

Work Stream 1

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Research Report

Facilitating the Sycamore Tree Programme

A Programme by Prison Fellowship for restorative justice in prisons

Results of 16 qualitative interviews with STP-facilitators in Europe



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List of abbreviations

- DE...Germany
- EU...European Union
- HU...Hungary
- IT...Italy
- PFI...Prison Fellowship International
- NL...Netherlands
- RJ...Restorative Justice
- STP...Sycamore Tree Programme



1. Introduction

The Sycamore Tree Programme (STP) is an in-prison restorative justice programme developed by Prison Fellowship International (PFI) bringing together unrelated victims and offenders in a 6-8 week programme to discuss crimes and their effects. Offenders have the chance to understand the harm caused by their crime, assisting them in reducing the likelihood of reoffending, and victims have the opportunity to talk about their crime experience and get answers to their open questions in the programme, finally supporting them in their healing process (see PFI, 2010).

The STP-programme has said to be effective in a number of countries around the world, but has not been implemented throughout Europe yet. With the help of a European Action Grant in the Criminal Justice Programme of the European Commission the project “Building Bridges” (2014-2015) analyses, adapts and evaluates the STP approach in Europe and seeks to transfer it to more European Member States.

Facilitating the STP-programme requires a number of skills is a form of leadership. A good facilitator can keep sessions focused on the subject, remind participants to consider the broader context of the crime issues, manage the process, move sessions along in a timely manner, help the group achieve useful outcomes, and give the group a sense of accomplishment. Facilitators are active listeners, who lead the discussion process with methods of pacing, listening, waiting, observing and including all participants equally into the group process. They are able to handle difficult situations between victims and offenders and are able to handle difficult restorative dialogues. Facilitators have a common understanding of restorative justice principles, maybe also a set of restorative questions or a programme guide which guide their working process and high social skills.

In the context of restorative justice it is underlined that facilitators are not neutral as maybe outside the justice system, as “they are committed to enabling each party to have their voice heard and their needs met” (Chapman, 2014: 67). Facilitators in restorative justice processes are “managers of stories”, as they allow victims and offenders to tell their story of the crime and these stories contain and reflect elements of these people’s identity, beliefs and values. Stories of crimes and crime effects are powerful narratives, which need a cautious handling by a trained facilitator. Through storytelling and discussion of different topics, such as forgiveness or repentance, victims and offenders engage in each other’s realities in a controlled environment and space.

This report is the result of a thorough analysis of 16 interviews with STP facilitators and mediators around Europe. The main aim was to explore how STP – which originated in North and South America – has been done in Europe in the past years and how more victims could be attracted to the programme, which is often lacking victims who take part. More specifically the STP approach in Hungary, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands was taken into account.

From April to May 2014 semi-structured interviews took place with 16 current or former mediators who facilitate/d STP in Hungary, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands for PFI.



2. Methodology

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by PFI staff members in the course of the European Action Grant “Building Bridges”. The interview guide was comprehensive, following a number of research questions defined beforehand between PFI partners and research partners in the project.

Potential former and current STP mediators were called by PFI staff members and asked for an interview date. The date for an interview was set as well as the permission to tape the interview and to use this information to contribute spreading STP into more European countries. All information was handled confidentially and anonymously.

The interviews started with a compliment, thanking them for their willingness to share their experience and time. Then only one question was asked at a time and the interview guide was gone through question by question. The interviewer took notes and stayed as neutral as possible, holding back own opinions. All questions were voluntary. If someone did not want or could not answer a question, it was moved on to the next question. All questions were posed exactly the way we have worded in the interview guide in order to assure comparison. All questions were open-answer questions and interviewees were encouraged to talk about the answer and not just to say yes/no.

The main research questions focused on the role of the victim and how victims were already attracted to the STP-programme and how this could be handled in a structured and effective way in the future.

The main research questions were:

- How are victims currently selected for STP?
- Which language is chosen to attract them to the programme?
- How could an „ideal-typical“ victim be described? (crime experience, personality, age)
- Which fears and anxieties do victims have before STP?
- In which cases are victims excluded from STP?
- What are the advantages for victims to take part?
- How is the pre-process before the first STP session organised with the victim?

After the interviews were finished (when all questions were asked), the interview was closed by saying thank you and clarifying how the mediator could be contacted after the interview.

After each interview PFI staff members wrote down where the interview took place (e.g. Amsterdam), the date (e.g. April 30) and how many minutes it took (e.g. 63 minutes). Also the age and gender of the facilitator who was interviewed was noted (male, 43 years old).



After the conduction of the 16 interviews in total, all interviews were transcribed according to rules of empirical social research word by word without making any corrections to the sentences and without leaving anything out and analysed by the researchers in the project using content analysis methods.



3. Results of the interviews with STP facilitators across Europe

3.1 Facilitators in the STP-programme

In this section current and former STP facilitators have a voice in explaining their main challenges in STP, their working together, their teaching methods and how they access prisons with a restorative justice programme as well as victim associations for finding victims to take part in the programme.

The following facilitators were interviewed in the course of this research from April to May 2014. The youngest facilitator was 24 years old, the oldest 76 years. The average duration of the interviews was more than one hour (69 minutes per interview).

Table 1: Overview of interviewed mediators

Nr.	Language	Date	Duration	Gender of the interviewee	Age of the interviewee
01	Dutch	2.5.2014	50 minutes	male	76 years
02	Dutch	8.5.2014	55 minutes	female	39 years
03	Dutch	2.5.2014	70 minutes	male	57 years
04	Dutch	2.5.2014	75 minutes	male	49 years
05	Dutch	2.5.2014	90 minutes	female	47 years
06	Hungarian	19.5.2014	48 minutes	female	52 years
07	Hungarian	15.5.2014	43 minutes	female	39 years
08	Hungarian	20.5.2014	48 minutes	male	31 years
09	German	25.4.2014	36 minutes	female	26 years
10	German	15.5.2014	36 minutes	female	24 years
11	German	25.4.2014	44 minutes	female	36 years
12	Italian	12.5.2014	65 minutes	female	58 years
13	Italian	14.5.2014	86 minutes	female	63 years
14	Italian	16.5.2014	111 minutes	male	62 years
15	Italian	17.5.2014	130 minutes	female	52 years
16	Italian	20.5.2014	119 minutes	female	54 years

The mediators / facilitators from Italy tend to be older than those on the other countries. Mostly only women take over the role of mediators in STP, only a few men were found for interviewing.



The facilitators in STP mainly have a social or pedagogical background education which they bring to the programme. The most common educational backgrounds of facilitators are social work, teaching, psychology, social pedagogy, and mediation. Some others were mentioned as well, like military army or law.

Facilitators mentioned that their educational or professional background usually helps them in performing in STP in different ways:

- Dealing with people: *“From victim support dealing with people who ended up in a specific situation, either offender or victim and the better understanding for both camps.”* (NL 01/332-334)
- Working in groups: *“Yes I have been a teacher and I have been in front of groups for 30 years. And that helps absolutely. [...] Working in a group requires a couple of years of training.”* (NL 03/560-563)
- Knowledge about human nature: *“I am a social pedagogue and I studied here. [...] because I think that I learned the nature of the human nature or that I developed an understanding for it, and I know about trauma and stuff like that.”* (DE 01/347-349)
- Conversational skills: *“I study social work and it helps learning about different conversational skills during my studies and to develop empathy for both sides.”* (DE 02/294-297)

3.1.1 Main challenges for STP facilitators

The three main challenges for facilitators in STP are a) keeping a balance between task orientation and people orientation, b) process management / process guiding, and c) keeping up professional neutrality towards offenders and victims.

