



Strategic Plan 2025 - 2029

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1. Introduction

This document presents a strategy which will guide the work of Restorative Practices Ireland for the next three years.

- **Part One** presents our vision, mission and values. It provides a brief outline of Restorative Practices (RP) and the research that establishes RP as an effective evidenced-based approach to managing difference and strengthening relationships. It also explains who we are and how RPI is governed.
- **Part Two** presents the policy and practice context in which RPI is developing.
- **Part Three** outlines the activities we will undertake to realise our vision and the outcomes we expect over the next three years.

1.1. Our Vision and Values

Our overall vision is that Ireland develops as a restorative society that believes in and integrates restorative practices as standard in developing and sustaining strong and happy communities.

RPI's work is underpinned by a set of core restorative values including respect, fairness, inter-connectedness, personal accountability, inclusiveness, collaboration and problem-solving.

1.2. Our Mission and Core Objectives

Restorative Practices Ireland (RPI) promotes and supports the use of restorative approaches across all sectors of the community in Ireland locally, regionally and nationally.

RPI has the following Core Objectives:

- To raise awareness of restorative practices and to inform national policies;
- To provide a coherent, collective voice for restorative practitioners, with a strong, active membership base;
- To promote high quality restorative practices;
- To gather and disseminate evidence and monitor related developments;
- To support and advocate for the ongoing development of RP
- To establish mechanisms to enable and promote reflective, professional practices;
- To support members in their professional practice and development;
- To provide an RP training course endorsement and validation system;
- To provide an RP Trainers endorsement and validation system; and
- To embed a shared understanding of high quality, effective RP, across relevant organisations, sectors and stakeholders.

1.3. Why Restorative Practices?

Restorative Practices (RP) help us sustain strong, happy communities by actively developing good relationships, by preventing the escalation of conflict, by celebrating difference and repairing harm caused in a healthy manner.

RP have their roots in traditional Justice systems like the Brehon law. However, RP has a wider reach than restorative justice which deals mostly with providing an effective response to crime or harm caused. It can be seen from the Continuum of Restorative Practices (Figure One below) that RP offer a wide variety of tools, pro-active, preventive, introspective and responsive, to build and maintain relationships, develop communication skills, prevent conflict and harm and deal with them in a healthy way. Other key aspects of RP include an emphasis on the importance of dialogue and fair process, demonstrating and maintaining respect for each other, and developing social collaboration and supports.

