

# Evaluation report 1: Together Programme – a partnering for schools mentoring pilot

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## Executive summary

This is the first formative evaluation report of a pilot programme, the Together Programme. A group of senior students from St Peter's College, Epsom, Auckland, travels to Rongomai School, Otara, on a weekly basis to work with a group of children who (mostly) have a parent or sibling in prison.

The two schools, plus Edmund Rice Justice and Pillars, two community organisations, have come together to initiate the programme. Pillars runs mentoring programmes in South Auckland and Christchurch, matching adults with the children of prisoners, with apparent success. Edmund Rice Justice is supporting the programme with funding and resources.

The four parties all have different but complementary motivations: Edmund Rice Justice to promote social justice action among young people; the St Peter's young men to undertake community service; Pillars to work to prevent the children of prisoners ending up in prison; and Rongomai School to provide students with a broader view of 'normal' society', 'where the police are not always on their doorstep'.

While St Peter's got involved because of its links with Edmund Rice Justice, the involvement of Rongomai School occurred fortuitously through a family relationship. The Rongomai principal said she would have been much more cautious had the school been 'cold-called' to take part.

The St Peter's young men participated in a Pillars mentoring training course in June. The course was well-received, and the skills useful, but the course prepared for a mentoring relationship when, in reality, the relationship was more group 'role-modelling'. This reflected a change in the nature of the scheme in practice, to meet both practical problems and safety concerns.

Each Monday, a vanload of 15 or so St Peter's students travels to Rongomai School, arriving at around 4pm. In the meantime, the 21 Rongomai students have been in the library, eating fruit and playing. While these were the maximum numbers, the actual attendance on both sides has fluctuated somewhat.

The pilot programme began at the beginning of term 3 and is expected to last for a 12 month period. It was initially intended to involve fortnightly visits, but in practice the scheme is weekly.

While Rongomai school is 80% Pasifika and 20% Māori, Māori make up 50% of the children in the programme. This reflects the dominance of Māori in the prison system. The average age of the children is 8.

The programme takes about 90 minutes. In the first part, the two groups play games together and run around. Then they settle down in small groups and read and do their homework. There is some, but not much, opportunity for private conversation.

Many of the St Peter's young men had initially been nervous, due to lack of knowledge of how people lived in South Auckland, and how these children would be. The nerves did not last long. The children were 'just like us, only disadvantaged'. They enjoy their time with the children and are convinced they are making a tangible difference, and that the children see them as role models. The young men also have gained understanding of their own lives: 'good school, good opportunities, a good life'. Some have clearly increased their understanding of social justice issues.

We gained a sense of the struggles facing the community around Rongomai from parents we spoke to. One lived with her parents, brother and son in the parent's home. Both parents were alcoholics and her mother was recently arrested. She would like to move but has no resources. She would like to work but cannot get a job. The other parent, an articulate mother, has just had her partner released from prison. The community faces a lot of difficulties from the youth gang the Killer Beez, which was started by a relative of Rongomai children.

The children really like the young men from St Peter's, and find the scheme 'awesome'. They describe the scheme as helping them with their homework and reading. They nearly all have a favourite St Peter's person.

The main conclusion is that the scheme appears to be very successful to date, and that the four parties should be congratulated for getting it underway. The early indicators of success are good. Some suggestions are given to assist in the evaluation of the scheme next year. In the second part of the evaluation, more work will be done looking for 'success factors'.

Liz Gordon  
November 2011.

## Formation of the project

This pilot project arises out of an agreement forged between four parties in early 2011. The idea for the programme came initially from Verna McFelin, CEO of Pillars, who had been interested for a while in extending mentoring schemes to the school setting. Pillars has been running mentoring schemes for the children of prisoners for a number of years, and has in place professional systems of mentor training and supervision. The scheme is very successful, but quite limited in scope. Working with schools was one way of extending the scheme.

Verna was introduced to Sam Drumm, of Edmund Rice Justice, and “she had the idea of a specific mentoring programme, and we were certainly interested in that”, as Sam noted (See Box on next page for more information on the organisations involved with this programme).

St Peter’s College, Epsom is one of the schools with whom Edmund Rice Justice has an ongoing relationship. Within the school is a voluntary club, the Edmund Rice group, as explained by the group’s co-ordinator:

Within the Edmund Rice tradition, the motto of the school is ‘To Love and To Serve’. The Edmund Rice (ER) group has a tradition of public service and voluntary work. The aim is ‘living values’: to undertake work that puts their beliefs into action. At the beginning of 2011, there was a feeling in the group that they wanted to do something that was different from before. The focus had been mainly on fundraising to support a worthy cause. The new focus was to be on undertaking practical work to make a difference.

