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ROUTE+

RESTORATIVE OUTREACH FOR YOUTH AND TERRITORIAL ENGAGEMENT

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Restorative outreach for youth and territorial engagement

TOOLKIT

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kiriku Appassionati di Educazione

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CORNMARK PROJECT "Seeking help, Seeking change"

PROJECT PARTNERS

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"Seeking help, Seeking change"

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1. Introduction

a. Project description

What are the specific objectives you wish to achieve and the "results you wish to obtain"? How do these objectives relate to the priorities you have selected?

The project aims to improve and expand Restorative Justice practices by strengthening the skills and knowledge of practitioners in Italy, Finland and Ireland. Through training sessions and interactive activities, it will encourage the exchange of different approaches and promote constructive dialogue between public institutions and citizens. The main objectives are to evaluate current practices, improve the skills of practitioners within the local community and enhance collaboration between stakeholders. Responding to the growing need for qualified professionals in the field of prisoner reintegration and social inclusion, the project supports innovation in professional training and responds to ever-changing social challenges.

Describe the target groups of your project

The project is aimed at professionals in the sector – particularly educators, social workers and public actors – as well as young people involved in restorative processes. The main participants will take part in training sessions and exchanges of good practices to be held in Ireland, Finland and Italy, drawing on the networks of local partner organisations (Wexford Local Development, Finnish Forum for Mediation and Kirikù). Stakeholders, such as municipal representatives, civil society, schools and the police, will participate in discussions to share knowledge and address barriers to the implementation of the restorative paradigm. Participatory round tables will focus on specific stakeholder groups, and pilot activities will involve people directly affected by crime, including victims, offenders and their support networks.

Describe the motivation behind your project and explain why it should be funded

Restorative justice offers a complementary approach to traditional legal responses to crime, focusing on dialogue between the offender, victim and community to promote accountability and understanding, in line with EU Directive 2012/29/EU, which stipulates that "all victims of crime are guaranteed their rights and receive support and protection". However, its effective implementation requires a shared educational culture among all actors in the justice system, including civil society.

The project addresses the lack of adequate training for professionals by developing qualified personnel within third sector organisations and public institutions. This will be achieved through a series of training sessions and exchanges between the participating countries, using a “train the trainers” model in Italy, Finland and Ireland to ensure long-term impact and innovation in practice.

How does the project respond to the needs and objectives of the participating organisations and the identified needs of their target groups?

The participating organisations are deeply aligned with the project's objectives, which focus on restorative justice, educational innovation and public dialogue. The Finnish Forum for Mediation (FFM), which has extensive experience in mediation in various sectors, seeks to update its practices in response to social changes and will benefit from collaboration on new approaches. Kirikù, with experience in accompanying people in internal and external penal enforcement and supporting victims, will expand its expertise and improve future initiatives through knowledge exchange. Both FFM and Kirikù work with vulnerable young people, families and individuals involved in the justice system, with the aim of promoting community inclusion and safety.

Wexford Local Development, through the Cornmarket Project, tackles social issues such as addiction, crime and exclusion by offering support and rehabilitation. Its Restorative Justice programme, run in partnership with the probation service, will benefit from the project's training activities.

Finally, ALDA contributes with its expertise in community engagement and project dissemination, helping to broaden the impact and visibility of the project at European level.

What will be the advantages of cooperating with European partners in achieving the project's objectives?

The European dimension of the project promotes the exchange of different ideas and practices in the field of Restorative Justice between Italy, Finland and Ireland, enabling the creation of innovative approaches at EU level. Thanks to collaboration between different EU countries, the project will create a shared knowledge base tailored to national needs and collect data from target groups to develop relevant training programmes.

The partners, with their diverse skills, will promote mutual learning and strengthen international cooperation, in particular through mapping European Restorative Justice practices and organising training sessions that will produce an electronic Toolkit combining theory and practical experience for wider use.

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b. Prevention in Restorative Practice and Restorative Justice

“You have to lower your voice and look up.” - Renzo Piano

“Happiness does not lie in the absence of contrasts, but in the harmony of contrasts. It is this harmony that is constructive.” - Roberto Benigni

The Concept of Prevention

Etymologically derived from the term ‘pre-venio’, prevent has two meanings: 1. arriving first, 2. anticipating, impeding, avoiding something negative and dangerous (Malizia, Nanni, Prellezo, 2008).

This means dealing with various variables, both structural and dynamic, but necessary in order to achieve the goal, which raises several questions. Among these, for example, and trivially: which service should be activated? Who decides what is negative and dangerous? How can I anticipate and prevent it? This means that, for a project that aims to prevent, it is necessary to be clear about: the object to which one intends to direct one's attention, the area of intervention towards which the activities are oriented, the contents of the intervention, and the objectives, whether “negative” (avoidance and/or removal) or “positive” (creation of opportunities and/or support for protective factors) (Malizia, Nanni, Prellezo, 2008).

The positive aims of the restorative approach can be seen in street education initiatives in Italy, where collaboration with the community and the involvement of various stakeholders are fundamental activities for creating a support network in response to situations of conflict, even potential ones. For example, in one specific intervention, supermarket cashiers were advised to contact the police as private citizens, reconnecting them with the appropriate services in their community. This intervention was carried out because the cashiers said they did not feel supported by the company in dealing with the deviant behaviour of a group of young people who hung around the supermarket.

Experience and numerous testimonies show that, in reality, the responses implemented are mostly “punitive”, i.e. they do not merely anticipate difficulties and needs, but are implemented after a harmful event has already occurred. These responses fall within the scope of all those practices considered to be tertiary prevention,1 which aim to repair or reduce the consequences of the event.