Apart from the challenge of securing a good frame for conversations in the prison setting, the balance between the large variety of tasks and also the focus on single people in the programme is seen as challenging. *“ [...] to have the variety of tasks in control and still be able to focus on the person.”* (NL 02/450)

Facilitators state that coping with difficult behaviour in the group is a challenge. This can involve dealing with calamities and aggressiveness or inappropriate answers. *“You see that they [offenders] need a shot and are stressed, just waiting for the STP to be over so that they can maybe get something sorted. People with problems like ADHD – that causes unrest in the group.”* (NL 04/701-703) Also, some victims need protecting since they are more vulnerable than others and this protecting space needs to be assured by the facilitator. *“To not be drawn to one side and to watch out and to be aware of the fact that victims and victims and sometimes need some more protection than an offender. And that an offender can also be a victim and the victim an offender.”* (DE 01/329-331) Sometimes also family members are present who need special attention.

Facilitators also see a challenge in maintaining order and rest in the group of unrelated victims and offenders.

Leading the process as a mediator / facilitator is also challenging. This means not diving into the stories of victims and offenders as a mediator, but keeping a meta-perspective and



running the group process. It means responding to the group dynamics, but also helping them to build relationships and trust towards each other and to the mediator. It involves guiding the atmosphere in the group, leading conversations and most of all asking open questions.

A professional attitude of neutrality is the third challenge. This involves not being pulled to one side, either the offender's side or the victim's side. Also it means resisting the temptation to direct a lot in the group process or the conversations.

Apart from these big challenges also small challenges were mentioned: organising small group work or preparatory work in a new prison.

3.1.2 Facilitating STP alone or with volunteers/other facilitators

Obviously there are two ways for STP facilitators to work together: either one facilitator is the sole leader or there are two facilitators. A team of two to three volunteers for small group work complete the team. *"You could never do the course on your own, you have to have the volunteers for the small groups, that is essential."* (NL 04/688-689)

Mediators say it is good to have an exchange partner after the STP sessions. Roles and responsibilities are clearly set, everyone knows their role and there is little discussion about it among team members. Most facilitators see no benefit in delivering the programme all alone. If a team works together regularly, they also have the chance to grow together. *"I would describe it just as a team where everyone has a job and where each task is appreciated. All together we are in a position to make it happen."* (IT 04/646-647)

3.1.3 Teaching methods

Apart from classical instructive teaching methods, the facilitators also apply interactive methods.

- Instructive methods

Instructive methods of teaching are used in STP. This includes classical up-front teaching, writing down words or using videos, power points and other visuals for teaching.

- Interactive methods

Also and foremost interactive methods are used in STP, like role playing, drawing, small group work, asking open questions evoking discussion, music and brainstorming activities. *"Surely the role play, the experimental part is much more useful."* (IT 02/471)

- No go's in teaching

Facilitators of STP state that teaching methods have to be adapted to the group. It has to be especially taken into account that offenders have low concentration and low theoretical skills in their opinion. Otherwise STP would not work. No Go teaching methods are one-way teaching methods requiring no response of participants and using methods involving a lot of reading and writing (essays etc.) or using too much paper and written material.



3.1.4 Restorative Justice Standards

There are best practice standards for restorative justice in Europe and in some EU Member States, like for example the “Best Practice Guidance for Restorative Practice”¹. We asked STP facilitators if and to what extent they were aware of these standards in restorative justice and to what degree they use these standards in STP.

Most facilitators answered like this: *“I honestly do not know about it. I have not heard.”* (IT 05/604)

It seems like PFI is very much exclusive (working within closed networks) and only loosely connected to such standard documents or facilitators do not know about them (their practical impact and benefit or using them). A future idea could be to offer an internal PFI training on such standards.

3.1.5 Accessing prisons

Since STP is facilitated in prisons in Europe, facilitators of the programme need to have access to the prison. *“We are in a good relationship and connection with prisons where they are interested in restorative justice programmes.”* (HU 01/476-477) Obviously the contact person varies with which the STP facilitators have the most contact: the prison chaplain, the front office, the prison director, social workers/prison workers or the volunteer coordinator.

First and foremost planning tasks are performed with them, first the recruitment of offenders for STP and second the resolving of practical issues. A ward or department has to be selected before STP starts from which offenders are asked to take part. This decision has to be taken by the prison management. Also practical issues need to be resolved: rooms in the prison have to be made available, keys given to the facilitator, and arrangements have to be made to transfer and bring facilitators to and from the gate. Also attendance lists for all offenders have to be filled in, to ensure that they are there for each session.

Sometimes facilitators are not involved in prison preparation work at all. One facilitator points out that there is a major difference between old and new prison contacts – within older and more established prison relationships not much has to be explained and processes are clear, but in new prisons preparation work is strenuous. Also, most PFI organisations have access to some prisons, but not countrywide. Clear agreements with the prison in a written form are missing in some cases. Staff members mostly do not know about restorative justice and its principles when PFI staff enters the prison.

3.1.6 Connecting to victim support centres or associations

Most facilitators mention not having any contact with victims' associations or centres at all, while other European PFI associations do have random contact with these associations and some others mention having marketing connections to them, reaching them via email or newsletter alerts.

- No contact to victim associations at all.

¹ http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/best_practice_guidance_for_restorative_practice_2011/



The access to victim associations is described as “extremely difficult” (IT 01/597-498). Some facilitators have no contact at all to them. One facilitator states that they are not willing or able to help in recruiting victims for STP.

- Random contact to victim associations.

Some facilitators do mention having contact with victim associations, but most of them add: “every now and then” to their statement. *“Contacts I do have every now and then but that is more not further formal.”* (NL 01/319-320)

Also single contacts with therapists who might help with recruiting of victims take place. *“Unfortunately we have only informal relationships. However, there is a need for cooperation and to work together on a daily basis.”* (HU 03/250-251)

- Marketing contact to victim associations.

Also some PFI facilitators underline marketing connections to victim associations , informing each other about activities and programmes, but they also add “every now and then” to their experiences. Newsletters and emails are also used to stay in contact.

In all cases it does make a difference who the contact person for the victim association is. If the PFI president is the contact person the relationship might be merely strategic, while prison workers might seek a more practical contact in which victims could be referred from one institution to the other. *“Our president has various links including an association of victims linked to the prison.”* (IT 04/616-617) A step into a good and connected future could be to make stable contacts with victim associations setting up written agreements with them, trying to work on mutual benefits and closer cooperation structures.



3.2 Before STP starts: preparation and selection phase with victims

In this section facilitators explain how they organise preparatory work with victims before the STP-programme starts. The section contains information about how victims are chosen for STP, if and how victims might be excluded from the programme, which kind of preparatory work is done with victims and which kind of risk assessment is performed with them.

3.2.1 Selection movements for finding victims for STP

Different selection movements are applied in the starting phase of looking for victims by PFI staff or volunteers as well as facilitators themselves. Six selection movements were identified:

a. Self referral VICTIM → PFI

A victim refers himself/herself to PFI, writes an email or calls and wants to participate in STP. The victim might have heard from STP through the media, an article or other marketing activities performed by PFI. This is the least cost intensive selection movement, since PFI has no costs looking for victims.

“It is possible that people hear about STP and come to us but also that we hear about victims and go to them.” (NL 04/26-27)

b. Personal contacting PFI → VICTIM

In this option PFI contacts single victims who might be known to staff members, telling them that for the current programme victims are still looked for.

c. Selection from a well-known pool of victims PFI → V/V/V/V/V

Some PFI organisations have pools of victims they usually work with or they work with in case they do not find other victims. From this pool someone is chosen who acts as the victim, although that person might have already finished dealing with the crime and the healing process. The advantage is that the victims are well known to PFI and that preparatory work can be reduced to a minimum.

d. Professional referral bodies VICTIM → INTERMEDIARY → PFI

A professional body, like the police or a lawyer, refers a victim to an intermediary, like a victim association or a professional network for facilitators, and there the intermediaries contact PFI with the chance to get in touch with the victim.

e. Direct victim referral VICTIM → VICTIM

A direct form of referral takes place if a former victim who takes part spreads their experience of STP to another victim by word of mouth.

f. Victim conferences/events EVENT → VICTIM

Some PFI organisations visit events or conferences or victim’s associations and recruit single victims there. *“We have also contacted some associations for victims [...] through*



counselling centres, churches and so on and then the presentation of the project was made to each of them.” (IT 04/11-14)

3.2.2 Selection strategies for finding victims for STP

For finding victims PFI uses common strategies of marketing but also other approaches. In some cases faith-based communities can be the basis for recruiting victims via personal contacts. Classical media-based approaches of attraction take place using newsletters, flyers or brochures.

