

## **Statement TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE issued in 1999**

It is our understanding that we all have that of God in us. Quakers cannot countenance a system of justice which not only excludes people from society but also treats them as inferior and irredeemable. Transformative justice seeks to change forms of behaviour that society cannot accept, and wherever possible to do this without the need for retributive prison sentences.

We are grieved by the increasing rates of imprisonment in Aotearoa New Zealand and by the high representation of Maori and Pacific Islanders in the prison population. We are alarmed to learn that, in per capita terms, more people are imprisoned in New Zealand than in any other western developed nation except the USA and that numbers have been increasing steadily over the last ten years. International research shows that imprisonment of offenders is expensive, but does not meet all the needs of victims.

The prospect of imprisonment does not deter most potential offenders. Prisons do not protect society in the long term. The theory that they provide the best remedy for crime has been tested and found wanting.

Society uses imprisonment as punishment. We can see that this runs counter to our true interests, because in many cases offenders leave prison less able to survive in the community, and more inclined to hurt others and seek revenge. Shorter sentences are more effective for many offenders. At present, imprisonment is named in legislation as mandatory for many crimes and as the recommended sentence for many others. We believe that alternatives to imprisonment should be used more widely. These include diversion, intensive supervision, mediated restitution and community programmes. Restorative Justice, based on community group conferencing, is a process that brings together victim, offender and other people involved to empower them to work towards reparation, reconciliation and healing. We have heard that this process can be effective when it is properly supported, and look forward to a full and independent evaluation of results.

Resources should be channelled into the provision of such alternatives rather than the building of more prisons. This would result in a decrease in the number of prisoners and would have positive effects for society. While we accept that there are some people whose free movement in the community needs to be temporarily restricted until the risk of offending is lowered, we believe that such people are few in number and that they need to be treated in places very different to present-day prisons. We continue the concern of Elizabeth Fry for the humane treatment of human beings in prisons, and support the promotion of positive programmes for study, skills, and creative arts.

We are convinced that the best ways to reduce crime involve long-term, persistent attention to :

- Social justice, in order to reduce poverty and unemployment.
- Preventative health measures, with special attention to mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, and disabilities.

- Education, with emphasis on literacy programmes, and anger management courses which reduce violent reactions.
- Consideration of the positive aspects of customary law practices that are currently outside the British-based New Zealand justice system.
- Family crisis intervention, to help families most at risk.
- Recognition and appropriate support for the needs of children who are growing into the society of the future.

As Friends, we wish to work towards universal acceptance of transformative justice. Our Meetings can help by:

- Lobbying MPs, parliamentary candidates, judges, other legal professionals, and the Department of Corrections
- Developing links with the Restorative Justice Network
- Being aware of transformative justice activities in our communities
- Supporting these ventures with our skills, time and money.

Our ultimate vision is of a transformative justice system which meets the true needs of both crime victims and offenders – and of a society where prisons as we know them now will cease to exist.