In Italy, for example, suspension is the most common punishment used in schools for negative behaviour by pupils. Recognising that this is purely punitive, schools are increasingly turning to alternatives to suspension. The latter allows the young person to be seen in the context of their history, beyond the event that occurred, and lays the foundations for restorative practices by connecting them to the other people involved (victims and the school community).

Looking at the field of security policies, there is the emergence of a new form of prevention that favours actions carried out by the most involved parties, i.e. the stakeholders in the community. They are no longer considered merely as beneficiaries of such interventions, but as promoters of them, calling on them to take responsibility. This paradigm of action is linked to the search for local solutions to the problems and needs that are identified. This initiative takes three forms of prevention: situational, social and community-based.

In particular, situational prevention is based on the assumption that direct intervention in the social context is necessary to reduce deviance and crime by promoting systematic and continuous reorganisation and manipulation of the environmental context (Selmini, 2004). Social prevention, on the other hand, aims to promote changes in the social conditions of the community through a comprehensive policy geared towards social welfare and affecting many areas of intervention (aimed at young people, family policies, etc.). Finally, the third type of prevention, community-based prevention, is aimed at involving the community. This includes practices that empower citizens, aimed at strengthening the natural defensive capabilities of the community in order to develop forms of participation through associations and new forms of solidarity (Garland, 1996).

Promoting Restorative Practices and Restorative Justice means drawing on both daily networking and prevention, which takes on the connotation of self-realisation activities for those involved. It is a matter of moving away from practices that are exclusively welfare-based (and even punitive), but integrating practices that recognise people's opportunity to feel part of the community they are building. The aim is therefore to break the chain of punitive responses that only target those responsible for the damage, favouring value systems capable of catalysing positive models of personal and social life, while also considering the other people involved in the event.

In conclusion, the restorative paradigm aims to establish a relationship that focuses on caring for the people involved and that is ongoing, as opposed to occasional prevention and interactions. This means investing in everyday, ordinary practices (so that restorative practices become systematic) rather than interventions in emergency situations alone. An integral part of this approach is the educational aspect generated by the restorative tools proposed, which focus closely on the process, relationships and needs of the people involved.

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c. The facilitator

The European Forum for Restorative Justice refers, through the definition of Restorative Justice, to its objective of ‘connecting people to restore just relationships’. This means that the restorative paradigm is based on the desire to give back a meaningful role to the person who has suffered harm, to the person who caused it and to the community, in resolving the conflict that involves them.

Examples of restorative practices and restorative justice tested in the international context include conferencing, family group conferencing and peacemaking circles. Significant representatives of the community to which the parties involved belong (from family to local institutions) are also invited to take part in these processes.

The ultimate goal of the proposed Restorative Practices and Restorative Justice is to guide those involved towards conflict resolution and the search for an agreement that can, on the one hand, demonstrate recognition of the parties involved and, on the other, lead to action that symbolises reparation for the damage caused by the offence.

In all this, an important role is played by the facilitator/mediator present in the restorative processes, who performs the various tasks required and regulated by the relevant legislation, ensuring that the guiding principles are upheld. They therefore protect the people involved by guaranteeing them, for example, free and informed participation, providing them with adequate information on the nature of the process and its possible outcomes and repercussions.

Furthermore, the facilitator/mediator is called upon to promote and support dialogue between the parties involved. They do not act as a judge or arbitrator between the parties, but rather have the duty to encourage dialogue between them in order to reach an agreement that will remedy the consequences of the damage caused. They are professionals who, following specific training, must be able to fulfil their task: preparing the parties for the meeting with each other; knowing how to manage the emotions that will emerge, starting with their own; creating a space for listening, which may also include moments of silence; allowing the people involved to take centre stage, evoking the image of a “biodegradable facilitator” (Dr Giuffrida, 2021).

Two essential characteristics of the facilitator/mediator are particularly important. The first is equidistance, which distinguishes them from having a third-party role, but requires them to be flexible for the purposes of mediation, altering their position of equidistance if they see an imbalance between the parties (S. Ciappi et al., 2020) . The second characteristic is the ability to adapt, paying attention to the language used, depending on the interlocutors with whom they are communicating, both when working with restorative tools and in promotional situations. In this regard, it is necessary for them to have adequate training and multidisciplinary preparation.

In summary, they must be professionals capable of “providing solid and secure platforms that enable people to reach dangerous places – through storytelling about themselves and their needs, for example – and facilitate difficult work – recognition of others –” by imagining restorative processes as actual scaffolding (“scaffolding method”, Chapman, Route 2025 training). Scaffolding that should also be set up in advance, with a view to prevention.

The restorative approach cannot be understood as a specific and rigid method, but rather as one that proposes values, principles and processes that adapt to each context and culture. Guided by so-called “cultural humility”, the mediator will construct appropriate frameworks that vary depending on the specific event, including the context and people involved. On the other hand, they will use an approach that allows the people involved to tell their own stories.

2. Common module / common vision / common principles

Key Foundation inspired by Tim Chapman's Route Training of Trainers

"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending." - C.S. Lewis

"All stories contain truth. The problem is their truth is incomplete." - Chimamanda Adichie

These quotes remind us that although we cannot alter the past, we can shape the future by engaging fully in the present. Each perspective contributes to the larger picture of justice, but no single story is complete on its own. This requires humility, curiosity, and a commitment to collective truth.

The scaffolding metaphor: structured support for restorative practices and Restorative Justice

The metaphor of scaffolding refers to the need to operate on a fixed and solid foundation corresponding to the values and principles of Restorative Justice, which are essential in restorative work. The rest of the scaffolding will adapt to the type of building that needs to be restored (the conflict to be addressed, the number and characteristics of the parties involved, etc.).

In this sense, Restorative Justice cannot be understood as a specific, fixed method, but rather as a common set of values, principles and processes that must be adapted to each context and culture.