Since STP takes place in prisons, in some cases a setting-based approach comes to life, meaning that the prison is involved in the selection of victims according to the offenders who have already signed up. In this case a top-down approach / offender-based approach is applied following the principle that crimes of offenders are the basis for victim selection.

When offenders sign up first and STP takes place in a prison, a matching process takes place, taking into account the type of crime and if the offense was a single offense or a multiple offense. But facilitators also mentioned the matching process as a success factor in general. *“Or course we look what kind of offenders we have and that this matches a little bit. If we have a lot of thefts, then we pay attention that victims take part in the VOM who are also affected by theft. We always try to match victims and offenders with similar stories.” (DE 03/8-12)*

Other criteria for selecting victims concern their personality traits and other factors. Facilitators pay much attention to the upcoming emotions of victims in the first interview. Emotions are desired and almost obligatory, but victims also have to “proof” that they are in a beginning or lasting healing process. Also the region victims come from and their seasonal availability play a role for the selection.

Facilitators specifically note that victims are selected who have a suitable story. Victims of sexual crimes are not seen as “suitable” for STP.

Some innovative ideas for selecting victims are also mentioned: asking probation officers to recommend victims, asking female police officers since they might be more empathic with victims, contacting victim care centres, or contact victims who write books about their experiences (researching authors of crimes).

3.2.3 Linguistic recommendations when speaking to victims

When asked about their linguistic practices when speaking to victims for STP, the facilitators mentioned several do’s and don’ts.

As Don’ts they mentioned putting pressure on victims regarding their participation and the usage of professional language and complex technical terms.

The list of Do’s is longer. The former or current facilitators would give the following linguistic recommendations when talking to victims before the programme. Talking about the background of restorative justice, about the principles of restorative justice and comparing it to criminal justice could be helpful for victims who are new to this kind of restoration approach. *“I tell something about restorative justice backgrounds, theory and experiences in*



our programme and in other countries. And for sure I do some storytelling! Just give them a taste of what happens in a group." (NL 02/49-52) It has also been rated as helpful to talk about prisons and punishment and how different and valuable new approaches are in tackling crime, also for the offenders. A key point is that restoration can only take place with the victim, which in the criminal justice system is mostly not the case, that the victim has a voice. Also storytelling about other STP groups is rated as helpful for new victims since a picture can then be transported to them how the STP groups work.

Reassuring language is often used in the first conversation and it is stretched that they contribute to the prevention of future crimes.

3.2.4 Typical crimes experienced by victims in STP

Victims who have previously taken part in STP in Europe in Germany, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands have had a high variety of crime experiences. There is a tendency to involve victims with rather non-serious crime experiences. These victims dominate those victims with serious crimes involving physical or sexual harm. *"It is difficult to involve the serious crime offenders in the programme."* (HU 01/27-28)

"I think about Bart, he was attacked under a tunnel by several people, also touched physically, [...] and Jan was the father of a son who had been threatened by another boy [...] and Chadir by the way I now recall [...] was threatened with a weapon in the supermarket." (NL 05/22-30)

Facilitators also say that in the best case the official court case is closed when victims take part in STP. Mostly the experienced crime lies back between 1 and 3 years.

3.2.5 Fears, apprehensions and expectations of victims towards STP

Fears and anxieties of victims before the programme starts are common. Two major fears can be differentiated: the fear of entering a prison since STP takes place in prisons and the fear of reactions from offenders to their story.

When victims mention being afraid of entering a prison, sometimes for the first time in their life, they are in particular fearful about the room structure and about the sitting order together with offenders.

"They are afraid of the meeting, afraid of the prison, afraid about how to be honest, afraid about what to speak so we need to take the preparation interview and their wounds very seriously and listen to their emotions." (HU 03/19-22)

"The difficulty of taking them to jail for a project of restorative justice, it was very difficult." (IT 03/26-27)

Considering their fear of diverse reactions from the offenders to their stories they mostly fear of being judged or condemned for parts of their story or as a person and fear of not being taken seriously.

"Most of them were afraid that offenders would not take them seriously because they have not experienced that before that they were taken seriously with their story or that



someone even showed serious interest in them.” (DE 01/19-22).

The facilitators in STP offer different solutions to this, dealing with expected anxieties and fears before the programme starts. First, they stress the principle of voluntarism or voluntary participation. Using the key sentence: “you can always leave” they offer the victim a permanent exit strategy, should he or she feel that they cannot finish the STP session. Also facilitators mention that fears can be minimized if only a short time period is left between the first interview with the victim and the actual start of STP. So a timely dense pre-process and process of the programme is seen as an advantage for not losing victims because of fear or anxieties.

3.2.6 Exclusion criteria for victims in STP

Facilitators agree on potential exclusion criteria for victims in the preparation and selection phase. If STP is considered as potentially harmful or if STP does not support the restoration process, then victims are advised not to take part. This assessment is done on the basis of their emotional status.

If victims have an aggressive attitude, an attitude of revenge or the need to condemn the offender for their crime, they might not be suitable for the programme.

“Also when a victim only wants some kind of revenge or tells the offender how wrong they are or did without knowing the offender. That is not helpful.” (NL 02/66-67)

“Definitely an attitude which is not suitable is a paternalistic attitude. Those who think that they have something to teach, a sense of superiority.” (IT 02/77-78)

“It happened to me to exclude a person because it seemed to me that he had not processed the thing in itself and at the same time he was too aggressive in a confined space such as a prison, that could create some difficulties.” (IT 04/69-71)

Also if victims justify or downplay the crime that happened to them, they might not be suitable either, since the seriousness and the effect of the experienced crime have to come out in their story. Downplaying their emotions would not be helpful in this case either.

A clear exclusion criterion is a recognisable risk of re-traumatisation. Facilitators describe this with emotions which are still too fresh and come up in the preparatory interview. Also, if the crime experience has not been processed yet and victims have too many questions, they might also need a different intervention than VOM. Victims of sexual crimes are usually excluded. *“It happened to a victim, I was afraid she was a victim whose brother was killed a short time ago and she was very young. So I was afraid by taking part she could be harmed.” (IT 01/41-43)*

If professional boundaries of mediation are reached, that means if other professionals are better suited to help victims like therapists or medical care, than the programme is not recommended.

Last but not least personality traits are a factor in excluding victims from mediation, especially if the basic principles of mediation cannot be fulfilled. Examples mentioned by facilitators are victims who stigmatise or discriminate offenders due to their religion or ethnicity, having a parental attitude towards (young) offenders trying to teach them a lesson,



having too high expectations and the lack of capability of storytelling. If stories of victims do not come across to the offender, the main aim of STP cannot be reached, that is why the ability to tell stories is something like a prerequisite to the selection of victims.

3.2.7 Range of victims

In STP the range of victims is wide; however, there is a tendency towards older victims, working age victims with predominantly Christian faith and a higher level of education.

Ranges were for example explained like this:

- 30-60 years old, Christian faith, intellectual
- 25-65 years old, Christian faith, high school or university degree
- 40-60 years old, Christian faith, low education
- 40-70 years old, high education, quality people

“Absolutely we have a great variety. [...] one is a very young retired police officer [...] mothers whose children have died [...] wives of people who were using drugs [...] or people very wealthy, very educated or very poor on the contrary [...] almost all Catholic.”
(IT 01/50-59)

3.2.8 Ideal-typical victim for STP

A best possible victim (ideal-typical victim) for STP is a person who has started the healing process after the crime, who has had an interrupted life due to the crime and effects are therefore visible and tangible, they have the capability of emotional storytelling and specific personality traits. Also: *“A typical victim is a victim who has a story quite similar to the stories of prisoners. In the context of the sessions we use this aspect of similarity.”* (IT 02/90-91)

Regarding the position of victims in the healing process, victims have usually started the healing process or are at the end of it when they take part in STP, but still have an open wound or an existing emotion which can be carried on. However, victims who take part are usually ready for restoration and desire it.