It was just by chance that Sam received the proposal from Pillars at the same time that the ER group was considering a more active involvement in the community. Sam, as an old boy of the school, had an existing relationship with the school, as well as with the ER group. In the end, the boys had two proposals in front of them: the Pillars proposal and another involving cleaning up pollution. The boys chose the Pillars option, because it seemed to hold the possibility of tangible benefits for all:

The boys made the decision in the group without having much of a clear understanding of what it entailed, but eager to work directly with disadvantaged children (Co-ordinator).

Some of the boys had actually had the idea of working in prisons, with the new Mt Eden prison directly across the motorway from the school. But for a variety of reasons, that was not possible. The Pillars option was a very acceptable alternative in order to, in Sam’s words, “develop a consciousness of justice issues”.

Now there was a need to find a partner school to work on the scheme. Because Pillars was a sponsoring party, the school needed to have, and be prepared to organise, a group of children that had parents (also, as it turned out, siblings), in prison.

In a coincidence, the St Peter's principal's secretary heard that a search was underway for a partner school, and rang her sister, principal of Rongomai school, to see if she was interested.

Tina Voordouw had heard of the work of Edmund Rice Justice through her sister. She was particularly attracted to the restorative justice work of the organisation:

I am heavily committed to restorative justice, and I think it is life-changing for the children to get this perspective (TW).

Tina was able to commit to providing a group of up to twenty children who "were the children of prisoners, or siblings, or otherwise with major issues around home and gangs". She explained her interest in the scheme as follows:

I just want them to see that they don't have to do crime, don't have to be part of a gang, don't have to be locked up.... That there's a whole section of society which is normal, where the police are not always on the doorstep. These kids can't imagine that.

The box below provides basic information on the four parties that came together for the project.

### The four parties

Pillars Inc is a community organisation and service provider working with the whānau and tamariki of prisoners. One important part of its programmes in Christchurch and Auckland is a mentoring programme for children aged between 5 and 17 years of age.

Edmund Rice Justice is a Trust formed in New Zealand in 2008, with the parent organisation in Australia. The aim of the trust is to support young people working towards social justice. The organisation undertakes programmes and advocacy across a range of justice issues.

St Peter's College is an integrated Catholic Boy's school in central Auckland. The school has a strong focus on personal as well as academic development, and is framed by Catholic values. It is one of five 'Edmund Rice' schools in New Zealand, founded by the Christian Brothers, and opened in 1939.

Rongomai School is an Auckland primary school in one of the most deprived areas in New Zealand (Decile 1A). A high proportion of students have a parent in prison. The principal, Tina Voordouw, has had a transformative effect on the school over the past decade, and involvement in the Together Programme offers another way of supporting the school community.

A formal agreement was drawn up as a Memorandum of Understanding between the parties. The parties agreed to work "in the spirit of partnership towards achieving their visions of":

Supporting the children of prisoner affected by imprisonment through mentoring, education and advocacy;  
Supporting young adults to be the change agents in their mentoring relationships and communities; and  
Working collaboratively as different sector agencies to deliver a mentoring programme.

The MOU includes information on training, intellectual property, media and costs. Edmund Rice Justice agreed to meet all significant costs, with the two schools meeting day-to-day costs, and Pillars providing the training. ERJ is an autonomous charitable trust. The costs for the pilot were guaranteed by the Christian Brothers (from Australia), but there is an expectation that over time it will become self-funding, or funded from other sources. ERJ also hopes that over time the programme may be expanded, requiring more resources to be found.

This agreement was executed at the end of June, 2011, although the programme had already begun.

### Issues arising from the formation process

The first evident issue is the different motivations of the four constituent organisations, and how well they came together for this programme. Pillars was essentially interested in mentoring the children of prisoners, Edmund Rice Justice in providing justice-based programmes for young people, St Peter's in pursuing its 'service' ethos effectively and Rongomai in offering alternative influences for the children.

In this instance, then, there was a strong concurrence of interests between the parties. Facilitating factors included:

- the prior existence of the Edmund Rice group within St Peter's, which provided an existing organising framework of a group of young men with a 'service' approach;
- strong interest by the Rongomai principal in bringing alternative influences in for the children;
- the co-ordinating role of Edmund Rice Justice; and
- the energy, enthusiasm and knowledge about mentoring of the Pillars team.