Recognition: a relational process

Recognition is not just a formal act, but a relational and transformative process. It requires empathy, listening and taking responsibility. It promotes the rebuilding of social bonds broken by crime and creates the conditions for repairing damage and, in some cases, for possible reconciliation.

Community involvement: justice belongs to everyone

Restorative justice and restorative practices are not just for professionals, but belong to the community as it is the main actor in the "process". When communities are involved, responses are more relevant, sustainable and culturally rooted.

Preventive care in Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice also brings with it a culture of prevention that focuses on strengthening relationships and emotional literacy before harm occurs, with the aim of creating resilient communities that are better equipped to manage conflict. At the heart of this framework is the voluntary involvement of victims, recognising their voice as essential to meaningful reparation. Justice is not achieved in isolation, and restorative practices emphasise political awareness by recognising systems of power and responding to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity with vision, understanding, clarity and agility. Practitioners must always ask themselves from what perspective they are operating, being aware of which voices are amplified and which are absent.

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Continuum of restorative practices

The continuum of restorative practices is a model that represents the variety of approaches and interventions within restorative justice, organised along a line ranging from more informal and preventive practices to more structured and reactive practices used in response to conflict or crime.

When harm is caused, a possible set of questions for the person responsible is: ‘What happened? What were you thinking at the time? Who was involved and how?’ For the person who suffered the damage, the questions focus on the impact and recovery: ‘How did you feel? What was the most difficult part? How did others react?’ These questions invite reflection, empathy and the possibility of reparation.

The pillars of Restorative Justice

The pillars of Restorative Justice are rights, obligations, responsibility and encounter. Each pillar carries fundamental values: dignity and respect are linked to the question ‘What happened?’, responsibility and solidarity to ‘What matters?’, care, justice and reparation to ‘What would you like?’. Encounter supports all these values by allowing subjective truth, recognition and agreement to emerge.

Restorative work proceeds from inclusion to participation and finally to reparation. However, Restorative Justice cannot be imposed: it requires the voluntary agreement of all parties to commit themselves.

Shared experiences

Several important aspects of Restorative Justice emerge clearly from an examination of the practical work carried out by Kirikù (Italy), the CornMarket Project (Ireland, REFRAME programme) and the Finnish Forum for Mediation (FFM), which show how restorative principles are applied in different contexts.

Cultural sensitivity and diversity play a central role in these projects. Kirikù, for example, tailors its educational and restorative programmes to the specific needs of individuals, families and communities, ensuring that interventions are socially relevant. Similarly, FFM tailors mediation practices within schools and neighbourhoods to reflect regional and cultural differences, improving accessibility and effectiveness for different populations, with a culturally sensitive approach that recognises the impact of historical discrimination and collective experiences on communities.

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The projects also address power dynamics and structural inequalities more explicitly. Kirikù's socio-educational programmes within prisons and community conflict management highlight the need to address social exclusion and systemic issues. Similarly, the FFM's community mediation work addresses the underlying power relations in neighbourhoods, emphasising the role of Restorative Justice in challenging and transforming these dynamics.

The importance of long-term impact on the community and sustainability are key elements. Kirikù promotes a culture of ongoing restoration through initiatives such as provincial restorative justice round tables, community conflict management, street education and mediation classrooms in schools, encouraging lasting community involvement starting from the network and collaboration with other organisations. FFM supports regional groups of operators who maintain and develop restorative practices over time, ensuring continuity beyond the initial interventions.

A crucial practical element of these projects is the training and involvement of professionals. Kirikù emphasises the role of qualified facilitators and educators who collaborate with schools, families and judicial institutions. FFM offers comprehensive training programmes for adults, children and educational staff, empowering them as mediators and restorative agents. This capacity building is essential for the consistent and ethical application of restorative justice.

The projects also show a strong emphasis on measuring outcomes and effectiveness. REFRAME, for example, from the Cornmarket Project, uses the COAIM system to track behavioural change, accountability and personal development, providing data-driven evidence of impact. This approach ensures that restorative initiatives remain focused and can demonstrate tangible results to stakeholders.

Finally, these initiatives recognise the complex challenges and limitations inherent in restorative justice. They adopt trauma-informed approaches, prioritise safety, and tailor interventions to participants' availability. This sensitivity helps navigate the complexities of conflict and harm with care and effectiveness.

3. What does Restorative Justice mean?

“Restorative justice is not about forcing people to do what we think they should do. It is about creating a space where they can tell the truth, take responsibility and begin the healing process.” - Howard Zehr

What does Restorative Justice mean for the Cornmarket Project (CMP)?

For the Cornmarket Project (CMP), Restorative Justice is primarily about relationships. It is not simply a process of meeting with offenders after harm has been done, but a broader philosophy that acknowledges harm, gives voice to all those involved, and supports reparation and reintegration.
Our approach reflects three key principles:

- Voluntariness: Participation must be a genuine choice for both victims and offenders.
- Voice: All parties, particularly victims, must have their experiences recognised and their needs respected.
- Change: Restorative Justice should support accountability and behavioural change, but at the same time it should create safer and more cohesive communities.

We consider Restorative Justice to be a complement, not a substitute, to the other rehabilitation and support programmes we run for people recovering from addiction, experiencing homelessness, and involved in criminal proceedings. CMP already works with hundreds of offenders each year through behavioural change and pro-social programmes. However, we only define an intervention as Restorative Justice when it actively involves both the victim and the offender and, where appropriate, the wider community.

In short, for CMP, RJ means creating spaces for dialogue and reparation that restore relationships and promote accountability, while ensuring that victims are not left behind in a process that has too often in Ireland been focused on offenders.

What does Restorative Justice mean to Kirikù?

Restorative Justice is an approach that aims to address harm or the risk of harm (through awareness-raising and prevention) by actively involving all those affected by the conflict, including victims, perpetrators and the community.