It is particularly interesting that the “best” victims described are those with an interrupted life because of the crime.

Concerning their personality traits their ability to react to a group situation and to difficult questions or situations with the offenders is a desired characteristic of a victim. Victims who are chosen gladly are those described as helpful.

Also as already mentioned the capability of storytelling is crucial. A factor is said to be the degree of emotion in the story of the victim. In the best possible case the victim is emotional but not too emotional due to a re-found balance in the victim's life. *“On the one hand they need to have dealt with it [the crime] so that they don't burst into tears but on the other hand they must not have put it so far behind them that there are no emotions anymore.”* (NL 04/10-12)



3.2.9 Advantages for the victim to take part in STP

Facilitators mention five main advantages for the victim taking part in STP:

- Awareness raising

The STP-programme raises awareness of victims' own emotions. They have the chance to express them in the programme.

- Skills acquisition

STP can help to develop or deepen specific skills. Two skills were mentioned specifically: learning self-determination skills and learning to forgive.

- Change of perspectives

One of the advantages stressed most often in the interviews is the change of perspectives that takes place in STP between victims and offenders. This change of perspective includes seeing the human behind the criminal, experiencing each others' worlds, and better understanding the offender's behaviour. Also, victims see that the criminal is just a normal person as well with a normal life and family background (normalisation strategy).

- Opportunity driven advantages

By the mere existence of the STP-programme an opportunity is given to victims to meet offenders outside a criminal court and to express their expectations. It is an opportunity to talk about their story and especially to receive answers to their personal open questions, which they can pose in the VOM but mostly not in the criminal court.

“First and foremost I say that it can help them to get rid of their questions. Of course they cannot give them complete answers because they are not their direct offenders, but they can still pose their questions and are likely to receive similar answers as from their direct offenders.” (DE 03/43-47)

- Healing

The main aim of STP is healing for both sides if the offence: the offender and the victim. STP gives victims the chance to be healed from being a victim and from seeing oneself as a victim. Also victims can get rid of own feelings of guilt (assuming that they might have caused the crime) and can get rid of fear, sometimes also irrational fear that the crime was a personal punishment and had something in particular to do with them as a person, which in the case of burglary or theft is mostly not the case, since criminals steal for financial reasons.

“To receive healing, to receive answers and through this a kind of security to forgive yourself and to get rid of feelings of guilt, which you should generally actually never have. And you should also receive courage to meet the actual offender.” (DE 01/89-93)



There are no financial advantages for victims to take part. Most of them are not even remunerated for taking part and for having to travel to the prison.

3.2.10 Finding no victims

As practice lets us know, it is not easy to find victims to take part in VOM in general.

In order to guarantee participation of victims in STP, two main strategies are put into practice if no victims sign up for an upcoming STP-programme:

- Replacement strategies

If no victim can be found for the programme and time is running, some facilitators use videos of victims' stories instead of a real person in the programme. *"I think about a movie that was shown from another programme [...] about two victims. Both their sons had been killed."* (NL 03/109-111) Sometimes also the role of the victim is played by trained or untrained volunteers. Also as a last alternative if no victim is found, an offender can be asked to talk about his victim experiences, since most offenders also have experiences as victims (LIT).

- Persistence strategies

If real victims are not to be replaced, persistence strategies are applied by keeping looking for victims. A victim can be borrowed from somewhere else – another institution or STP-programme in the same country. Also, the search strategies using methods explored in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 are persisted in.

3.2.11 Preparatory work with victims

The work that is done preparing the victim for the STP-programme is described by facilitators as more or less undefined. There are many uncertainties about who-what-where of this preparatory work.

When differentiating between different levels of preparation, there are at least three:

- No pre-process work is done with victims (no preparation)². *"I did not have any conversations in the preparation phase."* (DE 01/30)
- The pre-process is handled with a single appointment with the victim (selective preparation).
- The pre-process is handled with multiple appointments with the victim (intense preparation).

The methods of preparation are interviews, telephone calls or single/multiple appointments. If appointments are multiple, not more than three appointments take place. Some facilitators see this work in the pre-process phase as a fixed component of STP while for others it does not seem to be clear which parts are part of the programme.

² Only in the case of using well-known victims for STP the fact that no preparatory work takes place can be explained.



Concerning the concrete aims of preparatory work with victims, the main aims are a) to test reaction capabilities in difficult situations or with difficult questions and b) to check expectations of victims on a scale from low to high. Mainly the expectations victims mention in the interviews or telephone calls can vary extremely between low expectations (only being listened to) and high expectations (being restored in STP).

A challenge can be that the mediator and the preparatory worker are not the same person in some cases. However, victims can actively decide after the first interview, if they take part or not.

When facilitators were asked about any possible forms of (formal or informal) risk assessment with victims in the preparatory phase of STP, the answers varied.

At least three types of risk assessment were mentioned in the interviews:

- Formal risk assessment

“Since we don’t call victims from a wide circle, we can reduce the risk by ourselves. Other risk assessment was not used.” (HU 01/183-184)

“There is no risk assessment. Especially when they are selected by the prison and then I assume that the prison does it.” (NL 01/168) This statement reveals quite a lot of uncertainty about the risk assessment process.

- Common sense risk assessment

“And I must say that even if common sense would say, it might be better to wait, maybe because it [the crime] was too recent, the facts have demonstrated that the project can go ahead regardless of these factors.” (IT 04/450-452)

- Informal risk assessment

“There is no formal risk assessment. You could say that the meeting between facilitator and victim is the informal risk assessment. It is part of the conversation we have.” (NL 02/139-140).

“No there is no formal risk assessment [...] in the first conversation I try to check and ask how stable they see themselves.” (DE 03/153-155)

Formal risk assessment is not done by most of the STP facilitators and sometimes it is not even clear to them who is responsible for this (prison, prison workers etc.).

The largest discussion point for future programmes could be the distinction between common sense risk assessment versus professional risk assessment. Until which boundary is common sense risk assessment helpful and when does professional risk assessment come into play?

Also the fact that some facilitators have never thought of a risk assessment before evokes some questions about the emotional safety of victims.



3.3 Before STP starts: preparation and selection phase with offenders

In this section facilitators explain how they organise preparatory work with offenders before the STP-programme starts. The section contains information about how offenders in prisons are chosen for STP, if and how offenders might be excluded from the programme, which kind of preparatory work is done with offenders and what is done if no offenders sign up for the programme.

3.3.1 Selecting offenders for STP

Offenders are pre-selected through their specific prison they are in, depending on the connection of PFI to a specific prison. Hungary and Italy report working in high security prisons only or mainly. Then there is a selection of offenders for STP by the prison management or a voluntary sign-up process.

A lot of facilitators report that decisions and recommendations for participants are made by prison staff or prison management.

The four countries Hungary, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands apply different strategies of introducing STP in the prison and thus attracting offenders to it:

- Flyers and brochures are given out to offenders or bulletins are used for information
- There is a presentation of STP in plenary in one room in the prison
- There is a one-on-one cell contact with offenders
- There is an introductory afternoon in the prison

Sometimes also applications have to be written by offenders why they want to take part. Recruiting in the prison usually starts one week before the course starts and is dependent on practical restrictions, such as room restrictions for not more than 12 people for security reasons etc. So STP has limited spaces and selection can therefore become very selective.

3.3.2 Fears, apprehensions and expectations of offenders towards STP

Offenders who sign up for STP face different fears which can be grouped in 4 main fears:



Some offenders are afraid of storytelling, especially of telling their whole story and all elements attached to it.

The fear of stigmatisation is quite common among offenders. They are afraid to be charged with something during the STP sessions, afraid of additional condemnation and of accusation from the side of victims and family members.