It is difficult to imagine how such a set of interests could come together by chance. The first evaluative point is that to replicate this programme would take significant organisation and much development work. The programme is unique and carried by a set of one-off factors.

The second point is that while the initial approach came from Pillars, it is difficult to see how the programme could have got off the ground without the work of Edmund Rice Justice. That organisation both opened the door to St Peter's and provided a guarantee of resources.

The final point is the role of Rongomai. Would the school have joined the scheme if it had been 'cold-called', rather than contacted informally through a known source? This question was put to the principal, who responded:

The personal touch certainly helped because we're quite protective with these kids. Knowing how life is for them, there is no way that anything with the slightest risk would be considered. Even with all the measures set in place, there was a session where one of the boys ended up in tears because he thought he was being mocked when the older boys were simply teasing each other. Around here it seems that you have to earn the right to get this close so we respect that.

In other words, access would have been more difficult if the personal element had not existed, and the approaching agencies would have had to 'earn the right'.

In conclusion, there were a lot of places where the partnership could have foundered before it was even born. The fact that that the project was formed, and in a timely and efficient manner, is testament to the goodwill of the parties, excellent planning and organisation and a good portion of lucky chance.

## Training

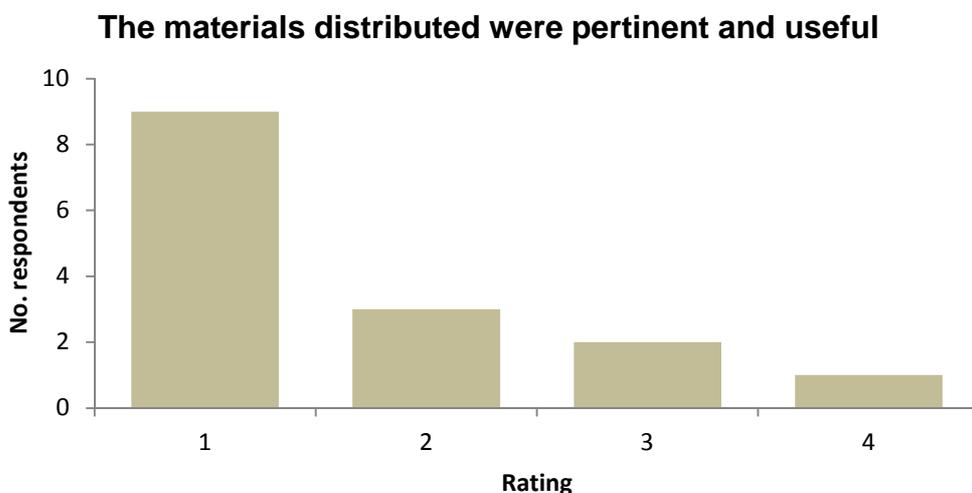
An important element of the scheme was the in-depth training offered by Pillars to the St Peter's group of young men. The training took place on 11 May 2011 at St Peter's, and fifteen young men attended. Aims of the training were to help mentors:

- Develop empathy and understanding of issues for children with a parent in prison
- Develop skills in the mentoring of children with a parent in prison
- Understand policies and processes required for the pilot programme, and
- Understand mentoring 'best practice'.

The participants were told they were involved in a unique venture. They were given a powerpoint introduction to the work of Pillars. They then undertook a series of exercises around 'family', followed by an 'imagery journey', where participants were told to imagine they were in a particular situation. The story told was about a boy whose father was arrested in the house. It was quite graphic and upsetting.