This is a particular paradigm that can be applied in various contexts, from education to safety, from the family to the community, contributing to conflict prevention and the building of responsible communities.

Through dialogue facilitated by an impartial third party, the aim is to reach a common understanding in order to repair the wrong done and re-establish relationships of respect, responsibility and solidarity. Unlike traditional (retributive) justice, which focuses on the violation of the law and punishment, Restorative Justice focuses on interpersonal relationships and human dignity, aiming to transform the dynamics of conflict and promote profound change, both on an individual-personal level and, equally importantly, on a social level.

This is a particular paradigm that can be applied in various contexts, from education to safety, from the family to the community, contributing to conflict prevention and the building of responsible communities.

Our approach reflects three key principles:

- Joint responsibility: promoting awareness of the involvement of all those involved in a conflict and its repercussions, encouraging them to participate in its resolution.
- Care: attention to expressed and/or unexpressed needs related to the values hurt in the conflict and the damage caused.
- Network: activation of all actors (public and private) to build diversified and integrated responses.

Restorative Justice thus offers an innovative perspective that goes beyond the punitive approach, promoting inclusion, participation and mutual recognition.

What does Restorative Justice mean for the Finnish Forum for Mediation (FFM)?

The Finnish Forum for Mediation (FFM) promotes the use of mediation and other cooperative, restorative approaches in resolving various types of conflicts and disputes in Finland. Its work is guided by a vision of a diverse society where individuals and communities use dialogue, mediation, and restorative practices not only to resolve conflicts but also to prevent them and strengthen mutual understanding.

Under the umbrella of FFM operate two key programmes that advance restorative practices in different areas of society:

VERSO Programme works in the field of education.
In Finnish schools and early childhood education, restorative practices and mediation are used as a child-friendly and constructive alternative for managing challenging situations, misbehaviour, and bullying. The aim is to enhance democracy and children's participation, strengthen relationships, and foster social-emotional learning even in times of conflict. Conflicts are seen as learning opportunities, and children are recognised as active and capable experts within their peer groups when solving social situations together.

The Center for Residential Peace applies restorative methods to address neighbour disputes and tensions between different population groups. Its work focuses on building community, trust, and peaceful coexistence through mediation and conferencing. At the heart of Restorative Justice is the belief that sustainable peace can only be achieved when those directly affected by a conflict are actively involved in addressing and resolving it. Participation, dialogue, and mutual respect are not only principles of the process — they are the foundation for lasting social harmony.

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4. RJ in different projects countries

Restorative Justice in Ireland

"Restorative Justice asks not just how we punish, but how we heal, how we restore trust, dignity and belonging in the aftermath of harm." - John Braithwaite

In Ireland, RJ is still expanding beyond pilot projects and specialist services. The Cornmarket Project is one of the community organisations working directly with the courts and probation service to provide RJ interventions.

The Irish context is characterised by two realities:

- Strong legislative recognition: Ireland has committed to RJ in line with EU Directive 2012/29/EU, and the Department of Justice has highlighted RJ as part of its future strategy.
- Fragmented implementation: Many organisations continue to focus on offender rehabilitation and label it RJ, even though victims are not involved. Consistency is limited across the country.

Within the CMP, we aim to model a broader and deeper approach. We emphasise trauma-informed facilitation, motivational interviewing skills, and a balance between proactive (relationship building) and reactive (harm repair) practices. By incorporating Restorative Justice into community-based sanctions and linking it to our other services (addiction treatment, housing support, social enterprise), we demonstrate how Restorative Justice can be integrated into real-life rehabilitation pathways.

Restorative Justice in Italy: the commitment of the Kirikù Social Cooperative

With the entry into force of the Cartabia Reform, Restorative Justice has gained new institutional recognition, with the launch of Restorative Justice Centres currently being defined. The Cartabia Reform introduced comprehensive regulations on Restorative Justice for the first time in Italy through Legislative Decree 150/2022. The aim is to offer a complementary path to criminal proceedings, allowing the victim and the perpetrator to actively participate, with the assistance of an impartial third party, in resolving the conflict and its effects.

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For your information, the translation of Restorative Justice from English into Italian can be misleading because it refers to the repairing model of the retributive justice paradigm.

In this scenario, Kirikù is one of the main actors, particularly in the provinces of Treviso and Belluno, experimenting with innovative approaches and practices focused on responsibility, care and reparation for damage.

The cooperative's work is based on three main areas:

- Offenders: through educational programmes, practical experiences and mediation, in collaboration with the justice system, as in the Karabà, Ricucire Responsabile and Liberi di Crescere projects.
- Victims of crime: mainly through the Victims' Helpdesk (Centre for the Reception, Care and Support of Victims of Crime), active in Treviso and Belluno within the Re-Agire and You-Be-Hub projects, in collaboration with other local authorities; involvement of people through Human Library experiences.
- Communities: through initiatives involving schools, families and the local area, such as the Kintsugi projects, the launch of a school mediation classroom in collaboration with the La Voce Association, and street education, which promote prevention and active citizenship.

The Kirikù Cooperative also actively participates in the Provincial Table for Restorative Justice in Treviso and the Intertavolo Percorsi di Giustizia, Comunità e Riparazione (Table for Justice, Community and Reparation) in Belluno, spaces for inter-institutional discussion created to build a stable and shared network that focuses on the value of human relationships and social responsibility.

The cooperative's work is therefore inspired by a vision of justice understood not as a mere punishment, but as an opportunity to rebuild bonds between people and communities through processes of listening, responsibility and reparation.

Restorative Justice in Finland

In Finland, Restorative Justice and mediation are promoted across many sectors of society. Nationally regulated practices include mediation in criminal and civil cases (VOM) and court mediation, both of which are actively integrated into the legal system.

