



## **Spotlight on ClearCut Communication – part of County Durham Youth Offending Service**

*ClearCut Communication, part of County Durham Youth Offending Service (CDYOS), was the joint winner of the SLCN Innovation Award at the 2017 Shine a Light Awards.*

*Since March 2014, CDYOS has employed a seconded speech and language therapist with the vision of becoming a speech, language and communication need (SLCN) service. ClearCut Communication is a communication-friendly resource that is, uniquely, used with both the victim of crime and the young person who has offended.*

Using communication-friendly language, sentence structure, images and colour coding, the resource takes both parties through the process of considering how the offence has impacted on their lives. This information is then swapped, with permission, beginning the process of shuttle mediation.

After reflecting on the experience of their actual victim, young people are asked to consider meeting their victim. They are asked to consider what they would like to say with the intention of a potential restorative conference.

The resource supports participants through the process with visual support cards that suggest 'people' ideas (who might have been affected), 'body state' ideas (were they drunk, tired?) and feeling ideas (were they angry, ashamed?).

The programme has three broad aims:

1. Defining what a victim is – establishing who the victim is; some young people view themselves as the victim.
2. Helping the young person talk about their offence - with the option of creating a picture story of their offence to assist them.
3. Ensuring the victim's voice is at the heart of the programme - close link-up between the professional supporting the victim(s) and professional working with the young person who has offended is crucial for both needs to be met. Both parties are encouraged to swap their work so that the other can reflect on the motivation and impact of the offence.

This idea came about when realising that when a victim was identified and a victim statement written, the victim impact statement was not used in any intervention work with the person who had offended. It was also noted that in a large number of people, those who had offended showed no remorse or understanding that they had changed the lives of others.

Knowing that it is essential the victim's voice is heard and understood, they needed the young person to accept that their actions had impacted on others, and for some with social communication difficulties, this can often be a struggle.

The CDYOS team found that breaking the victim experience down into bite-sized pieces with visual support enabled the young people to understand how their actions affected someone else and more importantly, to understand the words of the person they had harmed.



From January 2016 to January 2017 they completed 64 'Thinking about victim' programmes, some of which are still in progress. The programme has seen a significant increase in face-to-face contact between young people who have offended and their victims.

Typically young offenders struggle with victim empathy but this approach is making that possible, with staff reporting that all young people have been able to understand and complete the programme.

In Autumn 2016, CDYOS was awarded the Restorative Justice Council's Quality Mark. This work has also received interest from the Office of the Police Crime and Victims' Commissioner in County Durham. They had not considered communication as an issue for victim work and restorative justice, but now, understanding that successful engagement between victims and young people requires SLCN to be placed at its heart, they have requested SLCN training across the criminal justice partnership.

ClearCut Communication shared this award with Mable Therapy, an evidence-based practice with the principles of digital gamification, to create a flexible and impactful approach to supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.

ClearCut Communication has been joint awarded the *SLCN Innovation Award* for their innovative and holistic approach within an area where this is not only important but in high need.