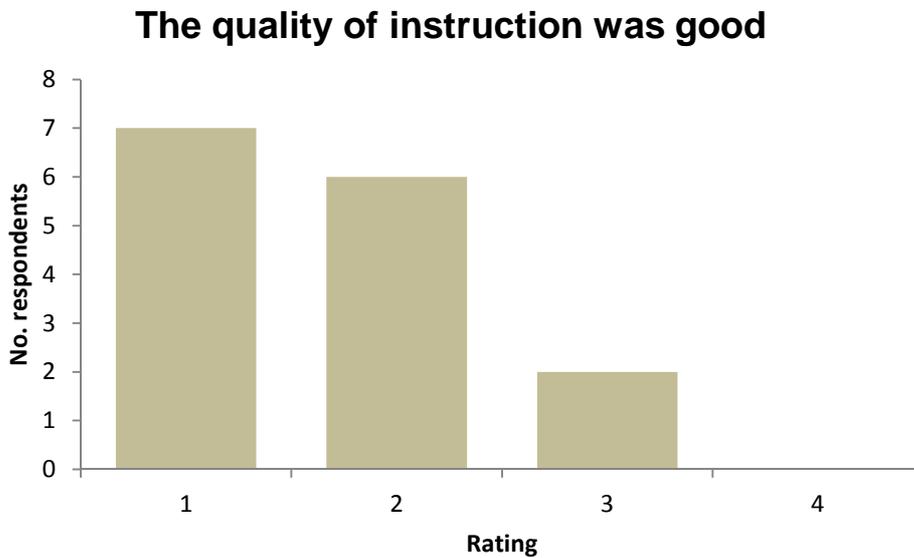
The next step was that participants were to think back to when they were 8-10, and identify a mentoring influence from that time, why the person was important and the qualities of the person, and write them down. Then there were a series of training and administrative processes, including the signing of confidentiality agreements, explanations of supervision and a series of exercises around difficult situations.

The training was evaluated by the participants using an anonymous form. Overall, the students were happy with the training. They were asked to evaluate a number of statements on a Likert-type scale, 1 being 'strongly agree' and 5 being 'strongly disagree'. The overall score on most items was four. The materials, including mentor guide, information about Pillars and links to the 'justus' website for children ([www.justus.org.nz](http://www.justus.org.nz)) were well-received, with more than half of all students stating they 'strongly agreed' the information was pertinent and useful, as Figure 1 shows:



**Figure 1. Usefulness of materials distributed (n=15)**

Most rated the quality of the instruction given as good or excellent, while two were neutral and none negative:



**Figure 2. The quality of instruction at the training session**

Overall, all but one participants thought the training was good or excellent, that one being neutral (this was one of the 'too many boundaries' respondents):



**Figure 3. Overall rating of training**

Several students commented on the training. Two thought there were "too many boundaries", two were keen on more interaction "and perhaps a video", one wanted more information on "the things we are not allowed to talk about" and one wanted "more training".

The students were interviewed about the training several months after the May session, when they had been visiting the school on a weekly basis. In retrospect,

they were more critical of the training,. The main reason was that, in the words of one student:

The training made out that we were going to be working closely, sharing and so on, with the kids. But we don't.

The training was essentially a mentor training programme, including a written mentor guide and outlining how to work in an intensive one on one relationship with children. At the time of the training, some kind of one on one relationship was envisaged but, as the following sections note, this was not possible in practice. There was, therefore, some disjuncture between the training and the actual programme as it developed, and the St Peter's boys picked up on this in interviews.

At interview, the boys had a variety of views about the 'imagery journey', which had outlined one child's story and asked participants to imagine the person was them. Some really liked it and found it enlightening, while one really disliked it. One boy perhaps summed up the majority view:

...informative but not empowering scenario...

The boys thought that some elements were a bit overplayed: "don't sweat it". This related in particular to the large number of cautions given through the training, which some interpreted as overly strict.

Apart from that aspect, the boys thought the training offered "good skills", although most was also "common sense". The best part of the training was seen to be "how we should interact".

### Issues arising from the training process

The training was well-received, relevant and interesting for the boys. But a mismatch appeared between the nature of the training – for mentors – and the actual programme in practice.

The boys enjoyed the skills learning and interaction elements, but had mixed views about the 'imagery journey'. They may have preferred learning about the experiences of prisoners through video (one example given) or through ordinary stories. A powerpoint with video clips may have been more effective.

It is possible that the relatively 'full on' nature of the training made them overly nervous about going to Rongomai; most noted that the reality of the school and the kids was much different from what they had imagined (see next section).

## The programme's beginnings

As originally conceived, the programme involved fortnightly visits by St Peter's to Rongomai, where individual boys would work with individual children in a mentoring role. Both elements, the timing and the work, changed significantly from theory to practice. According to Sam Drumm, the initial problems that were envisaged were:

- How do we keep all the students safe?
- How were the mentors and their charges to be married up?
- How were the changes in group composition going to be managed week by week?
- How do we deal with issues such as disclosure of abuse?

These problems were essentially managed by abandoning the notion of mentoring and replacing it with a role model approach.