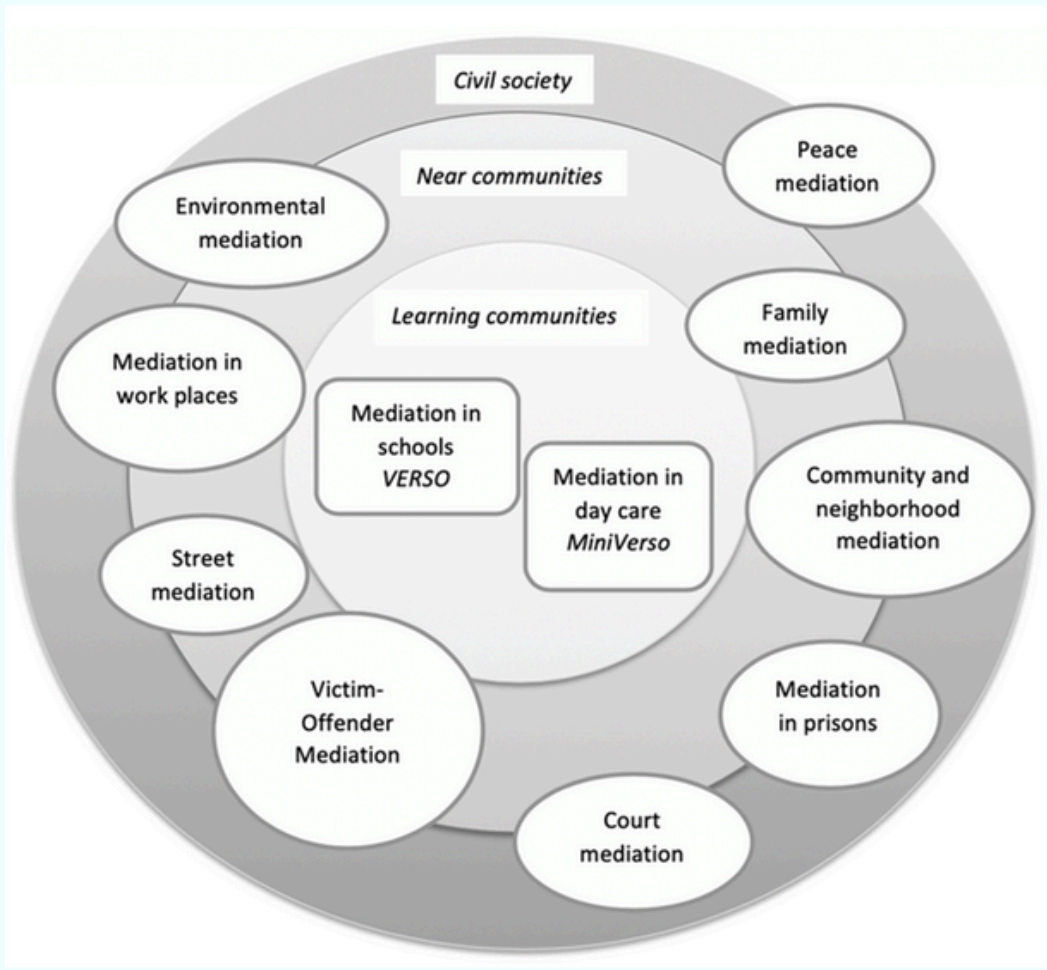
Beyond the justice sector, restorative approaches have become an established part of how conflicts are addressed within various communities. For instance, programmes under the Finnish Forum for Mediation (FFM) operate in line with Restorative Justice principles and values. The VERSO Programme promotes restorative practices in early childhood education and schools, supporting both the prevention and resolution of conflicts and bullying. The Center for Residential Peace applies restorative methods to address neighbourhood disputes and tensions between population groups, fostering stronger community relations and coexistence through mediation and conferencing.

Many civil society organisations also integrate restorative approaches into their community and encounter-based work, reflecting a growing understanding that restorative practices can strengthen trust, inclusion, and social cohesion at multiple levels of society.

In Finland, Restorative Justice can therefore be seen as an integrative approach that extends beyond the justice system. Mediation and restorative dialogue are viewed as important civic skills — ways of communicating and resolving differences that promote mutual understanding and peace in everyday life.
While the term mediation is widely used in Finland, it often refers to a broad range of processes grounded in restorative values. A key challenge — and opportunity — lies in bringing together different restorative actors to share experiences and develop practices collaboratively.

As Finnish society evolves and communities take new forms, it becomes increasingly important to explore, together with participants in restorative processes, **what "community" means** in each context — and who should be involved in those processes. Restorative Justice, in this sense, is not only about resolving conflicts but about continually redefining relationships, belonging, and shared responsibility in a changing society.

The figure below illustrates Restorative practices and mediation services provided in Finnish society. The boundaries between the various levels and services are porous and partially overlap with different stages of life and everyday events. Strengthening the culture of mediation in Finnish society contributes to transparency and continuity in practices of conflict management, while strengthening citizens' empowerment in their local social communities and in civil society.



Access to mediation services in Finland (Gellin, M. 2022)

5. Restorative Justice (Reactive) and Restorative Practices (Proactive)

Restorative Justice (RJ) can be understood as a process that takes place after harm has been caused. While this is true, it is only part of the picture. RJ also includes a proactive aspect: ways of working and being together that strengthen relationships, build trust, and reduce the likelihood of harm occurring in the first place.