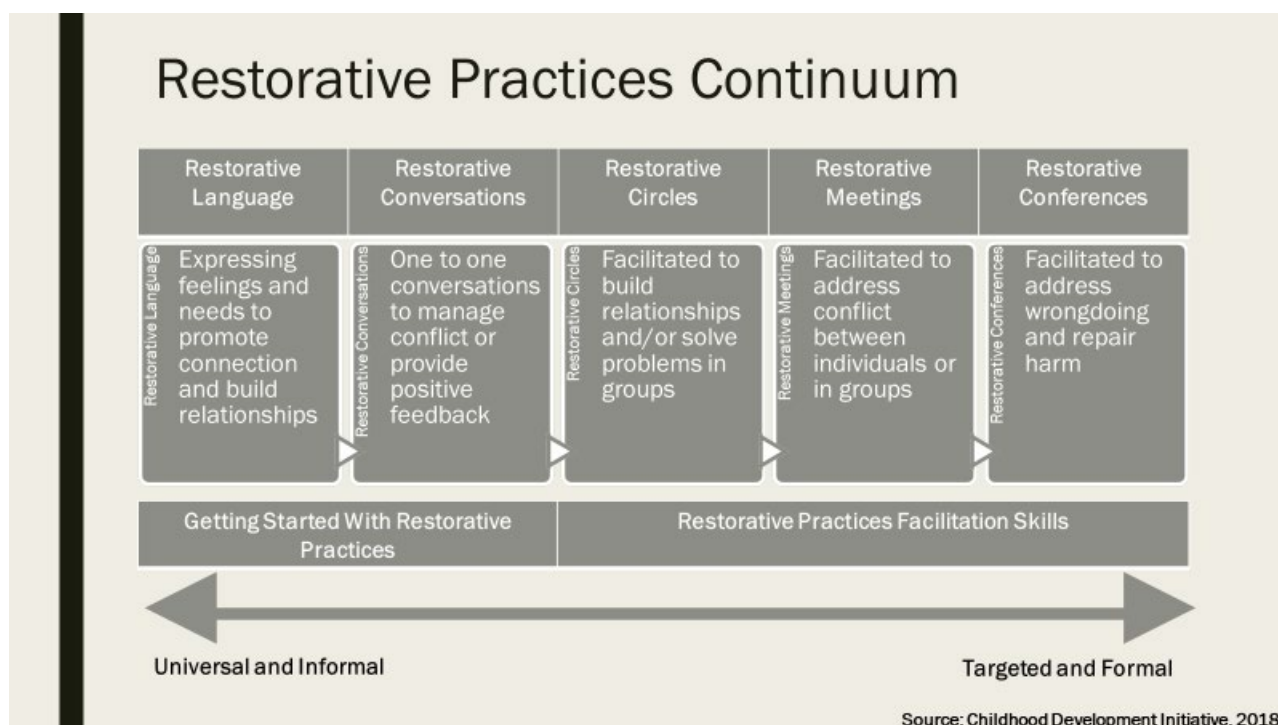


Figure One: Continuum of Restorative Practices

There is ample anecdotal and researched evidence to demonstrate the benefits from implementation of restorative practices in all service interventions with children and families and among many sectors of community life. The results of three implementation evaluations (Hull, Tallaght and Leeds) are produced in Appendix I.

1.4. Who We Are

Restorative Practices Ireland (RPI) is a partnership of agencies, communities and individuals and is open to all those who have a role or interest in the strategic management and development of restorative practices. The current steering committee

includes representation from the justice, community development, education, mediation, academic, childcare and social care sectors. The list of members of the steering committee is attached in Appendix II. We are working collaboratively with members of the Restorative Practices Forum, Northern Ireland (RPFNI).

1.5. Governance

In 2013, RPI was established on an informal basis, and was operated for the next ten years by a Steering Committee and a number of sub-committees and working groups. Over this time, RPI activities were funded by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), which was established in 2007

It became clear however, that RPI could not continue with small grants from CDI and between 2017 and 2021, a series of consultation processes were undertaken to identify strengths, areas for development and challenges relating to the strategic embedding and promotion of restorative processes. In line with feedback from these consultation processes, and feedback from RPI Regional Meetings, RPI moved to establish itself as a dedicated, professional support agency, with legal status and agreed governance structures and democratic processes that ensure that the membership inform and shape the organisation. RPI was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in January 2023.

2. Development of RPI in the current context

The current policy and practice context emphasises clearly how the establishment and development of RPI as an independent network for the support and growth of restorative approaches in Ireland is necessary and meaningful. Currently, RPI's mailing list includes more than 700 stakeholders drawn from individuals and organisations from across the country.

2.1. Policy context

The cross-departmental policy '**Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures**' (BOBF) provides an important mechanism to facilitate the interdisciplinary and multi-agency approaches which underpin restorative practices. The establishment of a national support structure for the quality assurance and development of RP will make a significant contribution to the achievement of Government commitments in this national policy framework for children and young people which was updated in 2025¹.

¹ See: <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/better-outcomes-brighter-futures-indicator-set/>

The **Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027**² has a clear emphasis on the benefits of restorative approaches. The principles underlying the plan state that Restorative Processes should be available for victims of crime when appropriate. In the area of prevention and education, restorative practices in schools are to be supported. Restorative processes are to be offered to young offenders even if they are not eligible for the Garda Youth Diversion Programme (GYDP), and the GYDP is to be reviewed and strengthened to offer more restorative practices.

The Youth Justice Strategy also recommends extending the use of restorative and personal development approaches prior to a Court hearing to give the Court the option of a strike out. Lastly, it suggests a review of the Children Act 2001 to include wider implementation of Family Group Conferencing, which is a restorative process.

