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Editorial Comment

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Prisons and prison conditions have been in the headlines of late: overcrowding, high levels of violent behaviour, (il)legal highs, record levels of deaths in custody and staff shortages are all reasons given for why the prison system in England and Wales is currently said to be in crisis. Rather than focus on these negative aspects of prisons, however, this special edition of the PSJ looks at Restorative Justice (RJ) and in particular its use in prisons. While it is currently being used both in and out of prisons in many countries worldwide, for reasons of space, we focus on its recent history and use in England and Wales, New Zealand and Australia. The contributors are all proponents of RJ, but have taken time to reflect on the 'good and the bad', as well as the frustrations experienced in developing what is still an emerging discipline. Recently enshrined in (sentencing) law in at least one country, RJ is increasingly being seen as a necessary and purposeful component of our Criminal justice system(s).

In any volume on a particular topic one of the forefront issues is to define exactly what the subject matter is; with this being the role of the first article. As eloquently argued by Masahiro Suzuki and Hennessey Hayes while RJ has become attractive to scholars, policy-makers and practitioners across the globe; there is often confusion over what exactly RJ is and what qualifies as RJ. The authors therefore give us the historical background to RJ and importantly focus on RJ in terms of the concept, its definition and practice. For readers not that familiar with notions of RJ this is a useful introduction to the key literature.

The next few articles then focus on the use of RJ in prisons. The first of these articles, written by Gerry Johnstone, provides an overview of RJ in prisons, looking at three approaches. These include victim awareness and responsibility acceptance courses (e.g. the Sycamore Tree programme); victim offender mediation and conferencing; and restorative imprisonment. He argues that the latter is a vision rather than a current practice but could exist where the principles and practices of RJ fully permeate the work of the prison. In terms of a 'restorative prison' Gerry Johnstone looks at how this might be achieved by looking at how RJ principles could influence induction and sentence planning, prison work and the prison and

its surrounding community. Also importantly he questions the nature and purpose of imprisonment and suggests that by reforming current prisons using RJ principles, these fundamental questions could finally be answered.

'RJ in prison: a contradiction in terms or a challenge and a reality' looks at the Sycamore Tree project in more detail. Written by Penny Parker, a Sycamore Tree tutor, it details what the programme is, how it works, how offenders are selected, offender experiences, participant feedback, victim involvement including when this occurs and also how this affects the participants. Penny Parker looks at offender responsibility and explains how this is achieved through the programme but importantly details how the programme also looks at their lives going forward. The article also offers some data on whether or not the programme works in terms of reducing reoffending. More evidence is needed but current data appears to be positive.

The Sycamore Tree programme is again mentioned in the next article by Kim Workman, which looks at the use and history of RJ in New Zealand Prisons. Tracing the rise and fall of RJ in custodial settings this article provides many case studies where prison conferences have been beneficial to both offender and victim participants. While government funding for direct victim/offender mediation and the Sycamore Tree project was discontinued in 2010, the article nevertheless ends with some optimism for the future, citing the new government policy that requires all New Zealand judges to consider RJ options prior to sentencing. This theme is picked up in an interview later on in the edition with one of these judges who runs one of New Zealand's experimental Drug Courts.

The final article on the use of RJ in prisons is written by Kimmie Edgar, Head of Research at the Prison Reform Trust. Rather than focusing on the use of RJ to mediate between offenders and victims, this interesting article looks at how RJ can be used in segregation units and in the management of often violent and disruptive prisoners. Kimmie argues that by using RJ in this environment a sense of responsibility can be instilled in those held in custody which can help with overall behaviour management. By treating offenders with respect and with RJ much more can be achieved than dirty protests and controlled force.

We then turn to an article written by David Thompson which focuses on the use of RJ in the community through Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). This is currently being used with many high-risk sex offenders when they are released back into the community and so serves as a useful risk management tool for NOMS. Recent additions to the programme also include a number of initiatives where Circles are being started within the prison environment so that the positive functions for the Core member can begin before release. David Thompson traces the history of CoSA and also sets out their usefulness and contribution to the RJ debate. If we do ever reach a stage that RJ in prison is the norm rather than the exception it is important that there are suitable community programmes in place so that any benefits realised in prison can be built upon following release.

Following on from the practice of RJ in the secure estate, we then consider effectiveness. The first article by Theo Gavrielides looks at the efficacy of RJ in custodial settings with specific reference to juvenile offenders. Although he states that the literature is rather scant in this area, his general view is that there are many benefits which can be experienced by young people; including an opportunity to express remorse; a greater sense of closure; to change perceptions about

the impact of offending and an opportunity for the victim to ask the 'why me' question. The article also considers the cost-benefits of RJ and again makes some favourable comments, concluding that whilst evidence is again scarce, RJ practices do appear to be cheaper than more traditional criminal justice options.

Finally, and in an attempt to provide balance, we turn to the opposite viewpoint with an article by William Wood. He looks at the promises and problems of RJ in terms of its use in the prison secure estate and offers a more critical view. In particular he looks at the recent history of prison policy and questions whether prison as an institution could ever make the necessary changes which would be required to make it truly restorative. He also offers some comments about the use of RJ in prisons, arguing that as the vast majority of current RJ programmes do not involve the direct victim can they ever really be said to practice RJ principles? Furthermore he questions whether current 'restorative values' in prisons originate in RJ traditions.

Even though this edition ends on perhaps a more cautious note than it began, we hope that the articles provide food for thought and will encourage practitioners and policymakers to consider the benefits and pitfalls of using RJ within custodial settings.