While traditional justice systems rely primarily on punishment to respond to offending behaviour, Restorative Justice offers a responsive approach that seeks to repair the harm by involving all parties – victims, offenders, families and communities – in a process of dialogue that promotes accountability. This model recognises the emotional impact of harm and provides a structured way to address the issue directly, with the aim of achieving a sense of justice that punishment alone cannot provide. (European Study on Restorative Juvenile Justice, pp. 13-15)

In contrast, restorative practices are proactive measures aimed at building strong and respectful relationships and communities before conflict arises. By promoting open communication and recognising people's needs, restorative practices create spaces that improve understanding among members of a society. Therefore, restorative practices help prevent harm and reduce the likelihood of future offences. (European Study on Restorative Juvenile Justice, pp. 13-15)

When we talk about RJ, it is useful to consider two aspects: proactive and reactive.

Proactive: building relationships before a problem arises

Proactive repair work consists of creating the conditions for success. It is like laying solid foundations for a building: when the base is solid, it can withstand greater pressure without collapsing (reference to the scaffolding metaphor).

In practice, this means intentionally creating a sense of belonging, trust and respect within the group or community. Proactive work focuses on:

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In practice, this means intentionally creating a sense of belonging, trust and respect within the group or community. Proactive work focuses on:

- Build relationships as a matter of course, not just when something has gone wrong. This means taking the time to learn about each other's strengths, stories and values.
- Establish shared values and expectations with the group. These agreements should be created together with the group so that they feel ownership and importance.
- Regular opportunities to express oneself, such as circles, check-ins or informal conversations that allow everyone to speak and be heard. It is important to listen carefully, showing appreciation for what others have to say.
- Inclusive decision-making, especially on issues that directly affect the group.
- Celebrate strengths and contributions so that people feel valued and appreciated.
- Hold regular check-ins where everyone can share how things are going.

When groups develop these habits, trust grows, and when trust is strong, it is easier to address misunderstandings and minor tensions before they escalate into formal conflicts.

Reactive: responding to damage in a constructive manner

No matter how strong your proactive efforts are, damage will still occur. Reactive RJ provides a framework for responding in a way that addresses the damage without causing further damage to relationships.
The reactive side of RJ involves:

- Shifting the focus from blame to understanding, asking “What happened?” and “Who was affected and how?” rather than “Who is to blame?”. Understanding the impact of what happened, not just identifying who is “at fault”.
- Including all voices, ensuring that those harmed, those responsible, and other stakeholders can share their perspectives and that their voices are heard and respected in the process.
- Create space for accountability: support those who caused the harm to take responsibility and make amends.
- Agree on actions to repair the harm, which may include apologies, compensation, community service or behavioural changes.
- Follow up to ensure that commitments are kept and that relationships are truly restored.

In this way, harm becomes an opportunity to learn, take responsibility and rebuild trust, rather than simply punishing someone and leaving relationships broken. For example, in a school setting, if one student damages another's property, a restorative meeting could bring both together to discuss what happened, examine its impact, and agree on a meaningful way to restore trust and repair the material loss.

Why do professionals need both?

Proactive and reactive elements are not separate “add-ons,” but are interdependent. Proactive strategies create a culture of safety and trust, making it easier for reactive processes to be effective when harm occurs. Similarly, well-facilitated reactive processes often strengthen the proactive culture by deepening mutual understanding.

A strong community needs both: building trust and having a plan to fix things.

When young people learn and use both aspects of Restorative Justice, they don't just solve problems, they create spaces where people feel safe, respected, and valued every day.

Proactive and reactive Restorative Justice with young people

A European model of Restorative Justice must reflect the cultural diversity of the community, strongly supporting its common commitment to children's rights and harm prevention. Unlike models focused primarily on reducing recidivism, the European approach considers Restorative Justice to be a proactive and educational process. It is based on the belief that children and young people should be supported in their development through inclusive, respectful and participatory practices that help them understand the impact of their actions and learn to live constructively in democratic societies.

Preventive restorative practices are fundamental to this approach. They focus on building respectful relationships and inclusive communities, reducing the likelihood of conflict before harm occurs. According to the European Model of Restorative Justice, these practices develop cultural capital by incorporating values such as respect, responsibility and inclusion into everyday interactions. They strengthen social capital through collaboration between young people, victims, families and communities, promoting trust and supportive relationships.

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At the same time, they improve intellectual capital by providing facilitators and professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to guide restorative processes in a way that respects the rights and needs of children. (European Study on Restorative Juvenile Justice, pp. 19, 23-24, 34-35)

According to the United Nations report Promoting Restorative Justice for Children (2016), restorative justice can support the realisation of children's rights by focusing on the consequences of harmful events for relationships and the future and seeking solutions that prevent their recurrence. The report emphasises that restorative processes can be applied in cases involving children regardless of the seriousness of the offence.

In the field of education, the concept is more commonly referred to as the restorative approach. This term is used to describe not only specific practices, but also the underlying values that form the basis of restorative work in schools. (Gellin, M. 2019.)

6. Participatory process

(relation of power vs power of relationship. Recognise the expertise of victim and of the practitioners)

Participatory process in the CMP and in Ireland (power of relationship vs. relationship of power)

"When people are trusted with a voice in their own healing, they rarely abuse that trust. Restorative Justice begins with believing that dignity grows through participation." - Kay Pranis

A genuine participatory process requires a shift from "power relations" to "the power of relationships". In the CMP, we recognise that:

- Victims contribute expertise through their direct experience of harm. They know better than anyone else what the harm has meant to them and what reparation might look like.
- Practitioners bring expertise in facilitation, creating safe processes, and ensuring voluntariness and balance.
- Communities bring expertise in context, history, and ongoing relationships.

In Ireland, Restorative Justice has often favoured a power relationship, where professionals and institutions define the process. The CMP seeks to rebalance this process by using motivational enhancement techniques and trauma-informed approaches that respect autonomy, choice, and voice. We seek to level the playing field so that both victims and offenders feel equally empowered to participate.

