

Jamaica Gleaner

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS

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WESTERN BUREAU:

Restorative Justice is poised to become an integral part of the curriculum in local schools as the Ministry of Justice is currently overseeing the development of a training module, which is to be introduced into teachers' colleges this September.

"It formed a part of the discussions we had at a recent world conference on the subject," said Carol Palmer, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Justice, while speaking at a Restorative Justice Workshop in Montego Bay yesterday.

"A lot of teachers were at the conference and together we see it as an integral part of our plans to move forward. The plan is to work with the teachers, the clergy and other sectors of society so that the knowledge can spread."

Restorative justice is viewed as a means of bringing victims' rights to the fore, and at the same time, get perpetrators to accept responsibility for their actions. It also seeks to get them to apologise, separate and apart from whatever punishment they might have received through the justice system.

"We cannot continue to be always angry and fearful, we must confront the source of our pain and work through how we can deal with it," Mrs. Palmer added. "If we are always going to be striving for revenge, we will never have a society that is positive and focused."

HEALING AND CLOSURE:

In endorsing the plans to introduce restorative justice in schools, Ted Watchel, founder and president of the International Institute for Restorative Practices in the United States, said it is an important tool in bringing healing and closure to victims and getting perpetrators to see the pain they have caused.

"It will get children to talk to and about each other and develop bonds and relationships," added Mr. Watchel, who was a special guest at the workshop.

"It offers an opportunity for victims to feel better about themselves."

According to Mrs. Palmer, two overseas consultants have been recruited to help develop a policy on restorative justice, and help create the modules for the teachers' colleges, which could result in the subject being introduced in local schools within two years.