

Restorative Justice for Juvenile Offenders

Grantee: Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform, Moscow

Project: to promote the practice of restorative justice in the Moscow City Commissions for Minors and their Rights (CMRs) in order to support victims of crime and to help young offenders and their families make amends for the harm caused by criminal activity; to develop a strategy for CMRs to create school mediation services; to produce guidelines for the development of restorative justice, and to spread best practice based on the experience of the pioneering CMRs to other areas of Moscow and other regions of Russia.

Established in 1996, the Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform has been involved in helping to set up trial by jury in Russia and in developing the restorative approach to criminal justice, starting with juvenile cases. The Centre aims to:

- Promote judicial reform in Russia by extending the professional development of judges, prosecutors, investigators and others
- Empower competent representatives of the community to take part in judicial and legal reform
- Contribute to the scientific and methodological support for reform including new forms of court proceedings.

Commissions for Minors and their Rights are the chief bodies responsible for work with young offenders under the age of criminal responsibility i.e. under 14. At present most CMRs have limited success rates because of their moralising and threatening attitudes and their orientation towards punishment. But some CMRs, notably those in Yaroslavl and Konkovo, have established mediation services based on the principles of restorative justice. It is imperative to develop these practices throughout Moscow and in other cities in Russia.

Intended for professionals who work with young offenders, the project, which took the form of seminars, workshops, meetings and publications, started in June 2011 at a national conference which included a section on establishing mediation services for CMRs. A bulletin including materials on this topic was published the following month. In September the CMRs of Yaroslavl and Konkovo held a joint seminar on the development of a system for work with young offenders based on their experience of restorative procedures. The fourteen participants collaborated to develop guidelines for innovative forms of work with young offenders based on the Yaroslavl model. At a workshop for mediators held in October ten people were able to practise their skills using role-play exercises. Two seminars took place in November: one on developing contacts between mediation and rehabilitation programmes within CMRs, and the

other on disseminating innovative methods of working with young offenders throughout Moscow.

There was some initial resistance to adopting new working practices because of the entrenched attitudes of some of the officials and their orientation towards repressive practices, but this was overcome in the course of the seminars and training sessions. Most helpful in breaking down this resistance were the professionals from Yaroslavl and Konkovo, who were able to demonstrate innovative working practices based on experience.

In order to maintain a constructive dialogue, the CMRs agreed to change the format of their meetings so that a supportive atmosphere could be generated, with a willingness to listen to the concerns of the young people and their families.

Representatives from various regions of Russia from Moscow to Novosibirsk and Arkhangelsk to Volgograd attended the final seminar of this project which examined the restorative approach to offending behaviour, including support for victims of crimes. Guidelines for the work of CMRs in restorative justice were drawn up in preparation for this seminar, where prospects for the further development of this work were discussed.

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Contact:

Rustem Maksudov

Centre for Judicial and Legal Reform

makcrane@mail.ru