

Sycamore Tree Project®: What's the impact?

"The Sycamore Tree Project® really makes you think. It's not like any other course I've been on. It makes you think about feelings. It's about what's inside. It changes how you feel about victims and that. I've done the ETS [Enhanced Thinking Skills] and that's easy. You know all the answers before you go in there. That doesn't change anything. STP is different because it's about what's in here." – offender from England and Wales

"I witnessed a man murdering my father. I have been carrying this hatred and hurt for more than 25 years. For the first time, I can truly say that I have forgiven the man that murdered my father. The feeling is something I can't describe." – crime victim from New Zealand

The Sycamore Tree Project® (STP) offers unrelated victims and offenders the opportunity to discuss the reality of crime and its impact on their lives. Victims tell their stories and hear the stories of offenders. Offenders come to understand the impact of crime on victims and the community and take responsibility for their behaviour. The participant comments above demonstrate the powerful impact these exchanges can have.

Evaluations of attitude changes among offenders participating in STP confirm this effect. In England and Wales, 2,188 participating prisoners completed questionnaires before and after the programme. The questionnaires, from the Crime-Pics II evaluation tool, gauge changes in offenders' attitudes after going through STP in five areas shown to be related to recidivism: general attitudes toward offending, victim empathy, evaluation of crime as worthwhile, and perception of current life problems. The study found:

- Significant improvements in victim empathy for prisoner participants
- Strong evidence of statistically significant changes in attitudes to offending attributable to participation in STP.
- Evidence that STP changed attitudes in ways known to reduce the likelihood of offending behaviour.¹

A study of STP in New Zealand found similar improvements in the attitudes of offenders participating in the programme.

In 2007, a Master's dissertation at Lucy Cavendish College explored the impact of STP on recidivism. Due to difficulties obtaining information from official sources, this research only measured the one-year reoffending rate for 62 STP offender participants. Of these, 20 had reoffended, meaning a recidivism rate of 32.3% compared to the national reoffending rate after one year of 46%.² While this data is preliminary, it indicates that participation in STP can be a factor in encouraging prisoners to change behaviour.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the programme also improves in-prison offender behaviour. According to Kim Workman, executive director of PF New Zealand, inmates who had resisted rehabilitation programmes such as goal setting and drug treatment feel more ready to take part in them after participating in STP. Also case managers have noticed changes in STP participants over the long term³.

1 Feasy, Simon, et. al. 2005. *An Evaluation of the Prison Fellowship Sycamore Tree Programme: based on a statistical analysis of Crime Pics II data*. Research Centre for Community Justice, Sheffield Hallam University, with REClaim North West, England.

2 Wilson, Margaret. 1997. *Inside out: how does an in-prison victim awareness programme affect recidivism?* Dissertation for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Criminological Research. Lucy Cavendish College.

3 Quoted in: Anonymous (2002). *'Profound Impact on Inmates'* Te Ara Whakatika: Newsletter of the court-referred restorative justice project. January/February 2002. Issue 7.



Centre for Justice and Reconciliation

Restorative Justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behaviour.

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