The Department of Education's procedures to prevent and address bullying behaviour for Primary and Post Primary Schools, **Bí Cineálta 2024**³ recommends the use of RP for preventing and addressing bullying behaviour and emphasises that teachers need to be trained appropriately in order to use this approach.

In the field of Restorative Justice, two other pieces of legislation and policy are significant:

- The **Victims of Crime Act 2017**⁴ provides for Restorative Justice Schemes, where they exist, to be made available for victims under certain conditions. The Act defines a restorative justice scheme and specifies the conditions that must be met for victims to avail of the scheme;
- The **current Programme for Government 2025**⁵ commits the Government to continuing to roll out the voluntary restorative justice programs nationally.

The development of RPI can very effectively support the implementation of these policy priorities.

² available online at <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/youth-justice-strategy-2021-2027-a4f019c4-6e87-4935-be3a-11265c134d07.pdf>

³ Available online at <https://oide.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Bi-Cinealta.pdf>

⁴ available online at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/28/enacted/en/pdf>

⁵ available online at <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/programme-for-government-securing-irelands-future.pdf>

2.2.Practice Context

In the field of education, important progress has been made in recent years. Awareness of the benefits of RP in schools has grown considerably and the number of teachers trained is increasing exponentially each year. To date almost 800 schools across the country have adopted RP as a whole school way of working to build and maintain healthy relationships between staff and students and among staff themselves, and to deal with any conflicts arising.

At community level, various communities are implementing RP projects. To give a few examples: The Early Learning Initiative at the National College of Ireland in Dublin's inner city is coordinating the implementation of RP in schools, with the Gardaí and in community organisations. In Clondalkin, Blueskies is delivering RP Training to schools, community groups and parents locally. Louth Leader Partnership is funding the implementation of RP at community level. The Childhood Development Initiative runs an RP Programme in Tallaght and trains RP Trainers across the country.

In the criminal justice field, the Garda Youth Diversion Programme (GYDP) is training all GYDP staff and volunteers in restorative practices and the Probation Service is expanding its restorative justice work year on year.

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3. The Future: activities, targets and timelines

RPI was established in order to enable the development of an independent organisation which would drive and support quality, evidence-informed practices aimed at maintaining, restoring and healing relationships.

RPI's vision and mission is being achieved through the activities set out below, underpinned by the establishment and development of a dedicated, professional, membership-based organisation, with legal and charitable status.

3.1. Activities

The planned principal activities are outlined in the description of activities below and have been centrally informed by the consultations noted above and consideration of the current policy priorities for Government.

RPI aims to promote and support the use of restorative approaches in communities, schools, social services and the criminal justice system nationally, locally and regionally. Our activities support the development and implementation of a strategy designed to embed these practices in Irish culture and across the range of services that cater to individuals from the cradle to the grave, including their utilisation as a prevention and early intervention measure, and along the continuum of interventions, up to and including crisis situations.

Table 1: RPI Activities 2025 - 2029

Objectives	Activities
To establish RPI as an independent organisation which operates to support the development and integration of RP	• Develop and implement Business Plan. • Agree on evaluation process and outcomes to be measured. • Recruit volunteers for sub-committees. • Seek support from policy makers for the development of RPI. • Source funding. • Recruit Coordinator. • Develop membership base.