For us, Restorative Justice is not just about achieving an outcome, but about fostering a relational process in which dignity and humanity are restored. This is particularly important with young people, who need to experience autonomy and responsibility in a safe and supportive way.

Recognising the victim's competence in the participatory process

In the context of restorative justice and the care of crime victims, it is essential to move beyond a traditional vertical approach, in which the operator is the sole holder of expertise and knowledge, and the victim is

seen solely as a fragile individual in need of protection. This approach risks reproducing power dynamics that overshadow the resources, experiential knowledge and capacity for self-determination of the victim.

The services promoted by Kirikù, on the other hand, value a participatory and horizontal paradigm that recognises the victim's competence as an active element in the process: not only as a bearer of need, but also of experience, meaning and the ability to make choices. The victim is welcomed not as the object of intervention, but as a competent subject of their own history and their own possibilities for reparation, processing and transformation.

Restorative values and the realisation of the rights of children and young people

European Forum for Restorative Justice defines restorative justice through 4 key values that are applied in restorative processes.

Restorative Justice is based on the values of subjective truth, respect for human dignity, solidarity and fairness. These principles form an ethical basis for promoting the rights and participation of children and young people in education and society in general.

Truth recognises that every perspective contains a partial truth and that a more complete understanding emerges through dialogue. In the case of children and young people, this reflects their fundamental right to be heard and to have their experiences recognised.

Respect for human dignity emphasises that every child is a unique and capable individual. Adults have a responsibility to ensure safe and respectful environments in which children can grow, be valued and exercise their rights.

Solidarity highlights human interdependence and diversity. Providing young people with opportunities to participate in decision-making and share responsibilities within their communities is essential to prevent marginalisation and promote a sense of belonging. (EFRJ 2021, p. 14-15.)

From the perspective of the rights of the child, each situation should be assessed individually to determine the least stressful and most appropriate method of conflict resolution.

Alternatives to judicial proceedings—such as mediation, diversion, and other forms of dispute resolution—should be encouraged when they best serve the child's interests. (Council of Europe, 2010.) Equity requires fair and transparent processes that reduce harm and prevent future conflicts. Realising children's rights depends on creating concrete opportunities for them to participate and take action on issues that affect their lives.

Together, restorative values and children's rights reinforce each other by creating conditions in which young people are respected, listened to, and actively involved in their communities. When working with children, introducing restorative practices (RP) and restorative justice (RJ) as early as possible helps reduce stress and ensures that their rights are more effectively respected and defended (Gellin, M., 2022, pp. 291–310). In Finland, this approach is applied nationwide in early childhood education and comprehensive schools, enhancing children's rights in decision-making, participation and their development of social skills in everyday conflict situations.

The continuum of restorative practices: building safer and more connected communities

Restorative practices offer a powerful framework for creating respectful, inclusive, and resilient communities. The continuum of restorative practices outlines a range of proactive and reactive methods designed to build strong relationships, prevent harm, and resolve conflicts at an early stage, when they arise.

A change in mindset and culture

At the heart of restorative practices is a restorative mindset, which is a constant commitment to prioritising relationships, empathy, and connection in all interactions. This mindset favours listening over assumptions, participation over exclusion, and requires constant reflection and education on the part of community members. Importantly, it requires educators, facilitators, and community members to continually reflect on their own biases and communication habits. The goal is to foster a culture where everyone feels valued and respected, creating a strong foundation for community wellbeing.

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Prevention as the foundation of wellbeing

Restorative practices used daily in communities can build trust and reduce the risk of conflict. Community practices include respectful and open meetings, the use of restorative language, and the integration of social and emotional learning (SEL). These practices are used consistently and informally in daily interactions, helping to create a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

Community strengthening takes this a step further by introducing more concrete methods such as regular circles, group reflection, collaborative problem solving, and shared decision making. These approaches help both young people and adults connect through shared positive experiences and values.

By incorporating restorative values into daily routines, communities develop cultural capital, or the shared beliefs and practices that give meaning and purpose to Restorative Justice. Justice becomes something to be restored through accountability and dialogue, not imposed through punishment.

Addressing damage through dialogue

When conflicts or harm occur, the continuum provides a set of intervention tools to respond in a constructive, empowering, and relationship-centred manner. Restorative interventions can be informal conversations that allow people to express their views, emotions, needs and thoughts about the event in question. These conversations are designed to encourage people to take responsibility in a respectful and safe environment, using restorative questions and optional scripts in the dialogue. They are particularly effective for dealing with minor incidents and misunderstandings.

Restorative circles are more structured and involve small or large groups to address more or less serious issues. These circles create a space to discuss the situation together and rebuild trust through mutual problem-solving. Therefore, more planning and scripting options are available.

For more serious incidents, restorative conferences offer a formal process facilitated by a qualified professional. These involve the person who has been harmed, the person responsible, and often family or community members. The focus is on acknowledging the harm, seeking reparation, and supporting reintegration, rather than punishment or exclusion. (Chapman, training 2025)

7. How to approach. Engagement of Victims

There is no Restorative Justice without the engagement of the victims. Direct or indirect victim

The Concept of Victimhood and How to Include It in Restorative Justice Processes

A victim is any person who has suffered harm — physical, psychological, economic or relational — as a result of a crime, regardless of the nature of the crime. They may be direct or indirect victims (family members, cohabitants, emotionally involved persons) and have complex and often hidden needs that require listening, protection, recognition and support (EU Directive 2012/29/EU).

In the restorative justice paradigm, the victim is no longer just an accessory to the criminal proceedings, but an active part of a voluntary, protected and structured process, where they can be recognised in their pain, listened to in their needs and accompanied in a process of re-elaboration and, where possible, reconstruction of social bonds.

