

The Introduction of Family Conferencing to the Probation and Welfare Service.

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Summary

This article describes the introduction by the Probation and Welfare Service (PWS) of family conferencing. It begins by outlining perceived weaknesses in the present retributive justice system in meeting the needs of young offenders and their victims. It identifies family conferencing, which focuses on making amends to the victim rather than punishing the offender, as an aspect of restorative justice and as another way of working with young people who have offended.

This article describes the concept of 'cross grade groups' within the PWS. It explains how this mechanism was used to interpret best practice for family conferencing, applying it to the Irish context and developing policy and procedures which allowed for the commencement of Part 8 (Section 78-86) of the Children Act 2001. It describes the roles of participants involved in family conferencing, the preparation and chairing of the family conference and outlines the decision making process. The article also offers some facilitation techniques that may help practitioners to make best use of the process.