Table 1: RPI Activities 2025 - 2029

Objectives	Activities
• To raise awareness of restorative practices and to inform national policies; • To provide a coherent, collective voice for restorative practitioners, with a strong, active membership base; • To promote high quality restorative practices; • To monitor outcomes deriving from effective RP; • To advocate on behalf of members; • To establish mechanisms to enable and promote reflective, professional practices; • To support members in their professional practice and development; • To provide an RP training course endorsement and validation system; • To Provide an RP Trainer endorsement and validation system; • To Provide a restorative practitioner endorsement and validation system; • and • To embed a shared understanding of high quality, effective RP, across relevant organisations, sectors and stakeholders.	<u>Develop membership base</u> • Establish short term working goals to enable member engagement. • Develop promotional material and operational structures to manage membership. <u>Develop reflective practice structures</u> • Support the development and sustainability of regional structures for ongoing networking and reflective practice. • Provide an annual CPD programme. • Organise annual regional meetings, consultations and thematic groups. • Organise members Communities of Practice , tailored for target groups and inclusive (e.g. school leadership, youth workers, etc.). • Organise one seminar per year. • Organise one all Ireland conference every two years. <u>Communicate</u> • Establish a tailored communication strategy: updated website, social media presence. Identify different audiences. <u>Network and advocate</u> • Identify prioritised stakeholders. • Network with RP champion politicians and follow up on Programme for Government. • Respond to interesting developments and pro-actively seek opportunities to promote RP. <u>Research</u> • Gather research and best practices from around the world, adapt to Ireland and disseminate to stakeholders. • Support monitoring and evaluation processes. • Gather case studies, data and evidence from Ireland and disseminate. <u>Establish Quality Assurance, endorsement and accreditation mechanisms</u> • Promote RPI's Quality Assurance Framework among practitioners, trainers and organisations. • Establish and implement an RP Trainer endorsement process. • Promote the integration of RP Modules into pre- and post-qualification education and training courses for all professionals.

The logic model below for RPI outlines the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities.

3.2. Logic Model

Table 2: Restorative Practices Ireland Logic Model 2025 - 2029

What we would like to change	What the research tells us	What we plan to do		What we expect to occur			
		Inputs Resources	Activities	Outputs	Short term Outcomes Years 1-2	Intermediate Outcomes Years 3 – 4	Long term Outcomes Years 5+
•Lack of awareness among policy makers and the stakeholders about the benefits of RP. •Identified need for a national structure for the support of RP practitioners, trainers, training courses and organisations. •Need for nationally recognised RP Quality Assurance (QA) infrastructure and processes for restorative practitioners, trainers, training courses and organisations. •Challenges related to an integrated implementation of RP in organisations.	• RP found to be an effective tool for building and maintaining relationships. • positive outcomes where organisations or communities take on a restorative approach. • Using RP results in improved outcomes for children and young people in schools, care of the State detention centres and for victims of crime and offenders.	• Funding. • Staff. • Time. • Materials and equipment. • Technology. • Organisational development expertise. • Specific expertise, e.g. service evaluations.	• Develop and implement Business Plan. • Source funding. • Recruit Coordinator. • Develop membership base and reflective practice structures. • Establish a communication strategy. • Advocate and develop policy makers network. • Document best practices, research and disseminate learning. • Establish Quality Assurance (QA), endorsement and accreditation mechanisms for RP trainers.	• Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status established. • Business Plan agreed. • Funding secured. • Coordinator in place. • Membership established. • Regional structure, CPD, trainings, CoP, seminars and conference organised. • Website, social media accounts and mailing list updated. • Political presence established. • Research and best practices disseminated. • Quality Assurance mechanisms established. • Course endorsement and accreditation established.	• Higher quality practice. • Increased awareness among policy makers and stakeholders of RP. • Increased use of RP among professionals, community members, individuals, families, young people. • A coherent, collective voice for restorative practitioners, with a strong, active membership base.	• Wide awareness among policy makers and stakeholders of RP. • Wide use of RP among professionals' individuals, families, young people. • RP training and education fully integrated into pre- and post-qualification education and training courses for all professionals.	• RP is 'business as usual 'across all sectors. • All individuals in Ireland - in particular young people- are engaged with restoratively by the adults in their lives. • Improved outcomes for children, young people and communities as a result of RP. • Professional associations and support organisations recognise RP as a core skill for the continuing professional development of their members.
		Evaluation Short Term			Evaluation Long Term		

4. Conclusion

This document presents the Strategic Plan that RPI has agreed on to promote and develop restorative practices. Restorative approaches have been found to be effective in communities organisations and institutions; the principles of RP are readily learned and utilised; they are flexible and sensible; they build on other approaches and training, and can be easily translated across settings. The approaches utilised in RP result in a range of outcomes for a variety of populations, which can support the delivery of key objectives in various policies.

