

Restorative group conferences with violent juveniles

preparation of young offender, his/her family, and victim for conference, their experience with the process
how community members perceive their role in conference
short case report about a conference with children who committed robbery
resocialization programme “Against Violence”

Kamila ŠPEJROVÁ



The Czech Republic

basic information about crime



The Czech Republic – 2016

- 10 million inhabitants
- 61.500 convicted in 2016
- 35.000 sentenced to trial period (without supervision), 9.500 sentenced to prison (currently 21.000 imprisoned)

PMS

- more than 400 probation officers in 74 centres (in every district town) in 8 regions
- PMS: nearly 30.000 new cases/year (36 % - pre-trial stage, 64 % enforcement stage)
- most common crimes: theft, neglect of compulsory maintenance, obstruction of a decision of the court (violent crimes: about 15-20 %)
- most common alternative measures supervised by PMS: community service (8.800), probation supervision (7.200 + 1.400 parole); 1.000 mediations

Young offenders



PMS: juvenile offenders

- a special law for juveniles, specialized officers, prosecutors and judges for juveniles
- PMS: 2.500 juvenile cases/year
- 60 % pre-trial stage, 40 % enforcement stage
- most common crimes: theft, disorderly conduct, grievous bodily harm, burglary, robbery
- most common alternative measures: probation supervision, community service, resocialization programmes, work for community
- especially when we work with children and youngsters, we cooperate with parents and other family members, schools, social workers, NGOs... and of course with the victim

Beginnings of restorative conferences in the Czech Republic



- 4 years ago we didn't have any experience with restorative conferences
- we studied foreign sources... discussed with specialists... and prepared methodology for restorative family group conferences
- we tried to find NGOs, which would hold restorative conferences for our clients – we weren't successful
- we trained our probation officers (specialists for work with juveniles) ...and started to hold first conferences with young offenders
- later we shot two short films about conferences

Restorative conferences



- usually organized by two facilitators
- participants: young offender, victim and their families and supporting people, community members (in our cases it was mostly neighbours and schoolmates, teachers)
- there are usually about 10 people in the conference
- the most important aspect is to prepare all the conference participants properly in individual sessions – it's necessary to explain what they can expect (who will be there, what questions they can expect...)
- very important is also the preparation of the facilitators... and the place
- after the first part of the conference, there can be some time left for the family of the offender to discuss the possibilities of harm reduction (correction plan)
- a conference lasts approximately 1,5 – 2 hours
- possible outcomes: agreement about amends, correction plan for the offender and his/her family
- the whole work on the conference lasts approximately 40 days

Victims before the conference



Victim's feelings after the crime

- they strive for just punishment for the offender
- they have psychological problems
- they worry about themselves, their family...
- they feel anger towards the offender

Victim's motives to participate in the conference

- wants to know why the offender committed the act
- needs to hear the offender's apology
- wants to tell the offender what he had caused
- has the possibility to help with the offender's correction
- has a possibility to get financial compensation (only 1/3 of victims)

Offenders before the conference



Offender's motives to participate in the conference

- to explain the circumstances of the crime
 - the possibility to apologize and to come to agreement about the harm reduction
 - the chance to get milder punishment
 - to try to appease their parents
-
- supporting people were more important for offenders than for victims
 - offenders were more afraid of meeting the victim, rather than victims meeting the offenders
 - more offenders weren't sure that the decision to participate in the conference was good
 - offenders were more confident that they would agree to the compensation

Participants after the conference



Most of the victims (over 90%)

- changed their opinion about the offender (for the better)
- believed that conference had an educational effect on the offender
- felt safe during the conference
- heard an apology
- said that it was important for them to say everything about how the crime affected them
- believed that the offender would complete the correction plan
- all victims would recommend the conference to another person (a victim of the same type of crime)

Most of the offenders

- apologized to the victim and their apology was accepted
- were sure that the conference influenced them so much that they would avoid conflicts with the law
- were ashamed during the conference
- were sure that they persuaded the other participants that they are not as bad as the others might have thought
- believed that they would complete the correction plan
- some of the offenders felt fear during the conference
- for all the offenders it was important to express personally how they wanted to solve their case

All victims and offenders agreed that the conference was a better way how to solve their cases than through judicial proceedings.

Program for juvenile offenders “Against Violence”



What we did before creating the program?

- searched for foreign sources, used them as an inspiration
- discussed with specialists working in field

Program characteristics

- use of CBT principles
- comprehensive work: in group, individually, with family/close people
- total of 28 sessions
(16 group sessions, 5 individual sessions, 5 family sessions + 1 startup + 1 final meeting)
- evaluation is included

Target group

- 15 – 18 years old, clients of PMS
- there was violence/a threat of violence against another human being

Main goal

- reducing the risk of criminal recidivism

Partial goals (in particular risk areas of juvenile´s life) were e.g.

- risk at general, risk situation
- coping strategies
- social contacts – family, friends, partner, free time...



Thank you for your attention!

kspejrova@pms.justice.cz