

# Book review

## **Community Reparation for Young Offenders: Perceptions, Policy and Practice**

**Pamment, N.**  
**Palgrave Macmillan**  
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Restorative justice (RJ) despite being difficult to define has been described as a positive way of resolving conflict and repairing harm. It continues to be promoted by academics, policy makers and practitioners alike as an “effective” way of reducing crime. The current Conservative government, for example, has promoted the use of RJ and appears committed to introducing it on a greater scale, throughout the system. The Ministry of Justice (2016a) recently published an analysis of what works with young people who offend, and in it highlighted the positive impact of restorative practices. Similarly outlined in Charlie Taylor’s interim report was the benefit of RJ specifically as a form of diversion (Ministry of Justice, 2016b). What is more, the special issue on RJ in *Safer Communities* considered its application in a number of specific contexts, and debated practical, theoretical issues. For example, one paper examined the implementation of pre-sentence RJ in the Crown Courts (Jones and Creaney, 2015). However what has been absent from critique, it seems, is one rather niche aspect of RJ – that of community-based reparation.

Inappropriately managed it can add to the harm experienced undermining the scope of its positive application to practice. Properly managed however, when young people and their supervising officers see something positive resulting from the work undertaken, it can increase victim awareness and improve young people’s employability skills, for example. For this

aspiration to become a reality, however, offenders should accept some responsibility and engage positively and creatively in a meaningful process, as the author of this book we are reviewing highlights. What is also said in the book is that community-based RJ can assist in the promotion of positive outcomes and reduce re-offending.

The book is split into five chapters. In chapter 1 the author provides an overview of the development of restorative practice and sets the scene well, provoking discussion and igniting debate on the rather neglected – in the academic world at least – area of community-based reparation. Here the author notes how following the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (and subsequent legislative reforms) RJ occupies a rather special place in the contemporary justice system. In this chapter the author details his rather impressive, in terms of both breadth and depth, methodological approach where rigour is quite clearly demonstrated. In chapter 2 the author detailed the “historical, political and legislative development” of community-based reparation in the adult and youth fields. Principally the author notes the necessity to re-discover its rehabilitative potential that seems to have gone awry. Chapter 3 details the “evidence base”. Notwithstanding the issue that some re-offending data referred to can be disputed, the author highlights significant gaps in terms of application of research findings to practice. Chapter 4 covers the findings of the primary research undertaken by the author. Indeed we would go as far as to say that the findings or claims to truth are somewhat robust. Critically discussed here is the somewhat “ineffectiveness” of the organisation and delivery of much existing community-based reparation. In the final chapter the author puts forward specific recommendations to overcome this and also debates the implications for practice. The author has provided a very useful, quite unique, clear diagram

to illustrate the key ingredients of “effective” community-based reparation here – which we are sure will be of benefit to readers of the book.

Critically Nicholas Pamment explains persuasively in this book how community-based reparation is popular among sentencers but crucially argues that it should not be a political tool used as a way of demonstrating “tough sentencing” – which has tended to be the case. He also notes how community-based reparation should not be tokenistic where people who have offended gain little from the process. Such tokenism is also of no benefit to victims and the wider community, the author explains.

Very little has been published critiquing community-based reparation. This book then is a breath of fresh air and one that is very relevant for policy makers, academics, students and professionals alike. It offers a sort of blueprint regarding what “effective” community-based reparation comprises.

Importantly it is a book that is an easily accessible read for the non-academic type – this is no easy task.

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