They are afraid of being stigmatised as “monsters” or bad people and especially being labelled as people who “will never change” and thus being branded forever. *“And fears of which stories victims will tell and how they might then see them, the offenders. Also the fear of being labelled and not even open for discussion.”* (DE 02/183-185) They fear being labelled as a “life time criminal”. *“Their greatest fear is to be branded forever and not to be understood for what they are now, not for what they were.”* (IT 01/174-175)

Also shaming is a real fear offenders have before the programme starts. Shaming and shocking are common methods in restorative justice, with the aim of restoration and forgiveness in the end. However, these shame dynamics can cause fear and anxiety before the programme starts. Offenders are especially ashamed in front of victims and afraid of suffering like most of them experienced in criminal court / trial.

The fourth fear is the fear of confidentially breach with the facilitator / mediator and is actually the fear of broken trust. Offenders do not know which parts of the programme are communicated further on and how this might affect their sentence and their trials. They are afraid that stories or information about their attitude could be communicated to outsiders.

This fear needs to be handled professionally by mediators in STP and they apply different strategies of calming offenders down: They stress the acceptance of every single person in the programme as a person, no matter what their background is, they show empathy and avoid judging. It is also made clear that there is no reporting about the contents of the sessions to the criminal justice court and that only processes are reported.

3.3.3 Exclusion criteria for offenders in STP

Offenders are excluded for several reasons, although this depends on the situation and the offender. First offenders can be excluded during the running programme because of their behaviour: violence, rebellion, or anger. Also the crime offense can be an exclusion criterion itself: offenders of sexual crimes and paedophiles are excluded from STP in general and if they do take part the sexual crime, which is in most cases not the only one committed, is not made public in the programme. *“All kinds of crimes occur among participants of STP. The sexual offenders cannot work with the group, so they can be included in personal counselling, but not in STP.”* (HU 01/213-214)

Psychology and mental disorders can also be an exclusion criterion. This includes personality disorders, psychological instability, a psychiatric diagnosis and also having no insightfulness into their criminal act at all. *“If there is the case of a personality disorder, then a kind of selection takes place.”* (NL 01/117)

Language is also an exclusion criterion since the native language is crucial to understanding crime victims. If the offender does not speak the language, participation is hard. From previous experience the language barrier cannot fully be overcome and lay translation by



other offenders does not work properly.

Also the sentence of the offender has to be long enough to finish the course (8 weeks). All these criteria are usually checked with prison staff or prison management and if juvenile offenders are involved or high security departments, then sometimes also psychologists do the exclusion or approval of participation.

3.3.4 Range of offenders and typical offenders

The range of offenders taking part is high, also the variety of crimes they have committed. *“Robbery, burglary, mistreatment, murder sometimes, drug crimes, drug trafficking.”* (NL 01/94-95) *“In general they did crimes against property, car theft, robberies in apartments or shops, crimes against public administration.”* (IT 04/232-233) However, the range of socio-economic characteristics of offenders is low and reflects the European prison population.

There are extreme motivational differences from being “able to leave the cell” to “highly motivated to change”.

The facilitators in the four mentioned countries work either with mixed groups of offenders from different backgrounds and crime offenses or with homogenous groups due to the same department etc. *“The range is very broad. The youngest participant just turned 12, the oldest was in his 70ies. They were all male.”* (NL 02/210-211)

The ideal-typical offender of STP is male, has low educational background, is detained to a high security prison in Hungary or Italy, is under 50 years old (in Italy), under 30 years old (in Germany and Hungary) and has been imprisoned for quite a while facing a life sentence or a long sentence. Usually the offenders have migrant background, and are either Sinti and Romanies or are Afro-American.

They are mostly open to chance, curious about the programme and are rather doers than thinkers.

3.3.5 Advantages for the offender to take part in STP

There are numerous advantages for offenders to take part in STP.

The social advantages are getting in touch with the outside world – volunteers and family and community members – and being able to leave the cell for the time of the programme.

The advantages for inner healing are that possibilities and ways of restoration are shown to them and that they are given the concrete chance to show restitution. Also forgiveness as a “replacement” or “substitute” is possible with the victims there.

An important factor in STP is for offenders to take over ownership for their crime. This involves taking responsibility for one’s actions, developing victim empathy by listening to the victim and gaining insight into their world.



3.3.6 Preparatory work with offenders

Preparatory work with offenders takes place in Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary. There is a first meeting with the offender, in some cases an application and an interviewing process, and the prison authorities' recommendation who should or could take part in STP. *"We inform them one by one, the potential participants, after that we make an interview with the prisoner."* (HU 01/193-194) In Italy not much is done for individual preparation, but the programme is presented in the prison.



3.4 Programme phase in STP

In this section facilitators explain how they perform the STP-programme in their European country, which parts they modify from the original programme, how they define a successful programme and which practical recommendations they have for continuing the programme in Europe.

3.4.1 Main aims of STP

The main aims of STP as believed by facilitators of the programme are quite different. Most opinions about what the programme is trying to achieve refer to the following:

- Starting an inner process of change in both offenders and victims
- Taking actual steps of symbolic restitution or reparation
- Making visible of crime effects
- Identity work
- Contribute to restorative justice and social peace
- Reviving religious life of offenders

The STP-programme is trying to achieve starting an inner process of repentance and healing within victims and offenders (DE 02, HU 02). These inner processes are hard to observe from the outside, but often start with respect, which is gained for the other side (victim or offender), and the development of compassion. Connected with this inner process of repentance and healing is to take action on the side of the victim and to: first, express their forgiveness to offenders (DE 02) and second, to critically review the offender's life (IT 01).

The STP-programme is also trying to achieve that actual steps of restoration are taken. These are supposed to be taken by offenders (NL 02). Action plans are set up, which express the decisions made and the concrete actions to re-do the harm caused (HU 01).

Another main aim of the programme according to facilitators is to make the crime look larger in the beginning of the programme, showing all effects of crime, hearing the story of the victim and the various effects it had on their life and their families (NL 05) in order for offenders to get a better understanding of their crime. In the end the impact of crime needs to be minimized again, showing them that something can be done to repay the harm caused.

One facilitator from Germany (DE 01) mentioned also that the STP-programme is identity work. It means showing that victims are not only victims and offenders are not only offenders, but that their stories sometimes overlap. But the programme also shows participants that identities are not permanent, but shape able and changeable (permanent identities vs. non-permanent identities).

Facilitators of the programme also expressed one main aim of reviving religious life in the lives of offenders (IT 01), starting a process of spiritual change in them (NL 02) and especially making them think about their life and their identity (Who am I? What do I want in life?) (NL 02, NL 03).



Applying principles of restorative justice compared to criminal justice is a key to achieving STP goals (IT 01).

“Restorative justice ... precisely because it is not the prison that you think would rebuild a life, but the opportunity to become aware of the done harm, the possibility of asking for forgiveness, the ability to repair, if feasible [...]. So I really believe that it reconstructs social peace that is essential for both: victims and prisoner.” (IT 05/277-280)

STP is seen as one pathway to achieving more social peace (IT 05) and to bringing victims and offenders together outside the criminal court (IT 04).

3.4.2 Restitution and restoration

Facilitators were asked which examples of restitution and restoration they have actually observed in their long term or short term experience in the STP-programme.

Visible restitution

Forms of visible restitution were either verbal expressions of restitution or actual acts of restitution. They can take various creative forms, like a statement to change, a referral to direct mediation or a story told to a guest at the celebration session.

“It [restitution] also happens during the course and then it is often about the family environment. You can see the family as victims as well. [...] from the offender that he makes something for one of the parents or girlfriend or... that kind of restoration takes place. And that is not rare. It depends a little bit on the composition of the closing session.” (NL 01/224-229)

- Acts of restitution
 - gardening, art, exhibitions, fundraising (HU 01)
 - paintings (NL 01)
 - towards a visitor in the last session as symbolic restitution (NL 02)
 - (written) commitment to get in touch with someone or to fulfil assignments (NL 03)
- Verbal restitution
 - both parties express their compassion for each other (DE 01)
 - through words and consolations (IT 05)
 - through a poem (NL 01)
 - through letters and action plans (DE 01, IT 02)

“It was a serial robber who was going to steal in the villas, he said: ‘My victim was a child and when I went to rob, there was this boy, who looked at me, he did not cry, but those eyes looked scared. For four years I have seen those eyes in front of me, they have always tormented me all night.’ Then he felt the need to write this letter to ask for forgiveness to the child.” (IT 03/504-507)

Invisible restitution

Also facilitators express invisible restitution, which was not as obvious as the examples above, but still took place, like a touch between two people, learning to forgive, accepting



someone's words or story etc. (NL 03, IT 03, IT 04).

