

Crime & Employment Case Study

Introduction:

This case study refers to an offence of Burglary, for which the responsible offender was now serving a custodial sentence. This was a victim-initiated referral, made to colleagues in the Durham Restorative Hub. Given that the offender was incarcerated within a Cleveland establishment, a request was made for our support in assessing and supporting the case. In terms of those affected, the offence involved the direct victims who lived in the house targeted, in addition to their daughter and granddaughter who had discovered the burglary, when visiting to get the home ready for the couple's return from holiday. The direct male victim had already indicated that he would like to engage in an direct Restorative Meeting with the offender, whilst the daughter and granddaughter would like to write him a letter, outlining the impact upon them.

RJ Intervention Preparation:

To ensure consistency in communication and information-sharing between restorative services, the initial assessment was undertaken in collaboration with colleagues from the Durham team. In exploring contributing factors to the offender's decision to burgle the victim's home, he explained that he had been experiencing significant financial difficulties at the time, after being made redundant from work. This had led to a considerable stress and concern about how best to support his partner and two young children, whilst receiving only a small sum of universal credit each month. To date, the offender had attempted to make good use of his time in custody, undertaking further training and employment, which would be of benefit to increasing his employment opportunities upon release.

Advised that the male victim wished to engage in a direct meeting and his wife and daughter, to provide letters outlining the impact of the burglary upon them. The offender confirmed that he would be happy to proceed with the communication requested and wanted them "to see the person behind what [he] had done, explain that he was not a bad person" and that he "did feel bad" about this. He described wanting to explain why the offence had happened, specifically in respect of his redundancy, the fact he had always worked prior to this and the extent of the financial difficulties he and his family faced as a result. However, of greatest importance to the offender was the wish for the victim and his family "not to live in fear in their own home, to give reassurance" to any concern about "is he going to come back and do it again?" The offender explained how he didn't "want to hurt them like that," "didn't want them to feel scared" and wanted to "say sorry for what they had gone through/ are going through." As such, he hoped that the Restorative Justice would help him "to put it right" and "give them reassurance - face to face or by letter." After a further preparatory appointment, the offender confirmed his willingness to continue with a direct meeting with the male victim and to hear the impact of his actions upon the victim's daughter and granddaughter, via a letter, which would be read out during the course of the face-to-face. The meeting was to be co-facilitated with Practitioners from each RJ service.

During the meeting itself, the offender immediately apologised and the victim was able to ask questions about where the stolen jewellery had gone. The offender described having tried to assist the police in retrieving the items and informing them of the jewellers where he had taken some of the items to sell. The victim explained that this jewellery had belonged to their late daughter, who had died as a result of illness. The jewellery had been intended to be passed on with the family and so was of great personal value. In response, the offender apologised again and appeared visibly upset by the realisation of the family's circumstance at the time he had committed the offence. At this point in the meeting, the victim provided his daughter's letter to the offender, outlining the impact of the offence upon them. The victim described how she had suffered with anxiety following her sister's death and the burglary had made this worse. The letter was read by one of the Practitioners and again, the offender appeared visibly upset on hearing the content, apologising further. It was agreed that he

would be happy to write a letter of explanation in response, although noting he would not want to make her anxiety worse. The victim felt that this would be appreciated and that he would let Practitioners know, should his daughter choose not to receive this.

The meeting ended, agreeing a Restorative Agreement of objectives that would help the offender make amends and allow all parties to move forward. This included the agreed letter of explanation. Given the offender's position prior to committing the Burglary, the victim was keen to understand what steps he had taken to try and address this in prison and his plans for release. He noted that in their small community, he would like to see him maintaining a pro-social life, finding employment and actively demonstrating his intention to change. On asking the offender about his previous employment experience, the victim asked him how he would feel about doing some work at his property, as a way of making practical amends. Whilst clearly surprised at the offer, the offender readily accepted, noting he would love to do so, as long as the victim's family also felt comfortable with this. He went on to note his appreciation at the victim having met with him, his time in doing so and the fact he had offered him the opportunity to undertake direct reparation upon release, so that he could make amends. Whilst stating that he couldn't forgive the offender, the victim noted that he "did accept that he had been trying to look after his family (albeit going about this the wrong way) and could accept his apology;" after which they shook hands.

The Impact of the Restorative Intervention:

Following the meeting, the victim informed Practitioners that he had friends working in the trade the offender had worked in and it was his belief that they would most likely extend the offer of work to him. Initial feedback given by the victim, following the face-to-face, was that this "had been a really good day," he had believed the offender's account and was glad to have met him, as this has given him reassurance and allowed him to draw a close to this.

In reviewing the meeting from the offender's perspective, he spoke positively about his experience and how he felt as though a weight had been lifted off his shoulders by being able to explain to the victim, apologise, shake his hand and be offered the opportunity to do work for him upon release. He had already begun to write the agreed letter of explanation and was able to demonstrate an excellent recall of the letter content and remorse for the impact his actions had had upon her, and especially the children. Given that he has children of his own, the offender described having considered how this may have impacted on his own children, in this situation and feeling apprehensive about visiting their grandparents home.

On reflection of the outcomes achieved from the initial direct Restorative Intervention facilitated, this case highlights how communication between the parties responsible for and those affected by crime, can promote harm repair, increase well-being, encourage reintegration back into the local community and promote meaningful change. Training and employment may contribute to the incidence of crime, if not in place or lost by the offender. Equally and more constructively, they may serve as a protective factor from further offending, should opportunities be realistic, accessible and the offender is motivated to change and engage within any support offered. In this instance, the victim's encouragement to the offender in finding employment and in using work-based skills as a means of providing direct reparation for the harm caused, demonstrates how the process of communication can truly offer reintegration back into the community, for both parties.