



Submission to the Justice Committee's Inquiry into Restorative Justice, January 2016

The Association of YOT Managers (AYM) is the professional association representing strategic leaders and managers in youth offending teams and services across England. Our membership, which is voluntary and by subscription, is over 300, and our members are employed in nearly 80% of YOTs. AYM is a member of the Standing Committee for Youth Justice, whose draft submission to the Select Committee we have seen and largely support. We will not rehearse the various points made in that submission.

The Committee will be aware that YOTs were established following the Crime and Disorder (1998) Act. This legislation also introduced restorative practice into the youth justice system through the Reparation Order. Thus YOTs have over 15 years' experience of contacting victims and ensuring that their wishes are taken into account in the management of community-based penalties. At the time this work involved a significant 'mind-shift' for practitioners, who had to learn how to approach victims of youth crime in a way that ensured that they were encouraged and enabled, but not put under no pressure, to participate in restorative activities. Many YOTs developed partnerships with victim support agencies to help them with staff training and/or with making approaches to victims. Our investment in restorative justice took a further, significant step forward with the introduction in 2000-1 of the Referral Order as the mandatory disposal for almost all young people appearing in court for the first time. This order made possible, and indeed encouraged, the attendance of victims or their representatives at face-to-face restorative meetings with their offenders: meetings which are overseen by lay volunteers drawn from the local community.

We note that the terms of reference for the inquiry suggest a significant focus of the Committee's work will be on the adult youth justice system, and although the youth justice system appears to be largely out of scope, we would encourage the Committee to seek to learn from the experience of YOT managers. We have been on a significant and lengthy journey to develop a genuinely new culture of restorative practice in the youth justice system, and we would caution against a view that this can be introduced successfully into the adult system without a large investment in staff training and culture change. Furthermore we would suggest that restorative justice should be embedded within the existing Services rather than creating new separate silos into which restorative justice work is referred. YOT managers are now, by and large, enthusiasts for restorative practice, and several services have achieved the prized Restorative Justice Quality Mark.

In the last five years or so, YOTs have faced both new opportunities and challenges to their restorative practice. Opportunities have come in the shape of the chance to bid for new work across

PCC areas, such as support for young victims of crime. Threats have included the loss of key posts in YOTs and an understandable prioritisation of work with high risk, persistent offenders who are often less likely to be candidates for victim-offender conferencing than young people at an earlier stage in their offending. The reduction in national funding for YOTs from the Youth Justice Board and locally from statutory partners will potentially put at risk the range and depth of restorative justice interventions which may be provided by the inevitable reductions in posts.

In summary, we are proud of the way the youth justice system has developed its restorative practice over the last 15 years whilst recognising that consistent and in depth restorative justice practice across all YOTS needs continuing promotion and enabling. In our view the existing youth justice system (at least the community-based parts of the system) with the range of Court orders including the Youth Offender Panel process, cautions including the Out of Court process, community resolutions and various diversionary projects for under-18s remains fit for purpose, and, if appropriately funded, will allow restorative practice to continue to flourish.