

## Notes of Judge Fred McElrea for launch of Restorative Justice Centre at AUT on 15 Sept 2006

This is a great day for restorative justice - and for this country.

As from today, the restorative justice movement can claim a solid base for teaching, training and research in a country that has been a world leader in RJ for over 15 years.

- Your Excellency as a man of the law is especially well placed to do us the great honour of officiating at this launch.
- Minister of Justice, your officials have carried some of the burden of training practitioners in recent years and promoting good standards, so you speak today for a Ministry that has been a key player.
- Commissioner of Police, your Youth Aid officers have been prominent and professional players in the Youth Justice sector since family group conferences started in 1989.
- Judge Thorburn, you are present not only as a representative of the judiciary – and one who has contributed a great deal to restorative justice over many years – but as a Board Member of Prison Fellowship, an organisation which in many ways has become the modern voice of the Churches and a real leader of public opinion in the matter of penal reform.
- Representatives of the voluntary sector, you were the first flag bearers and navigators. You are still the constant factor, the rock.
- Naida Glavish, you (and Matt Hakiaha) represent tikanga Maori, one of the great streams that flows into the restorative pool.

Now we complete the circle, with a modern institution of learning and research willing to underpin the future growth and development of RJ in this country.

What does it mean?

The term “restorative justice” applies to an approach to conflict resolution which brings together the parties most directly affected by wrongdoing and to encourage them with the support of their relevant communities to address the harm done and try and agree what might be done to put right the wrong.

Restorative justice has both indigenous and modern roots. Compared with the common western form of criminal justice, the restorative intention is:

- to produce an agreed outcome rather than one imposed by the State,
- to heal the wounds of the parties caused by their conflict, and
- to address ways of avoiding such problems in the future.

Although punishment has a role to play it does not have the primary place accorded to it in the usual court-based system. The main emphasis is on putting right the wrong.

This Centre is the joint effort of many people, from different sectors, as reflected on the Board of Governance – Victim Support, restorative justice facilitators, tikanga Maori, secondary teachers, Government agencies, the judiciary, students and higher academics, the Churches, the Parole Board, and so on.

Some of them cannot be here today – like Judge Carruthers who is detained in Manawatu Prison (chairing a meeting of the Parole Board!) and sends his best wishes.

The RJC will meet three pressing needs, being those for:

Training -- independent, interdisciplinary training for rj practitioners

Education -- the development of an academic framework that reflects both NZ's unique contributions to RJ and the growing international literature on restorative practices

Research -- that is based on the experience of major RJ users and helps identify best practice

The timing is perfect for the launch of a RJC at tertiary level in NZ.

- Our heavy dependency on the use of prisons is under challenge.
- The 2002 legislation for Sentencing, Parole and Victims Rights encouraged RJ to play a key role in providing more imaginative and victim-centred solutions to the effects of crime.
- However, the value of restorative practices is also being realised in schools, the workplace, and in community relationships.
- All of these sectors need access to a sound philosophical framework and skilled personnel as they plan and implement restorative solutions to conflict.

The climate is ideal for such a step.

- RJ has the support of all main political parties, expressed before the last election, and is a non-political movement.
- It is supported by voluntary groups such as Victim Support and the Churches.
- NZ's international reputation as a leader in this field gives it credibility in forging links with major players overseas.

AUT was the logical choice for a tertiary centre for RJ, because of its excellent track record as a contemporary University with a strong commitment to applied research, education and training.

And so, on an auspicious day, we can pause and say, thank you AUT, thank you all who have contributed to the restorative pool of wisdom so far. Now much greater things lie ahead.