

A Review Of
Integrating Victims in Restorative Youth Justice

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Book: *Integrating Victims in Restorative Youth Justice*
Authors: Adam Crawford and Tom Burden
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Integrating Victims in Restorative Youth Justice is the product of a six-month study conducted by Crawford and Burden of a youth offender program in England. This detailed report, which utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data, provides a comprehensive understanding of the youth offender program from the multiple perspectives of victims, juveniles and professionals. The book also identifies the challenges of putting policy into practice and offers suggestions for improvement as well as new ways of measuring success for restorative justice programs.

The book begins with a thorough review of youth crime policy in England, specifically the changes in the late 1990s that led to the creation of the Youth Justice Board and the Youth Offending Service agencies. The authors detail some of the goals of this new youth policy, including the referral order process. The referral order process is often an alternative to harsher punishments for first time offenders or less serious crimes. Instead of being sentenced to a detention center juveniles are required to fulfill a contract that can involve meeting with their victims and community service. This is a more restorative justice approach to youth crime that also focuses on victim involvement.

The authors also provide a brief overview of restorative justice and victim involvement to provide a basis for their own research. This research serves two important purposes. First, it shows how policies are translated into practice. Second, it offers a fairly comprehensive evaluation of the program. This also helps to continue the process of learning what types of criminal justice approaches work and how programs can be modified and improved.

The research aims and methods are also discussed in detail. The authors chose to utilize multiple methods of data collection including surveys and in-depth interviews of offenders, victims, staff and volunteers, in order to get a more complete understanding of the referral order process at one of the busiest Youth Offending Service (YOS) agencies in England. An overview of the sample including demographics and the structure of the YOS agency is also presented. The makeup and roles of the restorative justice team members are provided and a discussion on the role of volunteers in the referral order process is included. While there was not a great deal of detail in regards to staff members, the challenges of working with volunteers were very thorough. This could be helpful to practitioners interested in implementing a similar restorative justice approach or for existing programs looking to incorporate more community members in their process. However, more information about how the process works and how cases are

managed within the organization would have been helpful for those who are interested in creating this type of program.

The chapter discussing victims' experiences in the referral process proved to be very insightful. While the research site had a lower victim participation rate in the referral order process than other YOS agencies, the authors were still able to gain a great deal of information from victims who did not participate in the referral order process. While the quantitative information is limited, the excerpts from the interviews with victims show a wide variety of experiences. Reasons why victims did or did not choose to participate and the emotions that emerge from the crime and the referral process are all discussed.

The authors also focused on the experiences of the youth offenders in the referral order process. Interviews with the youth brought out several different themes about the process. For some it was still seen as punishment but for others it was a chance to have a say and to apologize. Important lessons, including the importance of victim involvement, can be taken away from the interviews about why the process was beneficial for some youth and not a positive experience for others. These lessons could be very beneficial for judges who want to consider alternative sentences for juveniles and practitioners working with this population.

The final part of the referral order process was also touched upon. This involved a contract that was devised by the youth and the YOS agency. The contracts often included actions that were meant to be part of reparation for the crime as well as actions that were aimed at reducing the youth's offending. For some, the distinction between these two goals was not clear. The authors stressed that this is an area that can be improved on in other programs and may help to make compliance with the contract more successful as well as reduce the youth's offending. However, the overall finding was that reoffending rates for youth that participated in the referral order process were significantly lower than youth given other sentences (fines, reparation, and community service).

The conclusion addresses both the potential and the problems with the referral order process and the restorative justice approach for youth offenders. Specific attention to the administrative challenges and the use of community volunteers is very helpful. The experiences of both the victims and the youth offenders also provide insight on new ways of defining a successful restorative justice program. The interviews with the juveniles allowed for a better understanding of how the youth felt about the criminal justice process and their actions. The interviews with victims and community members also showed the willingness of people to be involved in helping the youth succeed. While the book is realistic about the problems and limitations with the program, it does highlight the potential for a criminal justice approach that is more restorative and rehabilitative as a better way to handle juvenile offenders.

Overall this book would be appropriate and helpful for several different groups. For practitioners, the details about procedures, organization and individual experiences provide guidelines for implementing a restorative justice program as well as potential problems that may arise. Also, the interviews with both victims and offenders will be helpful to practitioners that work with either group to get a more complete understanding of how a restorative justice approach affects all of the individuals involved. The book is also helpful for researchers

interested in studying similar programs or for those looking at programs with small samples where multiple methods may be beneficial. Finally, for both students and teachers this book provides excellent examples for understanding some of the pros and cons for a restorative justice approach and is an interesting case study of turning policy into practice.

ENDNOTE

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