Barriers to restitution

Facilitators also state that there are barriers to actual restitution and restoration, especially on the side of the offenders. These barriers relate to the life of offenders after prison, in which they are forced to make a living and mostly have low educational background and to do acts of restitution in parallel (HU 01), which is perceived as difficult. Also, time is often dedicated to other things after release (HU 03). Also the special format of STP makes it hard to see real restitution, since unrelated victims and offenders meet and not the actual ones (NL 01).

3.4.3 Success and failure of the programme

One of the most exciting questions we asked facilitators was how they view the success of the STP-programme. However, the success of the STP-programme cannot be measured by all means. A difference has to be made between measurable and not measurable success, such as visible acts of restitution or invisible changes on the inside of an offender, which are hard to be objectively observed. The difference between a successful and a not successful programme lies in the participants' openness and their motivation to participate and it is more than just "a feeling" (NL 02).

Result-orientation

Changes in behaviour are viewed as a success due to the programme (NL 02), when participants are committed to change (HU 01), when changes are profound and sincere (HU 01) or when offenders really move and take practical steps (DE 02). Each course is successful, if victims and offenders are confronted with each other and if the soul is touched and something changes on the inside (IT 04).

"The more people change the more STP is successful." (IT 02/362-363)

One facilitator states that offenders often ponder on the sessions and that they seriously think about what happened (DE 01), which makes the programme a success. On the contrary the programme is described as "not successful" if facilitators see in the reactions of participants that nothing has changed and that they are wasting their time (NL 03). Most statements take the offender as the main success factor for the functioning of the programme, but one facilitator from Germany also states that "success" means that offenders were really moved, that a victim can say that they are genuinely better now after the course and that questions were answered that had been open for some years (DE 02).

Another impact factor seems to be the change in identity that the programme achieves: The way how offenders look at themselves changes (their identity changes, for example from being dishonest to honest, from being negative to positive (NL 03).

Some facilitators target at the ultimate aim of restorative justice: restoration and (symbolic or practical) restitution. They view a programme as "successful" if pure emotions were shown and reconciliation has taken place (HU 03, NL 01), or when practical steps of restitution are taken by the offender (DE 01). A facilitator from Italy puts it like this: "The worse the crime, the more suffering, the more repentance and forgiveness" (IT 01).



Some say the success depends on the closing session and the evaluation forms (NL 01) as well as a pre-post measurement of “success” with all participants (NL 01). However, offenders often give desired answers to questions because they have learned to do so in the course of their (many) imprisonment(s), so “success” is when they become more honest and do not compose their answers any more, but when the facilitator knows that his/her comments have arrived within the person (NL 05). Another indicator of success is when the closing session stays more formal. Then the course was less successful, also when few people from the outside are invited to the closing session and community engagement was low (NL 01).

One facilitator had a surprising result: A psychiatrist told her that an offender reduced his medication due to progressive healing during the course (IT 01).

Process-orientation

Other facilitators see the listening and discussion process as a success in itself which is a more process-oriented view of “success” (compared to results-orientation). This includes participation in discussion (HU 03), continuous exchange touching the depth of the topics (IT 04), interaction between participants (NL 03), by their openness and their questions (NL 03). On the contrary again, the STP-programme is not successful when no real conversation takes place in small groups (DE 03). The difference lies in how people interact, their involvement in the programme and how it affects them (NL 03).

In longer courses (full eight weeks) more depth in conversation can be observed, also with offenders with long term sentences because they had more time to think about their crime (NL 04). Also the “restorative spirit” during the course was mentioned as a success factor (HU 01).

Also practical success factors were identified: if all six or eight sessions took place, if all participants attended the sessions regularly, if homework was done etc. (NL 04).

Generally, result-orientation and process-orientation complement each other in defining the success of STP. The impact a programme has on somebody’s life is generally difficult to measure. Also the impact facilitators have on the success of the programme is unclear to date.

3.4.4 Modifications to the original STP-programme

How and if the original STP-programme, developed by Prison Fellowship International, as a registered trademark was changed or not, was answered differently across countries. Most facilitators did admit having changed to programme to make it culturally savvy.

First, the STP-programme is converted to the needs of participants and the degree of depth in discussion which is possible in each group (HU 01 / HU 02). Also methods are changed in Italy, Hungary, Germany and the Netherlands: In Hungary other methods not stated in the programme guide are added (HU 01) or more time is spent on particular content (HU 03), and in Italy the initial games are not played (IT 01/271-273).

In the Netherlands all sessions were adapted (NL 01) and no session stayed the same as in the US-American original for various reasons: detention policy, victim policy and Dutch



culture. Sometimes sessions have the same name but different content (NL 01).

“In fact we do not do much in exactly the same way as the original US-version. Most of the sessions are the same in themes, responsibility, forgiveness, making amends, towards reconciliation, celebration, but the other sessions are called different but contain the subjects like introduction, confession, crime, repentance. During the years we more and more found out what worked in the Netherlands. We needed more variety in activities, we added a lot of film material, and of course we adapted the small group questions to the way we introduce the subject. There was some trouble in using bible stories, so we now use more stories (video’s) of victims and offenders with sometimes a Christian testimony in it.” (NL 2/279-286)

More specifically asked, what they change, facilitators answer that Session 2 “what is crime” is left out and that there are customized forms of Sessions 6 and 8 (NL 04). Another facilitator from the Netherlands mentions modifying Session 2, but not taking it out completely (NL 05). In Germany eight sessions cannot be done, so the programme is shortened from eight to six sessions (DE 02 / DE 03). Also “restorative justice” as a topic is integrated into the Celebration Session 8 in Germany.

One facilitator from Germany stated that her first course was done strictly following the original, but that they did not do role plays, games and ice breakers in the beginning, since these methods do not work culturally in Germany (DE 01). Also an Italian facilitator underlines that his first STP-programme facilitation was done according to the original and then cultural changes were made. Restitution was difficult to understand, and the celebration session was different because of the social impact it had changing it from a more liturgical event to a societal event (IT 04). Only one facilitator from all 16 we asked said that nothing was changed from the original version (IT 05).

3.4.5 Monitoring reactions of victims and offenders

Facilitators have the task of monitoring and facilitating emotions which arise during the programme on both sides: victims and offenders.

Offenders mostly did not know how far reaching their actions were and they start to understand the consequences of crime for the whole community (HU 01/ HU 03). Offenders are often said to have a lack of responsibility or no notion of it (HU 03). Embarrassment is a typical feeling offenders have in the first session (HU 02).

Feeling guilty is also often the case for offenders and apologizing (starting to learn to say I am sorry) is the consequence of the programme (HU 03/ DE 02). Facilitators also state sincere interest of offenders in the victims (NL 04).

Victims are sometimes viewed as “brave” by offenders (NL 02), but it is also recognized that it can be hard for victims to tell the truth, and to be frank and straight in the programme (HU 03), especially when the crime seems “less severe” than other crimes which are discussed in the group:

“Or again there was a victim of a post office she had been kidnapped, shaken by this robbery, it was hard to talk about the offense, it looked like a foolish offense compared to the murders in which all the other victims were involved. So she didn’t open up fully, but



at a certain point she talked, crying because she was traumatized by this, and instead she helped one of the prisoners who had never felt free during the trial, the imprisonment of some robberies he had done, [...] they were particularly marked for the ferocity with which he had acted towards the victims and asked for forgiveness and finally said 'I feel forgiven.'" (IT 01/319-325)

Facilitators often perceive victims who take part in the programme as nervous, relieved, self-confident and happy that they did it as well as compassionate for the offenders (not the crime) (NL 02, DE 02). When asked about typical reactions to offenders in the sessions, one facilitator answered:

"Sometimes they say that it really helped them to express their feelings toward offenders and receive their recognition. I must think of an older lady who told her story in a youth course of how someone broke into her home when she was at the funeral of her husband, and one of the boys was so touched that he spoke to her in the final celebration session and they hugged and she said many times: 'I know you are not a bad boy.'" (NL 02/313-317)

Also victims are perceived as relaxed and natural, emotionally clear and honest but sometimes also quite confrontational in nature (NL 03/ NL 04).