### The timing of the programme

The programme commenced at the beginning of term three, 2011, and was (and still is) to last for a 12 month period. The fortnightly programming meant that there would only be five visits per term. Also, in term 4 the NCEA examinations would significantly disrupt the visiting schedule.

Other problems with the fortnightly arrangement were uncertainty (do the visits take place this week?) and difficulties with parental arrangements. As is explained below, the programme involves the Rongomai children staying at school until 5pm, while the St Peter's boys do not get back to the city until around 5.30.

It was therefore decided virtually from the start of the programme that weekly visits would be made in term time, which overcame all these problems.

### Recruitment of the Rongomai School children

Rongomai School was unsure whether it could produce enough students with a parent or sibling in prison, and included a second tier of selection related to home problems, multiple disadvantage, gang membership and so on. In reality, most of the children involved in the programme (21 of them) were the children or siblings of prisoners.

About half of the children initially identified were not, in the end, able to take part. The primary reason for this was children moving from family to family, and in one case where both parents were in prison, between whānau and CYFS care. As well, some families lacked the required level of organisation

The ethnic characteristics of the group are interesting. While the school population is around 80% Pasifika and 20% Māori, Māori students made up half of the group. This reflects, at a micro level, the very high imprisonment rates of Māori in society.

The children ranged from 5.8 years to 10.9 years of age, with the average age being 8.

## Organising the visits

There were significant logistical issues in organising the visits, which were held weekly on Monday afternoons. The St Peter's boys were not available to leave the school until 3.30, and the trip took 30 minutes in a van, which meant that Rongomai had to provide after-school activities for their children for a whole hour, from 3 to 4. The school therefore organised some activities and also some refreshments in the library for the children.

## First contact

Most of the boys were fairly nervous on their first visit to meet the children. Some felt that they were nervous because of the 'full on' nature of the training, while others wondered what the area and the people would be like. As one young man put it, "it was a step up from the past – from fundraising to doing something practical".

Quite a lot of thought and planning went into the activities at the first meeting. The two lots of participants first sat in a circle and tossed a ball around. Whoever caught the ball had to introduce themselves. Then they divided into team and played a game with marshmallows and chopsticks, which was widely mentioned as particularly good fun, followed by some reading. Quite a lot of bonding went on in the first week. Some participants who were unable to attend the first session felt a bit left out when they did subsequently attend.

Most people felt the ice was broken fairly quickly. Some of the St Peter's boys considered that the fact that most of the children were from the Islands helped as they have very friendly cultures.

The first session was important and it was successful. It made the participants want to return to the programme.

## Programme activities

On a weekly basis, the programmes fall into three categories:

- play activities, outside if possible, designed to use up the children's energy, to undertake team activity make friends;
- other bonding activities; and
- reading and other study or homework related options on a one on one basis.

From the teacher perspective, all elements are important. The principal of Rongomai is very concerned that the children see few role models outside of their own neighbourhood, and such roles are often highly negative. For example, several of

the children in the programme are closely related to people in the Killer Beez youth gang, and expect to become members (or already are). While currently pressure to join the gang is low, due to the key players being in prison, that will not last.

For the Principal, the programme offers a real opportunity for the children to gain some alternative role models to the narrow options they face in their own neighbourhoods.

However, the learning tasks are also really important. Few of the children get the opportunity at home to sit and read and learn with one adult on a regular basis. There is real value in this programme and she is expecting real learning effects.

### Issues arising from the development of the programme

The programme was complex to set up, but the commitment of all participants made it happen. One teacher from St Peter's was interviewed who had no particular involvement with the Edmund Rice group and did not teach in the age group of the boys, but started attending and driving the van out of interest alone, and had become an integral part of the group. While there was a lot to organise, then, at every stage there were people willing to do the work – drive the boys, recruit and get consent, get the parents on side, provide some 'gap' activities for the children, design programmes, and organise everyone.

The evaluative lesson learned is that having a group of committed and organised people, both in the organisations but more particularly within the schools, is a crucial success factor. Enthusiasm was crucial to the successful launch of the project.

The core change from mentoring to role modelling was important in allowing the programme to proceed safely. There are almost insuperable problems in pairing individual under-age young adults with some extremely disadvantaged children. Mentoring of this kind is a difficult role even for adults, and one session of training was not going to prepare the boys for such a role. As well, as the next section shows, the boys seem much happier to be role models in general rather than specific mentors. While relationships are building between individual children and particular boys, the burden of such relationships, to the extent that it exists, is shared between them all.