RPI's consultation with practitioners identified what practitioners need in order to maintain the quality and focus of their practices and to develop these further, both geographically and sectorally. This Strategic Plan seeks to address these identified needs and progress a strategic, sustainable and high quality approach to the delivery, utilisation and integration of restorative practices. It provides a monitoring framework, guidance on targets, indicators and timelines, and sets out how we intend to achieve our overall vision over the next three years.

Appendices

Appendix I - Summary of three research projects: Hull (UK) Tallaght (Dublin) and Leeds (UK)

Research from Hull (Mirsky, 2009⁶, Carlile, 2008⁷) has demonstrated a wide range of benefits arising from the integration of restorative practices across professional disciplines and sectors, including education, children and family services and justice. These include:

- Increased stability in foster care placements and residential care;
- Increased resolution of community disputes and reduction in community disorder;
- Reduced anti-social behaviour among young people;
- Reduced bullying between young people;
- Improved attendance and morale among staff of services dealing with children and young people;
- Improved school attendance (primary and secondary);
- Improved school attainment (primary and secondary);
- Reduction in the number of young people categorised as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training); and
- Improved attendance and morale among staff of services working with children and families.

Research into a community-based restorative practices programme in Tallaght, Dublin (Fives et al, 2013⁸) found that, after just two years of implementation, a restorative approach was being used frequently across a range of sectors in Tallaght West, with 75% of those surveyed reporting that they had experienced RP being used at work, home or in the community. In addition:

- For those who had undertaken RP training, there were significant improvements in their ability to manage conflict – 87% reported being better able to manage conflict and 82% found that they were better able to manage other difficulties by using a restorative approach.
- In terms of prevention, 43% of those surveyed reported experiencing a reduction in disputes, with the greatest gain made in the reduction of disputes at work.
- Prevention of conflict was supported by the reported improvements in a variety of relationships. 61% of those surveyed reported that taking a restorative approach had improved relationships between service providers and service users. 47% reported improved relationships with their work colleagues as a result of using RP and an equal proportion of those surveyed (47%) said that relationships with their family members had improved through using RP. The lowest (yet still significant) gain in this respect was the reported improvement in relationships with neighbours (14%).

⁶ Mirsky, L. (2009) *Hull, UK: Toward a Restorative City*. Restorative Practices E-Forum, International Institute for Restorative Practice.

⁷ Carlile, P., (2008). *The City of Hull: Riverside Project*. Hull: Hull Centre for Restorative Practices and IIRPUK.

⁸ Fives, A., Keenaghan, C., Canavan, J., Moran, L. and Coen, L. (2013) *Evaluation of the Restorative Practice Programme of the Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

- 36% of those surveyed said that they were more willing to report crime and/or anti-social behaviour as a result of restorative approaches being employed across the community.

Leeds Children's Services introduced restorative practices to social workers in 2014 with a £1m investment, and recorded a saving of £4m in year one alone. Following a Government funded programme in 2015, Leeds Children's Services trained all their social workers in restorative approaches. The evaluation of the programme (Mason and al, 2017⁹) found significant reductions in:

- The number of children in the care system (21% reduction compared to 1% increase nationally);
- The number of child protection plans (from 640 to 580); and
- The number of children in need (5 times greater reduction than average)

The evaluation also reported a saving of £755 per family engaged by Leeds Children's Services due to fewer referrals into care, fewer case conferences and more effective social work interventions leading to cases closing more quickly.

⁹ Mason, P., Ferguson, H., Morris, K., Monton, T. and Robin, S. 2017 Leeds Family Valued. Evaluation Report, July 2017. Department for Education.

Appendix II: RPI Steering Committee Membership

Noren Duggan	Co-Chair
Terry O'Neill	Co-Chair
Catherine Ashe	RP Consultant
Claire Casey	Childhood Development Initiative
Dan Hurley (Secretary)	Community Development Worker
Vera Hogan	Mediators Institute of Ireland
Róisín Doran	Restorative Practices Forum Northern Ireland
Catherine O'Connell	Facing Forward
Martin Reilly	Retired Prison Governor
Gwenn McKenna	An Garda Síochána
Richie Walshe	RP Quality Specialist and Oide Associate