Apart from these positive feelings, facilitators are often faced with negative feelings as well, like reluctance and being cautious (DE 01/ DE 03). Offenders seem to be "smaller" when victims are there, not cheeky, and more conscious about what they were saying, but is gets better along the way of eight weeks of working with both sides of the crime process (DE 01). Other feelings which were observed were: anger (IT 01/ IT 02) and pain (IT 03) on the victim's side. Victims tend to get angry more often than offenders (IT 02).



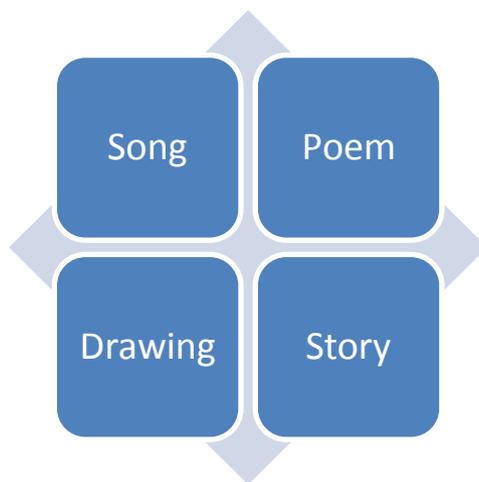
3.5 Finishing phase of STP

In this section facilitators analyse the finishing phase of STP, the last event with the celebration with community and family members. Also they explain how victims are further supported beyond the STP-programme.

3.5.1 Celebration in Session 8

The last official session of STP is Session 8 “Celebration”. In this session an overview of what happened during the programme is given as a review and repetition for participants and invited guests. There is an official part with speeches and then there is an act of restitution by participants (mostly only offenders).

This act of restitution can be a 2-minute statement by the offenders, a “testimony of change” or the reading out loud of written letters. The act of restitution can be very personal. Normally one of these four forms is chosen: song, drawing, poem or story of change.



Then time is given to guests to react to these stories or songs, poems or drawings. Guests are seen as active participants in this last session.

This is followed by an appraisal time for offenders (and victims) handing out evaluation forms, certificates, and sometimes also a present for taking part. After that the social part with the opportunity to chat with guests and food and drinks begins.

In general, the celebration session is seen as an opportunity to fulfil restorative justice principles of involving the wider community / family in the restoration process. Society is brought to prison by inviting 1-2 people from the offender’s personal environment. It is sometimes difficult for them to invite guests, first if they have no direct crime victim and second if invited guests do not come. *“Often not many come.”* (NL 05/613) Still society moves together in prison in this last session of STP. The last session is generally geared more towards the offender than the victim. One facilitator even says it is an “over-valued” session.

3.5.2 Involving families and community members

Facilitators were asked why others (family, community members) are invited to the last session and which kind of restitution takes place there. Also we wanted to know how the benefit of the programme is communicated in this last session.

The effects of the STP-programme are not explicitly communicated, but shown to participating guests. Offenders show what happened, they show what they have learned and they show the effects on their lives. Society moves together for this purpose and guests come to view this change in the offenders. Facilitators hope to receive future support for the offenders like this, restoring relationships with their family members. *“We find it important to show the importance of social circles when it comes to restorative justice, so when people from the social circle of the participants are present, they play a role in the process for the offender. We hope we can support him in this process and help him take responsibility.”* (NL 02/410-413). It is very important that participants talk themselves and not that the facilitator takes over this last session.

Also there are two sub-aims of the last session in STP: making the programme known to the public and convincing sceptics about STP.

3.5.3 Victim support after the STP-programme

How victims are supported after the actual STP-programme differs from country to country. While in some countries there is no structural support for victims and facilitators do not know, how and if victims are guided any further, other countries do have support systems like referral systems and introductions to victim associations.

The lowest intensity of support is to integrate victims into newsletter mailing lists and giving them one phone call after STP is over asking them how they are doing.

“There is no standard except for the “how did you get on?” phone call or via email.”
(NL 04/624)

The highest intensity of support or ongoing cooperation is personal counselling and/or referrals to victim support centres if needed, or initiating further activities like visiting schools together and talking in front of students about their crime experiences.

“If victims want more support or if more rehabilitation is needed, then they receive counselling from me and then I think about ways to refer them to a specialised clinic or counselling centre.” (DE 03/373-375)



4. Summary and Conclusions

This research report is – as mentioned earlier – the result of a thorough analysis of 16 interviews with STP facilitators around Europe. The main aim was to explore how STP has been done in Europe in the past years and how more victims could be attracted to the programme. More specifically the STP-approaches in Hungary, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands were analysed, taking into account country differences.

Concluding this analysis from the perspective of programme facilitators, it can be said that facilitating restorative processes remains a complex task. The three main challenges for facilitators in STP are keeping a balance between task orientation and people orientation, process management / process guiding, and keeping up professional neutrality towards offenders and victims.

The main aims of the STP-programme from the perspective of the facilitators are to start an inner process of change in both offenders and victims, to take actual steps of symbolic restitution or reparation and to make crime effects visible, but also to engage in identity work and to contribute to restorative justice and social peace.

Access to prisons seems to be well established in the participating countries. Most PFI ministries have access to some prisons, however not countrywide. Clear agreements with the prison about the STP-programme in a written form are missing in some cases. The contact person between the prison and the STP-programme varies from both sides: from the side of the prison the prison chaplain, the front office, the prison director, social workers/prison workers or the volunteer coordinators are contact persons, from the side of the STP-programme this can be done by the coordinator, the facilitator or volunteers.

Access to victim associations is rarer, since STP is perceived more as a restorative programme for offenders than for victims. Most facilitators mention not having any contact with victims' associations or centres, while others do have random contact with these associations and mention having marketing connections to them, reaching them via email or newsletter alerts. A step into connected future could be to make stable contacts with victim associations, setting up written agreements with them, trying to work on mutual benefits and closer cooperation structures.

Typically a matching process takes place, trying to find victims with similar crime experiences as the offenders, matching them into suitable STP-groups. Victims are supposed to be emotional, being able to bring across their story with the effects of the crime on their life and bringing across how their lives have been interrupted by the incident. Victims face two main barriers to participation: the fear of entering a prison and the fear of reactions from offenders to their story. Victims are excluded if there a risk of re-traumatisation is detected before the first session. Facilitators report a distinction between common sense risk assessment versus professional risk assessment, while most of them work with common sense risk assessment. In the future more structured forms of risk assessment could be given to facilitators in the programme. If no suitable victims can be found, it is either persisted in looking for victims or they are replaced (by volunteers or a video).

The methods of preparing victims for the STP-programme are interviews, telephone calls or single/multiple appointments. Some facilitators see this work as a fixed component of STP



while for others it does not seem to be clear which parts of preparation work are part of the actual programme. The main aims are to test reaction capabilities in difficult situations or with difficult questions and to check expectations of victims on a scale from low to high: low expectations (only being listened to) and high expectations (being fully restored in STP).

4.1 Recommendations regarding the inclusion of victims into STP

When re-thinking the results of this report, it was mainly aimed at producing practical implications and recommendations for future restorative facilitating of STP, rather than mere academic results.

Taking the results of what our 16 facilitators stated in the interviews into account, several practical recommendations could be deduced regarding future room for improvement of the programme.