## Early views about the programme

At the time of the first phase evaluation in October/November 2011, the programme had been operating for nearly half a year. An early change meant that the visits were weekly rather than fortnightly, and therefore at least ten visits had been made during the period.

Interviews were conducted with students from both constituent schools about their feelings and experiences in the programme. Both similarities in perspective, and clear differences, were evident from the interviews. As well, staff from both schools had views about how the programme was working. These findings are reported in this section.

### St Peter's

The nervousness felt by many of the St Peter's boys wore off fairly quickly once they had been to the school and met the children. Initially, it was "pretty nerve-wracking", until the ice was broken.

The St Peter's boys were adamant that the Rongomai children are "just like us"; "just the same as any other kid growing up in Auckland"; "just like me at that age"; "they are just kids". The notion that there is a social gulf between the two groups was strongly rejected by them all.

The kids are better than I expected. I thought that they would be more distraught, wilder...

But they can be disadvantaged in some ways. Just the way they act makes you think there are things going on in their lives.

While the Rongomai children are the same as the St Peter's boys, there are some tangible differences. The one that received most comment was reading ability:

Some of them are not very literate. For example, some have trouble with basic words of four letters that they should be reading. A lot of the work we do with them is trying to do the basics with them. And also trying to get them to want to read.

There has been a clear shift from the beginning of the programme, where the goal was to form mentoring relationships, to something more akin to role modelling. The former implies a fairly close one-on-one interaction, while the latter is a friendly but more distant approach.

I can see their happiness – they feel better about themselves. We offer different role models, and leadership. And I feel better about myself, too.

This role is good for me.

They do see us as role models. In the sports activities, 'watch me do this', teaching them some soccer tricks. They want to be a part of us. It could be said that we are almost a catalyst for change. There *are* results.

While the general role model approach is working, from time to time the boys do end up on the receiving end of individual confidences from the children. As the section below on Rongomai shows, it is clear that the children all have favourites, whether the boys know it or not.

A number of the boys, and the project leaders, talked about the opportunity for what they called 'tangible' changes. The St Peter's boys thought that there were changes both in the way they saw their lives, and also in the Rongomai children:

Showing ourselves that we are quite privileged not to have family members in prison – good school, good opportunities, a good life.

They seem happier, and the way they carry themselves... I am not saying they are completely changed people but there are small changes. For example, at the start they were more aggressive to each other, more rough stuff. They are more caring now, even in the way they speak.

The boys were asked what help they were able to offer that would make a difference to the lives of the children. The most common response was the assistance with reading. But there was a strong undercurrent of helping the children become something better, as the following comments illustrate:

Try and help them change themselves.  
Might make them try harder and improve.  
They desire to be seen as clever even if they are not.  
We bring our culture of wanting to learn and they want to be like us.  
We can be effective. The kids are more open now and are showing us what they can do.

The students discussed whether they would be able to turn around the lives of the children.

They are the right age, especially if it is carried up through middle school.  
This is the point at which choices are being made.

I think stuff like this is good, but only if it is consistent and over time.

The boys have noticed a change in their own views around social justice. They now tend to have a "broader view":

We take a lot for granted - peace and quiet - people don't have easy lives.

I have come to understand better the spectrum of society

This is not a fair society. There is strong discrimination that I see as an Asian. They will face it too, but they won't be able to deal with it as well as I do.

A number stated they are keen to change society. Some may choose to go into employment doing social justice work, such as teaching, but the general view is that the best option might be to: "get a good paid job and then be a volunteer".

## Rongomai School

Two parents were interviewed at Rongomai School, to try to understand how they view the Together Programme. One confided that her son "saw a lot of drinking at home", where she lives with her parents, who are both alcoholics. However, she considers that he is OK, having received some counselling, although he has some major behavioural problems.

Recently, her mother got arrested, which caused a lot of problems in the family. She would like to be able to move out of the house and get her own place, but money is very tight. Now her son is a bit older, she would like to get a job:

But I have never worked. What would I do? And who would employ me? I have no experience.

She has done some preliminary courses: chef, beauty therapy, hairdressing and business, but none has led to paid work. Essentially she wants to ensure that her son has more opportunities than herself:

I hope the Rongomai children will learn a bit more.... Helping the younger generation, keeping the children on the right path... encourage them.

She sees the scheme as a big brother type (her words) mentoring programme, which is fun and helpful:

He has talked to me about it, thinks it is very good – he loves it!