Through the experience gained in the Re-Agire and you-Be Hub projects of the Kirikù Social Cooperative, an integrated approach has been developed that starts with the early identification of the victim — even in the absence of a report — and then activates informational, psychological and relational support, capable of putting the person at the centre and restoring a sense of security, trust and choice.

Restorative pathways are only proposed when the conditions of voluntariness, respect and non-revictimisation are met, and are based on:

- Clear and accessible information on rights, available pathways and forms of protection, including in the judicial sphere;
- Emotional and psychological support provided by professionals specialised in working with victims of crime;
- Guidance and accompaniment to specialist services in the area (third sector organisations, justice, local authorities, protected facilities);

- The development of restorative justice and criminal mediation pathways, in which victims can, if they wish and have the resources, participate in meetings with the perpetrator in a mediated context, to give voice to their experiences, receive answers, contribute to understanding the damage and, in some cases, co-construct forms of symbolic or concrete reparation.

The inclusion of victims in these programmes requires the presence of a structured and trained local network, operating according to shared protocols (such as those activated with the Veneto Region) and based on a socio-humanistic approach. Continuous training of operators, the enhancement of interpersonal skills, active listening and respect for the victim's self-determination are central elements in ensuring effective care.

Finally, the Restorative Justice paradigm represents an opportunity not only for the victim but for the entire community, promoting the restoration of social bonds, the empowerment of offenders and a culture of justice that puts people and relationships back at the centre.

Approach to victim involvement in the Cornmarket Project

“Restorative Justice begins when those who have been harmed are given back thei voice, when their story, their needs, and their hopes shape what happens next.” - Howard Zehr

In the CMP, we emphasise that there can be no restorative justice without the involvement of victims, preferably in person, or through other means if this is not possible. This involvement must be handled with care and respect, always placing choice at the centre. Our approach includes:

- Ask for permission: victims are invited, not coerced. We clearly explain the process, the possible outcomes, and their right to refuse at any time.
- Understand the context: we take the time to understand the victim's history, circumstances, and needs before proposing any meeting. This prevents the risk of re-traumatisation and ensures willingness.
- Do the heavy lifting: Professionals take on the preparation, not the victim. We coordinate logistics, manage expectations, and ensure the safety of the process.
- Ask them what they want: Victims define what meaningful redress means to them, whether it is an apology, reparation, community service, or simply being heard.
- Ask questions, don't conduct structured interviews: we focus on dialogue, deep listening and letting victims lead the conversation, rather than imposing structured questions.
- Help them achieve “restoration”: where appropriate, we help victims express their needs and ensure that commitments are honoured. This reflects our trauma-informed practice throughout the CMP. We do not impose “solutions”. Instead, we create spaces of safety, trust and empowerment, where victims can reclaim their agency and perpetrators can take meaningful responsibility.

8. How to promote RJ within different stakeholders

Within public opinion, the promotion of restorative justice should first and foremost involve making the concept of RJ accessible to a wider audience. This could be achieved by publishing resources such as questions and answers, simple definitions and testimonials, which would be shared within networks (universities, magazines, social media or other relevant networks). Creating something engaging such as a survey can be useful in understanding the public's perception of RJ and can be an effective way to introduce them to RJ and the resources available. Democratising the use of RJ in schools is also a way to promote it to the general public, as children would grow up with the idea of Restorative Justice and therefore feel familiar with the concept once they become adults (as it could also be an educational tool in this case).

In the context of professional work with stakeholders, RJ can be promoted by training professionals in the use of RJ through the sharing of the training kit (adapted to the context in which it would be applied and possibly available in different languages). In addition, by involving other professionals who may be interested in further promoting RJ (including professionals from the private and public sectors, such as therapists, public social workers, local community leaders, etc.).

To promote RJ within institutions, an awareness campaign can be organised with suggestions for improvements and a policy document with arguments supporting the benefits of RJ.

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9. In a nutshell

1. Understanding the Two Sides of Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice (RJ) is more than a response to wrongdoing — it's a way of building and sustaining community.

To work well, RJ needs both:

Proactive (Before Harm)	**Reactive (After Harm)**
Builds trust, connection, and safety.	Repairs harm and relationships.
Prevents issues from escalating.	Addresses impact and supports healing.
Normalises communication and shared decision-making.	Provides a structured process for accountability.
Focuses on strengths and inclusion.	Focuses on voice, responsibility, and repair.

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2. Examples for Practitioners

Proactive Strategies	**Reactive Strategies**
Weekly check-ins or circles where everyone is heard.	Restorative meetings involving all affected parties.
Co-created group agreements and values.	Facilitated dialogue to share perspectives.
Celebrating achievements and contributions.	Agreements for meaningful amends (apology, restitution, service).
Peer mentoring and buddy systems.	Follow-up sessions to ensure commitments are met.
Open channels for early concerns.	Mediated conversations to prevent repeat harm.

3. Practitioner Checklist

Use this list to integrate RJ principles into your daily practice:

- I provide regular opportunities for all young people to speak and be heard.
- Group agreements are visible, understood, and co-owned by the group.
- I address small issues early, before they grow.
- When harm happens, I focus on understanding and impact rather than blame.
- All voices are included in the process — especially those most affected.
- I support those responsible for harm to take meaningful action to repair it.
- I follow up to ensure the repair has happened and relationships are moving forward.

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4. Reflection Questions for Practitioners

- How do I intentionally build trust and connection in my daily work?
- Do I have structures in place for young people to voice concerns safely?
- When harm occurs, how confident am I in facilitating a process that includes all voices?
- How can my proactive work make my reactive responses more effective?
- What additional support or training would help me strengthen both sides of RJ?

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5. Final Tip

Restorative practice is not a one-time intervention — it's a **continuous culture.**
The more you invest in proactive relationship-building, the more resilient your community will be when harm happens.

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