release.
- **Post-release Monitoring:** Establish structured follow-up programmes for released offenders that include Restorative Justice, enabling ongoing support from probation services and community organisations.

Theme 6: Progression of custodial sentences

By reforming how offenders progress through their custodial sentences using a Restorative Justice model, we can create a more effective and humane system that benefits offenders, victims, and communities alike. Enhancing transitional pathways, employing incentives, reassessing release criteria, improving post-sentence supervision, refining the recall process, and learning from international practices will contribute to a justice system that prioritises rehabilitation and restorative practices. This comprehensive approach not only supports individual growth but also fosters a safer and more cohesive society.

It is essential that referral to Restorative Justice service should be available and promoted throughout the person's journey through the criminal justice system, not just during the custodial sentence. Custodial sentences alone are not rehabilitative, and offenders need additional support to repair harm caused and change their behaviour.

Evidence shows Restorative Justice increases motivation to engage in rehabilitative and reformatory programmes whilst in custody. Access to Restorative Justice should be facilitated at the earliest opportunity not just to increase engagement of offenders but also to increase confidence and satisfaction of their victims.

Restorative Justice can be used as an **addition** to custodial sentences, supported by the prison estate to take place whilst people are serving sentences.

Restorative justice should be integrated as a standard practice within custodial sentences. This requires adequate training for prison staff and identifying Restorative Justice champions within the prison population to promote its benefits among peers.

The challenges and barriers to enabling Restorative Justice to take place in prison with victims of crimes must urgently be addressed. The current HMPPS Restorative Justice Policy Framework, designed to facilitate restorative justice processes safely and effectively for individuals serving custodial sentences, has inadvertently negatively affected crime victims.

The restorative sector has identified several challenges regarding the implementation of the HMPPS Restorative Justice Policy Framework and its integration into Re:Hub's operational activities. These include extended wait times for processing referrals submitted by restorative service providers; lack of transparency in decision-making processes; and an absence of a defined process for service providers and/or victims to appeal decisions which impacts accountability and is causing further harm to victims.

"The process is stopped or significantly delayed by ReHub. It makes us feel that we are letting people down and causing further harm." - Restorative Justice practitioner

Theme 7: Individual needs of victims and offenders

To meet the individual needs of different victims and offenders while driving better restorative outcomes, the sentencing framework must be more adaptive and considerate of the complexities surrounding each case. By listening to victims, increasing transparency, tailoring approaches for specific groups, and learning from international best practices, the criminal justice system can better serve all members of society, ultimately leading to a more just and effective approach to sentencing. It is also essential to implement changes in sentencing that both acknowledge and accommodate the diverse backgrounds and characteristics of both victims and offenders.

Victims' needs are often not taken into account in the criminal justice process, and they are left without a voice. Additionally, there is no opportunity for people who commit crime to explain their actions or make amends for what they did. Restorative Justice gives all parties involved the opportunity to have a voice, enter a dialogue and drive better outcomes. There is a wealth of evidence that shows that Restorative Justice works to help people feel that justice has been delivered far more than any other intervention.

Everyone who has contact with the criminal justice system should be offered access to Restorative Justice. One of the challenges about accessing Restorative Justice is that it is not routinely offered to victims. The Victims' Code has a duty for the police to provide information on Restorative Justice. This 'duty' should be extended to all criminal justice agencies, unconditionally, at clear identifiable points, particularly at the point of case disposal and sentencing. This duty to provide information on Restorative Justice should be incorporated into the sentencing guidelines.

Victims rarely feel like they get their voices heard by the justice system, they are sidelined in the process. They are the people most impacted by crime yet the least involved in the process and are basically treated as witnesses. Greater use of Restorative Justice is a way of putting victims' needs at the heart of the justice system, rather than being an afterthought. It's also a way for the State/government to show that it cares about what has happened to victims.

Why me? has a wealth of testimonies and case studies from victims whose lives have been transformed by Restorative Justice. These stories are powerful illustrations of the impact of Restorative Justice:

In 1992, [Will](#) was kidnapped and tortured in a case of mistaken identity. After spending 30 years bottling up the emotions he felt as a result of the attack, Will met one of the people who harmed him in a face-to-face Restorative Justice meeting. The meeting changed his life completely.

In 2019, [Andy's](#) son, Joe, was killed in a road traffic collision caused by a driver on his phone. The tragic loss left Andy feeling angry and confused. After two Restorative Justice meetings with the driver, Andy found forgiveness for the man who killed his son and says he's a changed man.

[David*](#) served a 15-year prison sentence after killing someone and pleading guilty to murder. He sought Restorative Justice after finding out about it on a victim awareness course that he completed in prison. Eventually, David met with a family member of the person he killed and was able to give them the answers that they needed.

[Janika](#) suffered a violent knife attack at the hands of her former partner. He was convicted for attempted murder and remains in prison. She said, “Taking part in restorative justice was the key that unlocked the door to my future.”

[Teresa](#) was sexually abused by her father when she was very small. He never admitted the crime, which caused rifts in the family. After years enduring trauma and with her father having passed, Teresa sought Restorative Justice.

There are many more stories like [this on our website](#).

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

[The European Federation for Restorative Justice](#) has numerous examples of developments in other countries on their website.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has published guidelines endorsing restorative justice as essential for effective and just responses to crime. Their reports emphasise that restorative justice leads to better outcomes for victims, offenders, and communities.

New Zealand: New Zealand is often cited as a leading example of restorative justice implementation. The Family Group Conference model, introduced in the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, has resulted in reduced reoffending rates among youth offenders, with studies indicating a 30% reduction in recidivism compared to traditional court processes (Doolan, 2016). New Zealand's Family Group Conferences emphasise community and family involvement in the sentencing process, providing valuable lessons on integrating restorative justice into custodial outcomes.

Australia: Research from the Australian Institute of Criminology shows that restorative justice programs have been successful in reducing recidivism rates in a variety of settings. For example, the program in Western Australia was associated with lower reoffending rates among juvenile offenders as compared to those who went through the conventional justice system.

Canada: In Canada, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002) incorporates restorative justice practices. Evaluations of community-based restorative justice programs, such as those in British Columbia, have shown that they lead to lower recidivism rates and high levels of victim satisfaction. Victims reported higher satisfaction levels when involved in restorative processes compared to traditional approaches (Kerr, 2019). [Marlee Liss](#) was the first person in North America to get access through the courts to Restorative Justice for sexual violence, after being raped in 2016. The restorative process took her from feeling voiceless and disempowered after the court process, to feeling empowered, relieved and hopeful

Norway :Norway's approach to restorative justice emphasises community and rehabilitative strategies. The Norwegian Institute of Criminal Justice Research (2017) reported that restorative practices in community sentences resulted in a significant decrease in reoffending, noting that the focus on repairing harm effectively reintegrated offenders into society. Norway has successfully focused on rehabilitative practices within its prison system, achieving low recidivism rates by prioritising education and community reintegration strategies.

The Netherlands: The Netherlands serves as a model where innovative reforms have reduced prison populations by over 40% from 2006 to 2023. Their focus on alternatives to incarceration, such as community programs and balanced sentencing, offers valuable insights into developing sustainable sentencing practices.

Useful references and links

[Why me? website](#)

[Why me? case studies and testimonies of the impact of Restorative Justice](#)

[What is Restorative Justice?](#)

[Restorative Justice APPG Inquiry into Restorative Practices in 2021/2022](#)

[Victims Commissioner Survey](#)

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