

Practice used in rehabilitation catching on among various groups

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An intervention technique known as restorative practice is gaining traction in organisations as wide-ranging as primary schools and prisons.

The practice, commonly used in rehabilitating offenders and wayward youth and children, involves getting troublemakers to engage in guided conversations with their victims and families.

This is a far cry from traditional disciplinary methods where perpetrators are simply isolated and punished, noted experts.

It is clearly catching on, with 77

schools, social service organisations and government agencies having been trained in the technique by Lutheran Community Care Services (LCCS) as at the end of last year.

These organisations are also intensifying efforts to embed this practice in their cultures, said Mr Justin Mui, executive director of LCCS, a social service organisation that has been accredited since 2012 to train people in restorative practice.

About 90 staff members in the Singapore Prison Service were trained last year compared with fewer than 10 when the LCCS programme started in 2012, he noted.

Apart from the disciplinary aspect, the practice also focuses on building strong relationships within the community through frequent conference sessions between community members, said Mr Mui.

It has yielded positive results, said social workers.

Staff at the Singapore Boys' Hostel have dealt with rule-breakers using restorative practice principles, said Ms Yeo Bee Lian, head of the hostel.

When youngsters break rules, the hostel's staff get them to interact with their peers and employees in structured sessions to let them see how their actions have af-

fected others around them.

"The key for change is when the youth understand the impact of their actions, which is better than relying on the traditional approach of just punishing them with detention," noted Ms Yeo.

At schools, too, the practice has helped teachers better manage wayward students.

A secondary school teacher – who cannot be named to protect the identity of the boy – said a restorative practice conference session held in June had proved pivotal in helping his wayward charge face up to his actions.

The 14-year-old student was al-

ready in a programme for at-risk youth when he stole money again – this time from the teacher.

The LCCS organised a conference session for the boy, his parents and the teacher, during which the adults shared how they felt about the boy's behaviour.

"He really regretted his actions because he broke down crying... It was a very powerful moment," said the teacher, who added that the boy's behaviour has been much improved and he has stopped getting into trouble.

The practice goes beyond schools and institutions.

Earlier this year, restorative prac-

tice principles were introduced into the family justice system to help families who are going through divorce cope better through processes such as mediation, said Mr Desmond Lee, Minister for Social and Family Development.

Mr Lee told a two-day restorative practice conference that ended last Friday: "There is great potential for restorative practices to bring about positive outcomes – for families, young people and other important relationships – as we collectively pursue this difficult but necessary road to true and genuine reconciliation."

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