The other mother had a husband not long out of prison, and was a very outspoken person. She is also very pleased with the programme, and thinks that it might make the children aspire to be something better.

The kids see the boys as just bigger kids from a different area, but just like them. It is good.

She believes it has already made a difference to her daughter's reading. When asked how the programme could be improved she thought that outings would be a good addition. And:

All good! All good so far! I want it every day of the week!

Two groups of Rongomai children were interviewed – a group of boys and a group of girls. On Mondays, they explained, after school they go to the library, where they are given fruit to eat as an afternoon snack, and read, do their homework and play.

The students were asked to describe what the St Peter's boys were like. They came up with several descriptions:

- Not from around here
- Really tall
- Some are Asian (No, Indian, another said)
- They are richer than us (this led to a debate about pocket money)
- They are like us (again debate, yes, no...)
- They are doing all sorts of things

The students really like the scheme:

Awesome! Other schools should have the scheme too!

We learn how to read, they tell you how to do maths and they help us with our homework

The boys are good to us and help us with... good.

We need help with homework and reading.

As a stranger, the evaluator found it hard to get a lot of information from the children about their views of the St Peter's boys. It was evident that they enjoyed and looked forward to the visits. Talking about one boy, the Rongomai principal said:

If he misses a Monday it is like something big is missing.

The girls' group all said they had a 'favourite' St Peter's boy, and the boys also indicated a favourite. How the children managed to winkle some time with their favourite boy in a group situation is a bit of a mystery, which might be followed through at the second evaluation point next year.

### Does the programme meet its goals?

One of the interesting issues about this project is that the goals for the four main participant groups differ significantly. For the Rongomai principal and children, the aim is to get a broader view of society, engage in some good literacy learning and perhaps view the future differently. For Pillars, the aim is that the next generation of the children of prisoners be kept out of prison.

For the St Peter's boys, they want to do some good with a group of disadvantaged children. The programme gives them a sense of commitment and a practical approach to serving others. The boys have a strong social conscience and the

programme is helping this get stronger. For Edmund Rice Justice, the aim of the programme is to work on attitudes, bring about personal change, have a vision of a socially just society and "part of my passion is to see if they have deepened their views on big issues of structural justice."

It is remarkable, then, that at least in part the programme is showing early signs of meeting most of these goals. The proof will be in the strength of the relationship once school restarts in early 2012. As well, the impending release from prison of the leader of the Killer Beez gang, who is a relative of some of these children, will test the influence of the boys.

The programme is fun, everyone enjoys it, all feel that their goals are being met (however they are conceived). This is as good a start as would be possible.

## Conclusion and action points

While small in scope, relatively speaking, this programme is far from a minor intervention. Significant road blocks have been overcome to get the programme up and running, resource it and make it happen, week after week. The key to its endurance thus far is that it is still meeting the goals and ambitions of all parties, and there have been no major hiccups to prevent it continuing.

The parties to the MOU should be congratulated, and particularly Sam, Jakub and other St Peter's people who ensure that the boys get down to Rongomai each week and work effectively with the children.

Tina's commitment to social change from the Rongomai perspective has also been a driving force. The children really enjoy their Monday sessions.

There is evidence of a growing social conscience among the boys from St Peter's. Realising that the children are 'just like us' is a big step forward in a nation with such big social and ethnic gaps. The boys are keen to maintain social justice work beyond school. More than one boy leaving school this year articulated their commitment to staying with the programme in 2012.

It is more difficult to assess the effectiveness on the Rongomai children. One girl said her reading has improved "from 16-17 to 18", but it is hard to know whether that improvement would have occurred anyway. However, by the end of the pilot programme in mid-2012, the school should be able to show if the group have shown improvements in their learning.

Of course, this is not the only hoped-for outcomes for the children. The ambitious goal is to change their futures, to move them beyond the Killer Beez and towards a successful, happy, crime free life.

At the beginning of next year, the parties need to get together to see whether an ongoing programme can be organised for these children. Perhaps some individual mentoring relationships may come out of this, or at least some programme that sees the children through the danger years between now and High School.

I would like to see some individual reflection from both parties next year. It would be great if each school could run a poetry competition (say), getting the participants to write about their experiences in the Together Programme. This would provide a written record from the perspective of the two schools. If this is not possible, some other way of recording experiences should be found, that can be used in the final evaluation report.

Liz Gordon  
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