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**JUST CARE – RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACHES TO
WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN PUBLIC CARE**
By Belinda Hopkins (2009)
Jessica Kingsley Publications, price £29.99
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You might think that children in care (now called 'Looked after children') are only a minority interest for QICJ members – until you reflect on the fact that such children only too easily acquire criminal records for such misdemeanours as breaking windows, while their peers living with parents might just be grounded for a week and have their pocket money stopped. Incidents within care homes/residential units can also escalate, especially since the children and young people living there are amongst the most deprived and vulnerable in society. So there is an urgent need for restorative approaches in the residential care section.

The first striking aspect of the book is its cover, featuring six luminous red dice, with numbers showing from 1 to 6 (though not in the conventional arrangement, please note – the dots are all arranged in circles). – No, the dice are not an invitation to gambling, they introduce the number of people involved in different restorative processes.

The book is built around five restorative themes:

1. An appreciation of, and respect for, individual perspectives.
2. A commitment to develop mutual understanding by making explicit the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
3. A focus on harm and how to repair this harm; on the effect of an action and who has been affected.
4. An appreciation of individual needs.
5. Accountability in terms of repairing harm and putting things right, and shared ownership of problem-solving and decision-making by those involved.

Belinda weaves these themes into successive chapters which deal with the different restorative processes:

- The restorative mindset (die 1)
- Restorative enquiry – for active listening, developing empathy, encouraging communication and cooperation (die 2)
- Restorative enquiry – for use in interpersonal conflict (die 2)
- Mediation or mini-conferencing – semi-formal approaches (die 3 or 4)
- Conferencing – formal approaches (die 5)
- Circles of various types (die 6)

There are by now quite a few books on restorative justice/practice/ approaches. What marks this one out is its attention to practical detail and translating restorative principles into the nuts and bolts of everyday communication. This comes from Belinda's huge experience of this kind of work, in many different settings. She often writes in an engaging personal way, which makes the book very approachable. It is also illustrated with many diagrams – these are very much part of the explanation and help to clarify concepts, practical applications and stages of processes.

Although this is a hands-on manual, Belinda does draw on research results, and theories not only of restorative practices, but also of neighbouring fields such as organisational change, which is involved in implementing restorative approaches in residential units, and social pedagogy. She also pays good attention to the often thorny subjects of partnership working and sustainability.

There are a few people who really 'walk the walk' as well as 'talking the talk' (and writing the words) – Belinda is one of them, and it shines through this book. And when it comes down to it, the restorative approaches and communications for children and staff she describes are not just a topic for specialists – it is good practice for all of us to follow in our Quaker Meetings and other communities.

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