

Resolution of the Building Bridges Conference, 19th-20th November 2015, Rome, Italy

WHEREAS the Building Bridges project was a very good experience bringing together victims and offenders, but also bringing together victim support organisations and organisations assisting offenders and ex-offenders, NGOs, government bodies and prison administrations, practitioners and researchers, and external experts.

WHEREAS through Building Bridges, we were able to have a significant impact on the lives of individual victims and offenders, we helped to implement restorative justice principles in prisons around Europe – in some prison systems, for the first time - and we helped build capacity for small organisations to initiate sustainable change, to develop and grow, and to offer services that create positive, systematic change in their prison systems.

Building on the recommendations of the EU and the experiences of the Building Bridges project, which was made possible through the support of European funding, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

We encourage practices whereby victim-offender dialogues are implemented and rolled out on a greater scale by organisations involved both in victim and in offender support activities, and feel it would be helpful for this to be encouraged both by institutional statutory funding bodies (for example through targeted operational grants at national and European levels) and by non-statutory foundations, umbrella organisations and networks operating in these fields.

Recommendation 2

We encourage prison and criminal justice officials and other related statutory bodies to open up the criminal justice system to restorative justice principles to programmes that facilitate victim-offender dialogues, whether this takes place within custodial settings or in the community. Where restorative justice practices already play a role in the criminal justice system, we encourage the expansion of this role, particularly in custodial settings, in line with international best practices and research evidence.

Recommendation 3

We encourage greater collaboration and cooperation between victim support and offender support organisations, recognising the positive synergy and shared objectives that can be achieved in collaboration, and the added value that this collaboration can have on outcomes for both victims and offenders. We encourage those organisations who have hitherto worked exclusively with either only victims or only offenders to consider offering services to both groups where possible.

Recommendation 4

We encourage organisations involved in victim-offender dialogues or other restorative justice practices to cooperate or increase their cooperation with international partners with potential to influence theory, practice and legislation, and to consider greater cooperation with organisations from outside the traditional victim, offender or restorative justice arenas, but who may be able to offer fresh perspectives and specific skills, where all partners may benefit from mutual learning and exchange.