

CASE STUDY

Bristol: working together to resolve conflict and repair harm

*Marian Liebmann**

1. Origins of the project

In late 2007, Bristol City Council held a high-profile conference about making Bristol a Restorative City. However, although many restorative initiatives already existed, some of twenty years' standing, they were not talking to each other. If we could not get ourselves together, how could we ever persuade other people of the virtue of our cause? So, in 2010, a small group gathered practitioners and began meeting in workshops of about 30 participants, helped with slender resources from an independent organisation. The objectives were to:

- identify common underlying principles of restorative process;
- bring people together to be inspired by what we are all doing;
- create an ongoing Restorative Justice forum for Bristol;
- identify a common vision and find more ways to work together collaboratively;
- work out how we could make Bristol a 'Restorative City'.

We ran several workshops and mini-conferences between 2010 and 2012, exploring restorative themes and working collaboratively. Examples were: restorative justice in prisons, restorative practice in schools, police involvement in restorative justice, mediation with homeless people, restorative approaches with young people, hate crime, and more. The workshops were expanding and clearly met a need, and gained support from professionals for restorative ways of working. However, in April 2014 'austerity cuts' began to take effect, and the minimal funding provided by the council ceased, and so did the workshops, apart from occasional ones when funding was available.

2. Theoretical and conceptual basis

One of the best known attempts to define the values of restorative justice was undertaken by Howard Zehr. He compared and contrasted retributive and restor-

* Marian Liebmann, PhD, is an independent restorative justice practitioner, trainer and consultant. She is the former director of Mediation UK.
Contact author: marian@liebmann.org.uk.
Bristol Restorative City: <http://restorativebristol.co.uk/introduction/strategy/>

ative justice – while retributive justice is concerned mainly with meting out retribution or punishment to the offender, restorative justice deals with putting things right for everyone, especially the victim (Zehr, 1985). Some of the values of restorative justice this led to are: dialogue, mutuality, healing, repair, repentance, responsibility, honesty and sincerity. Later work by Howard Zehr (2002) suggested six key questions to help analyse how restorative an intervention or model is:

- 1 Does the model address harms, needs and causes?
- 2 Is it adequately victim-oriented?
- 3 Are offenders encouraged to take responsibility?
- 4 Are all relevant stakeholders involved?
- 5 Is there an opportunity for dialogue and participatory decision-making?
- 6 Is the model respectful to all parties?

Restorative Bristol was the name adopted, after much discussion. As it developed into a more formal organisation (from being a loose network of interested organisations and individuals), it initiated a membership scheme based on restorative values, as these seemed more important and more widely applicable than particular restorative justice models. We asked prospective members to complete an application demonstrating that they met the Restorative Bristol core principles (Restorative Bristol, 2019) which are:

- facilitating dialogue between all those affected by the wrongdoing or conflict;
- encouraging those responsible for the harm done to become accountable for their actions and responsible for setting right the wrong;
- ensuring that all those involved or affected are given the opportunity to share their story, their feelings and their needs;
- involving everyone affected in finding mutually acceptable ways forward;
- repairing the harm caused by any behaviour that has a negative impact on others;
- repairing, or at times, building relationships between those affected.

3. Operationalisation

We had begun to build links with Bristol City Council, and in August 2012 we had a meeting with senior professionals, who wanted restorative working to become a mainstream activity. They set up the Restorative Bristol Board to include several heads of department of Bristol City Council, as well as statutory agencies, police, criminal justice agencies, voluntary organisations and independent members. The Board began meeting every six weeks, to take the work forward and to find funding for it. A few restorative justice practitioners, including myself, were included along with the independent members.

A senior probation officer was tasked with scoping all restorative justice activity, compiling a report and organising a large conference to launch Restora-

Marian Liebmann

tive Bristol officially. This conference took place in December 2012. City dignitaries, including the elected Mayor for Bristol and the Police and Crime Commissioner attended the conference. The programme included speeches on Restorative Bristol, forgiveness in victim-offender work, restorative justice work around the globe, restorative approaches in schools and workshops and talks by eight local organisations about their restorative work.

In 2013, restorative work continued to gain momentum across the city. A Project Officer was appointed for one year to help develop a strategy for future development of services. The 'strapline' adopted for Restorative Bristol was 'working together to resolve conflict and repair harm'. A website was set up and a membership scheme initiated. Further conferences took place, although with increasing austerity they became harder to arrange.

