



## Restorative Practices *Aotearoa*

### **WHY WE EXIST**

Restorative Practices Aotearoa (RPA) has often struggled to define where it fits in the RJ world, a world made up of practitioners, provider groups, funding organisations, supporters both nationally and internationally and the government ministries and agencies working in restorative practices such as Oranga Tamariki, Police, Corrections, Education, Health MSD and central to RPA, the Ministry of Justice.

#### Background:

Prior to Restorative Justice Aotearoa (RJA), the forerunner to Restorative Practices Aotearoa being formed in 2006, the Ministry of Justice were supporting and providing assistance to provider groups and were looking at an organisation that would support and work with provider groups in delivering the conferences that the Ministry of Justice were now funding provider groups to deliver. This resulted in the Incorporation of RJA in 2006. The Ministry of Justice along with practitioners and provider groups had prior to the formation of RJA produced the Restorative Practice Best Practice in New Zealand booklet in 2004 and Restorative Practice guidelines.

This relationship has continued and grown over the last decade with MOJ and RJA/RPA developing a relationship that is based on trust and a combined understanding that the objectives of both organisations are generally the same. From the broad general population based outcomes such as offenders are held to account and outcomes of safer communities and increased trust in the justice system defined in the Ministry of Justice Statement of Intent to the RPA Strategic Plan Mission statement of “to foster promote and support high quality restorative practices and services that are relevant and meaningful across diverse cultures and have the potential to enhance the lives of all individuals and communities.” Our intentions and goals are the same.

Finding our path, direction and *raison d'être* has taken a decade of deliberations and trial and error. We have made some mistakes and have learnt from them, we have listened to and acted on wonderful advice from very knowledgeable and caring individuals, groups, communities, whanau, hapu and iwi. All of these interactions have built the fabric of who we are as an organisation today, and shaped where we are going. This is clearly defined in our Strategic Plan 2017 – 2022. This Plan has a clear vision and direction and it defines who we are and what our vision is.

Alongside of RPA throughout our growth and development have been the Ministry of Justice. We have a large Government organisation, supporting and promoting a major change in the criminal justice sector, one that has to the best of my knowledge never been implemented or tried to such a degree anywhere in the world. Placing victims at the centre

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of a process, giving a meaningful and powerful voice to victims was a new and forward thinking initiative. Providing a safe environment for victims, offenders and family to engage in conversation was a new concept in the adult criminal justice system. A totally foreign concept and idea for many who knew a justice system that was only punitive.

It is often quoted and correctly so, that Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices have evolved from flax roots communities. What is not often mentioned is that in Aotearoa the Ministry of Justice have been proactive and supportive of the movement from a very early point in the development of the RJ movement and particularly in the adult criminal justice system.

The relationship between MOJ and RPA is one where there are varying levels around how we engage, what we engage on, and expectations of each of the organisations. What we have developed over the past decade is a high level of trust.

MOJ fund RPA and have done since prior to 2006, this has been a contractual arrangement where MOJ have funded RPA to deliver various outcomes. It is this money that has kept RPA viable and able to deliver the services we have it has also enabled RPA to grow to its current shape today. Previously we were a membership base of provider groups and have recently reformed into an individual membership organisation. This has provided us with some challenges as the funding from MOJ is tagged to provide support for provider groups. As we have worked through this with MOJ it has become clear that we are able to deliver the services expected from MOJ to the provider groups without compromising our individual membership base.

What is our relationship with MOJ?

We are a contracted provider to MOJ who are required to deliver specific outcomes in line with our contractual agreement with MOJ.

We sit in a defined position where we are contracted to MOJ to support provider groups in attaining the contractual arrangements they have with MOJ. As a membership organisation and in lieu of a better description an umbrella or peak body organisation we support and represent our members and the provider groups through discussion and advocacy with MOJ.

How can this work?

We have built up over the past decade as stated before, a high level of trust with MOJ, we ensure that we engage in manner that is respectful of our relationship, forthright and honest in our discussions with MOJ on behalf of our members.

We are not a part of MOJ and as a membership organisation work hard to ensure our member's needs are being met and we are supporting our members in delivering high quality restorative practices and services. This position is one that we are comfortable in and are totally aware of the difficulty, real and otherwise that this position brings. There are times where our advocacy for members may be challenged, there are times where our support for MOJ may be challenged and there are times where our position might be difficult for MOJ and our own members at the same time. What is the most important aspect of the relationship we have with both members and MOJ? It is the trust and respect that we engage all parties with. We are honest and respectful in conversation and approach. We have no agenda's other than what is clearly defined in our strategic plan, this plan has been the product of many conversations over many years and clearly defines who we are and why we exist.

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It is no coincidence that all of our key objectives and critical success factors are aligned and relate to the Ministry of Justice outcomes in their Statement of Intent.

We at RPA and MOJ have the same goals and aspirations. I would suggest that they are also the same for the provider groups and our members.

Nga mihi

Mike Hinton  
General Manager