First, female prisons could be accessed more consciously, since at the moment the STP-programme is in most countries done more with men than with women. Also involving migrants in the STP-programme, who do not speak the national language, could be a challenge for the future, since most European prisons are over-populated with immigrant offenders. Second, the issue came up in several interviews that a lot of crimes do not have a victim and that offenders who want to take part in restorative justice processes have the problem of not being able to direct restorative action towards a person. Third, the access and participation of offenders with a mental health problem or even a psychiatric diagnosis, which is also common among prisoners in Europe, could be addressed consciously in the STP-programme guide and the Building Bridges handbook.

Since connections to victim associations are generally rated loose by facilitators, fourth, making an effort and trying to make written agreements and connections to victim associations, clearly stating the benefits for victims to take part in STP, could be a useful step of action for PFI. Also, fifth, trying to activate previous victims to search for one next victim and tell them about the programme by word of mouth could be a kind of “assignment” given to previous victims with a positive experience in STP.

Sixth, the advantages for taking part in the programme need to be clearly communicated and used for media communication with victims in the future. It is questionable whether or not a flyer used for preparing offenders in prisons about the programme is methodologically adequate, since most offenders in European prisons have low educational and reading skills. Concerning the matching of victims and offenders the question arises, if offenders are typically rather male with low educational background and victims are rather educated higher and more often female, how this affects the matching process. More research could be done about this in the future.



4.2 Future research

Future research on the European practice of STP is definitely needed, since STP is currently spreading in Europe and will be implemented in “new countries” without any STP experience in 2015 (Portugal, Spain and the Czech Republic). This bears the possibility to evaluate their experiences in parallel and to learn from existing practice.

Future research could – also internationally – focus on the following aspects to bring about change and quality in the STP-programme. Research questions guiding this research could be:

- How do programme leaders measure and define “success” or a programme? How do cooperating prisons and victim associations view “success”?
- Which formal instruments for risk assessment could be useful for STP? When is common sense risk assessment enough and when is it not enough anymore?
- How could the participation rate in Session 8 be increased by members of the local community?
- How could preparatory work for victims be improved in order to make the acquisition of victims for PFI organisations easier in the future?
- Which forms of after-care are appropriate for victim’s care after STP is finished?



5. ANNEXES

References / Read more about STP

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STP Original Session Guide

Session 1: Introduction to STP

Session 2: What is crime?

Session 3: Responsibility

Session 4: Confession and repentance

Session 5: Forgiveness

Session 6: Making amends

Session 7: Towards reconciliation

Session 8: Celebration



Interview Guide

Introduction

As you all might know, the Sycamore Tree Programme (STP) originated from North and South America with its core of bringing together unrelated victims and offenders for the purpose of restorative justice. With this research we would like to find out how STP has been spread and used across Europe already and what opinions current and former STP facilitators have about the programme.

Questions

1. How are victims selected for STP?
2. Where do you usually find victims? How do victims find out about STP? (e.g. newsletters, snowball system, personal connections?)
3. What crimes have they typically experienced? What groups of crimes are common for your victims?
4. How would you describe their fears, apprehensions and expectations towards STP? How do you deal with these fears, apprehensions and expectations before STP starts?
5. When you speak to a victim before STP starts, which words do you use to describe STP? Which language do you use? What are you especially sensitive to and why?
6. When or in which case might a victim not qualify for STP? When would you reject someone? (e.g. too high risk for re-traumatisation) Has this ever happened? How did you inform them/handle it?
7. From your experience in STP, how would you describe the range of victims you have worked with in the last years? How would you describe their diversity in terms of age, gender, religion, and educational background? Why do you think some sign up more often than others?
8. How would you describe a “typical” victim for STP? How long have they usually lived with their crime experience until they take part in STP? Which steps have they usually taken for personal healing/restoration?
9. What is the importance of victims for the STP programme?
10. Which advantages does it have for the victim to take part in STP?
11. Are they financially remunerated for taking part (small fee, travel costs etc.)?
12. Imagine a STP programme is planned for next month and no victim can be found for STP, what happens?
13. Which kind of preparatory work do you do with victims? What happens between the first contact with the victim and the actual participation in the session? (steps in between) How do victims react to these steps?
14. Is there any form of (formal or informal) risk assessment? (e.g. risk of re-traumatisation) How and by whom is it done? Explain.
15. Let's talk about the offenders now. How are offenders selected in your programme?
16. Where do you usually find offenders? How do offenders find out about STP? (e.g. newsletters, snowball system, personal connections, prison management?)
17. Which crimes have they typically committed? What groups of crimes are common for your offenders?
18. How would you describe their fears, apprehensions and expectations towards STP? How do you deal with these fears, apprehensions and expectations before STP starts?



19. When you speak to an offender before STP starts, which words do you use to describe STP? Which language do you use? What are you especially sensitive to and why?
20. When or in which case might an offender not qualify for STP? When would you reject someone? (e.g. specific crimes) Has this ever happened? How did you inform them/handle it?
21. From your experience in STP, how would you describe the range of offenders you have worked with in the last years? How would you describe their diversity in terms of age, gender, religion, and educational background? Why do you think some sign up more often than others?
22. How would you describe a “typical” offender willing to take part in STP? How long have they usually been imprisoned until they take part in STP? Which steps have they usually taken for personal healing/restoration?
23. How would you describe the personality of a “typical” offender willing to take part in STP? (e.g. openness etc.)
24. Imagine a STP programme is planned for next month and no offenders can be found for STP, what happens?
25. Which kind of preparatory work do you do with offenders? What happens between the first contact with the offender and the actual participation in the session? (steps in between) How do offenders react to these steps?
26. Is there any form of (formal or informal) risk assessment with offenders? (e.g. risk of violence etc.) How and by whom is it done? Explain.
27. What do you think STP is trying to achieve?
28. Which sessions from the original STP programme do you do in exactly the same way as the original US-version (8 sessions) and which parts have you modified and why? (see annex with list of sessions)
29. How do offenders typically react to victims in the sessions? Which emotions, change of atmosphere etc. can you observe when they meet?
30. How do victims typically react to offenders in the sessions? Which emotions, change of atmosphere etc. can you observe when they meet?
31. How is the victim introduced to the group?
32. What kind of restitution / restoration have you seen in the last years? Give examples. What institutional or societal barriers exist that prevent or limit this restitution / restoration?
33. What do you as a facilitator do in difficult situations between victims and offenders? Why do difficult situations occur?
34. How would you determine if an STP session is “successful”?
35. How would you be able to tell if one STP is more successful than another STP? Which differences would you see?
36. How would you describe practical issues, like time foreseen for different activities? How appropriate is the time frame in STP? Which activities take longer, which shorter and what would need to be changed in your opinion?
37. What happens at the celebration/last session?
38. Why are others (family, community members) invited to the last session? Which kind of restitution takes place there? How is the benefit of the programme communicated in this last session?
39. How do victims and offenders keep in touch after STP? In which cases is this desired? Why or why not?



40. How are victims supported after the actual STP programme? Which support measures do you implement and how do they work (intensity of support, kind of support, etc.)?
41. How do you think victims are helped with this programme? How could this be communicated best to other victims?
42. What are the main challenges for facilitators in your opinion?
43. What do you do to access prisons? Which steps do you take to involve them?
44. Which connection do you have to victim support centres? (local, regional, public, private, self-help groups etc.)
45. What is your professional background? Does it help you in STP? If yes, how does it help you?
46. Do you do STP alone or with another facilitator / person? How do you meet?
47. How would you describe the relationship between STP facilitators? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing STP alone or together?
48. Describe your experience with an easy STP group. Why was it easy?
49. Describe your experience with a difficult STP group. Why was it difficult?
50. Which teaching methods do you use? Which ones would you never use for STP and why?
51. There are some best practice standards for restorative justice in Europe and some EU Member States like for example the “Best Practice Guidance for Restorative Practice”³. Are you aware of these standards in restorative justice? To what degree do you use these standards in STP?
52. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your STP experience?

³ http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resource/best_practice_guidance_for_restorative_practice_2011/