4. Ongoing processes

4.1 *Member projects and services*

Over the period since the launch of Restorative Bristol, member projects have come and gone according to their funding. At the time of writing, the restorative projects and services (mostly members of Restorative Bristol) running in Bristol are listed in the following box:

Restorative projects and services in Bristol 2019

- Resolve West (formerly Bristol Mediation), established in 1987, provides a range of conflict resolution tools to neighbours/communities in dispute in Bristol and the surrounding areas, using a team of over 40 volunteer mediators, three casework staff and a community engagement officer, and deals with over 150 cases per year.
- Restorative Approaches Avon & Somerset (RAAS), led by Resolve West, offers restorative approaches including conferencing, shuttle and restorative letters, for criminal justice (including sexually harmful behaviour and domestic abuse) and some school cases, as well as running a range of restorative workshops.
- Bristol Police Youth Restorative Disposal, piloted in 2008-2009, after training 700 police officers, using restorative justice to resolve low-level incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour, deals with over 5,000 incidents per year in Avon and Somerset (the police area that includes Bristol). Young people are not charged for offences in these cases.
- The Probation Service and police refer cases to RAAS.
- CRC (Community Rehabilitation Company) South West delivers restorative justice and also refers cases to RAAS.
- Bristol Youth Offending Team, working with offenders between the ages of 10 and 17, encourages them to take responsibility for the harm they have caused their victims, and to make reparation to them.

- Bristol Reparation Service, run by Catch 22, a national charity working in Bristol with Bristol Youth Offending Team, provides reparation projects.
- Hate Crime and Discrimination initiative, a joint venture between SARI (Stand Against Racism & Inequality) and Resolve West, provides a range of restorative interventions.
- RESTORE, part of the Forgiveness Project, works with offenders at Eastwood Park women's prison.
- Vinney Green Secure Unit for vulnerable young people uses restorative approaches to work with their challenging behaviour.
- Shirehampton Primary School uses a restorative approach that moves away from punishment to an approach seeking to educate and involve their pupils.
- Orchard Secondary School uses restorative approaches to handle disciplinary incidents in the school.
- Restorative Thinking Parenting Programme encourages parents/carers to think about their child's behaviour, what it is communicating and what responses might meet their child's needs.
- Resolution at Work provides workplace mediation services to organisations, helping them to resolve disputes and improve working relationships.
- Several large public sector organisations have their own in-house workplace mediation services.
- Salaam Shalom brings Muslims and Jews together in a variety of ways, such as radio work, art exhibitions, plays and conflict resolution work in schools.
- Restorative Justice Week (November) provides an opportunity to gather and promote a variety of restorative projects, such as films, workshops, talks, school conferences.

5. Findings, challenges and further perspectives

5.1 *Challenges for Restorative Bristol*

The Restorative Bristol Board still meets quarterly, but funding austerity has led to loss of staff and our project officer now has about ten other priorities to juggle in addition to Restorative Bristol. Sometimes new policies can undermine restorative work, e.g. zero tolerance/punishment. Often services are reduced to meeting minimum legal requirements, leading to lower standards becoming acceptable. No longer 'new and shiny', restorative approaches can get lost in the current turmoil of endless reorganisations to save money.

5.2 *New direction planned*

Until now the Board's action plans have been quite broad, aiming to promote and encourage the delivery of a wide range of restorative approaches. However, some

Marian Liebmann

recent incidents in deprived areas of the city have prompted suggestions of doing specific pieces of work in these areas and developing interventions and events to focus on citywide issues and needs, trying to bring a restorative approach to these areas. It may require a different structure of the Board to enable this.

6. Conclusion

There are two main routes to the concept of a restorative city. The first is the 'training route', in which restorative ideas are spread through expanding training in restorative practice to successive groups and departments, and then embedded in the way of working. This is the route taken by Hull (the first city to declare itself a restorative city), Leeds and several other towns/areas.

The second route is the one chosen by Bristol, which is gathering existing restorative initiatives into a more coherent organisation, and using this to initiate further restorative services. Other cities that have followed this route are Durham, Brighton and Southampton. In addition to initiating and encouraging new services, it is also important to apply a restorative approach to citywide issues, which Bristol is hoping to do.

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