

Grüßwort Oxford

Dear Mr. Fishbourne, (Chair Thames Valley RJ Service Steering Group)

Dear Mr. Czajewski, (Director Oxfordshire Thames Valley Probation)

Dear Ms. Townsend, (Director Thames Valley Partnership)

Dear Ms. Darrall, (Divisional Manager Thames Valley, Victim Support UK)

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I am absolutely delighted about the opportunity to deliver some words of welcome to this conference with the title “Restoring the Balance: Ensuring RJ Post-sentence is Safe and Helpful for Victims” here in the historical city of Oxford. In my opinion the sharing of knowledge among experts from different professional backgrounds and from different countries this week is very important for the further development of Restorative Justice elements in criminal justice in Europe.

The Minister of Justice of the German federal state of Schleswig-Holstein, Ms. Anke Spoorendonk, sends her greetings to all of you. Restorative Justice is a judicial topic of high priority for her. From the start of her ministry she has successfully promoted the enhancement of mediative elements in the justice system of Schleswig-Holstein.

Particularly because we want to take responsibility for juveniles, also for those who have committed criminal offences and at the same time for those who have suffered from their deeds, we have planned a number of projects within the current legislative period:

The Ministry of Justice, Culture and European Affairs was partner in the EU funded project „Improving Knowledge and Practice of Restorative Justice“. The success of this project with participating government- and nongovernment organizations from seven European countries has been the motivation to also participate in and support the current project “RJ at post-sentencing level; supporting and protecting victims”. Together with Schleswig Juvenile Prison and Kiel Adult Prison the Ministry of Justice is an associate partner. The project idea complements our well-established practice of ambulant victim-offender-mediation with the perspective and concrete possibilities of Restorative Justice in prison with respect to the interests of victims. Jo Tein is going to introduce the goals and the project design to you in a minute.

Another task within our jurisdiction is the further development of juvenile VOM-services with the aim to reach all regions of Schleswig-Holstein – our government has therefore increased the budgets and the staff of regional mediation services. All in all we are funding nine specialized NGOs in this field of action, five in the juvenile- and four in the adult sector. In addition to that two full-time-employed staff will be added to the existing public probation service with the sole task of delivering juvenile victim-offender-mediation. To give you an impression about the scope of our criminal justice system in general: Schleswig-Holstein has 2,8 million inhabitants, 1.600 prison inmates in six prisons and approximately 5.000 clients on parole.

A sensible reaction in criminal procedures – also in my personal opinion – is the instrument of victim-offender-mediation. It can resolve the conflict between the harmed person and the accused, at least it can reduce the threat that results from the conflict. It can avoid following civil law procedures concerning compensation, it can unburden the judiciary and help avoiding criminal court procedures and sanctions.

A criminal offence not only violates the law and the public order but often also affects human beings and their relationship to one another. To confront offenders and above all juvenile offenders with the harm they have caused is a prominent principle of our criminal justice system. This approach also essentially contributes to satisfying the victims of criminal offences. If we are successful in integrating everyone who is affected by an offence into finding solutions to this conflict, we are on a good way towards the restoration of human relationships, towards coping with the experience of being harmed and towards Restorative Justice in general.

The victim has an active right to influence these processes. In traditional German court procedures – which in many cases are inevitable – the victim is reduced to the role of a witness or even simply “evidence”. In Restorative Justice procedures the responsibility for the case is handed back to the offender. He must be motivated to cooperate in restoring the mischief that was done. To achieve this goal also supporters can be integrated in the process: parents, teachers or other persons of trust.

As participants of this conference and possibly of the entire week of consultations and study visits you are actively dealing with the question how Restorative Justice can be practiced in- and outside of prison.

I would genuinely like to express my gratitude for your important personal commitment. All of you contribute to the fact that Restorative Justice step by step gains importance as an alternative procedure pre- and post-sentencing in the criminal justice systems all over Europe.

In Germany victim-offender-mediation was implemented in 1991. It is mainly applied in the pre-sentence stage of criminal procedures. Last year 1.600 VOM cases were counted in Schleswig-Holstein with a tendency to rising numbers. We are looking forward to the effects of the current EU project; we believe that the demand for post-sentence Restorative Justice procedures will rise.

The project partners from Schleswig-Holstein, whom I represent here today, will hold the final project conference in Kiel in August 2014. We are looking forward to welcoming you in our beautiful country between the Baltic and the North Sea next year.

I am looking forward to an interesting conference today and to the professional gain we can all expect from it by having a look at the agenda.

Thank you very much for your attention.