

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23



**Essex Restorative
& Mediation Service**

RESTORATIVE AND MEDIATION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service (ERMS) Annual Report 2022/23. This report highlights both the successes and challenges the Service has experienced in the past twelve months, and the steps it is taking to ensure it continues to provide an effective outcome for victims and enable those affected by crime to move forwards with their lives.

We know from the feedback received that the satisfaction rate of those engaging with the service continues to remain high. 97 per cent of participants were satisfied with the service, increasing from 89 per cent the previous year, while a 100 per cent said they would recommend the service to others.

ERMS has also been seeking to expand the service it provides. In June 2022, I was particularly pleased to note that the Essex Police Victims and Witnesses Board formally approved the use of Restorative Justice for domestic abuse victims. This allowed Essex Police officers to refer domestic abuse related cases to the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service.

We have seen a reduction of overall referrals during the past year. There are a number of reasons for this that include the legacy of the pandemic, and the need to continually raise awareness of referral routes to the Service where organisations and their personnel have grown. This is particularly true of Essex Police who have gone through rapid growth over recent years.



ROGER HIRST
POLICE, FIRE AND
CRIME
COMMISSIONER FOR
ESSEX

In response, ERMS will be working hard throughout 2023-24 to increase awareness and highlight the obligations criminal justice partners have under the Victims' Code of Practice to offer restorative justice to victims. To underpin this, ERMS will provide structured support and implement a training package programme to help partners navigate the referral process. Where appropriate the Service will also make direct contact with victims and offenders to encourage self-referral to the scheme. Additionally, they will be taking on more referrals of burglary and assault, while continuing to grow the number of domestic abuse and hate crime referrals, all of which will help victims to get their voice heard.

Reflecting on the achievements made and how challenges are being overcome, I must warmly thank our ERMS team and our volunteers, without whom this service would not be possible and who consistently go the extra mile to ensure the rights of victims are met. As you read through the annual report, I am certain you will appreciate the immense value of the work taking place and the commitment we have in Essex to providing the best Restorative and Mediation Service possible.

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“I feel like just talking to you has helped me come a long way from the bitter and confused person I was when we first met and can now finally close the chapter and move on properly. I’d like to just leave it where it was and continue living my life for the present and not the past.

Thank you so much for all of your help and time. Just talking on a level with you both that validated and understood me really helped in a way that I can never thank you enough for”

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WE SAID, WE DID

We Said	We Did
Continue to increase post sentence referrals by a further 25%	Referrals for post-sentence cases fell from 37 in 2021/22 to 18 in 2022/23. There are a number of reasons for this decrease which are outlined in the report.
Continue to work towards changing Essex Police Policy to allow equal access for survivors of Domestic Abuse	In June 2022, the Essex Police Victims and Witnesses Board formally approved the use of Restorative Justice for domestic abuse victims. This changed internal policy and allowed Essex Police officers to refer domestic abuse related cases to the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service.
Increase referrals for incidents of hate crime by 30%	The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service received 24 hate crime referrals in the year 2022-23. This reflects no change in the number of referrals of this type and reflects the overall decrease in referrals.
Continue to work with our partners in HMPPS to reduce the delay in complex and sensitive cases	Although delays are still being experienced, progress has been made here with new frameworks having been published by HMPPS. Details will be discussed in the report.
Continue to monitor evaluation responses and increase to a 30% return rate.	Evaluation responses have increased to a total of 30% this year.

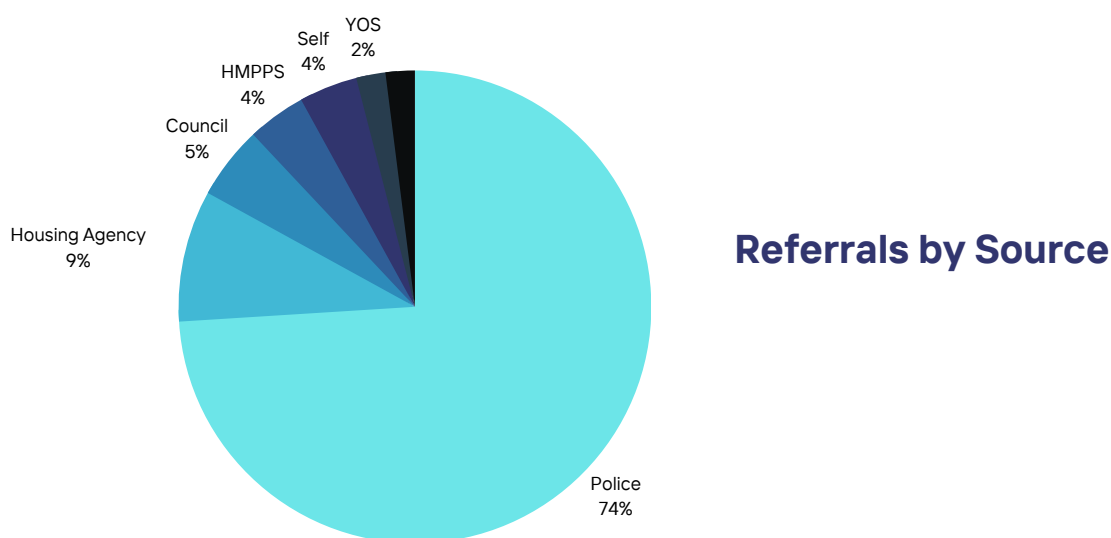
WE PROVIDED AN EFFECTIVE SERVICE

The 2022-23 year saw a total of 262 referrals received by ERMS with the service making contact with 599 people; 428 of those were victims of crime or anti-social behaviour and the remaining were responsible for causing harm. Communication was facilitated in 16% (33) of closed cases, meaning that 136 participants were able to have their voice heard by another party in their crime or conflict.

A 2% increase in cases ending in communication between parties was seen this year, which ERMS believes is due to a change in process for mediation and a reduced number of referrals allowing for more time and resource being allocated to effective facilitation. The service received a satisfaction rating of 97% from participants, increasing from 89% last year and 100% would recommend the service to others.

Figures show that referrals have reduced by 29% this year compared to last year. Referrals from the Police accounted for the biggest decrease in referrals with a 30% reduction in total referrals.

Referrals from HMPPS accounted for 11 of the total number, a reduction of 35% from last year and council and housing agency referrals reduced by 27% this year.



Geographically, Southend was the biggest referral area and are accountable for 24% of all referrals. This could be due to there being dedicated resource in Essex Police focusing on RJ in this area. Braintree, Tendring and Colchester remain high volume referrers accounting for around 10% of referrals each. Epping, Maldon, Brentwood and Rochford remain the lowest referrers accounting for around 2-3% of all referrals each.

There are a number of factors which ERMS believes could account for the reduction in referrals this year. Firstly, many of our referral partners such as HMPPS and Essex Police have experienced mass recruitment with a loss of many experienced staff and officers across the services. New recruits have received minimal training input around RJ, which is a particular change for Essex Police who previously had an input from the ERMS team with each training

package for new officers. This has now changed to a standard package delivered by Anglia Ruskin University in which the RJ input is greatly reduced. In addition, supervisor roles are changing across both organisations with new managers having less experience before promotion than has previously been seen. This lack of awareness in newly recruited and promoted staff and loss of experienced staff may explain, in part, a reduction in referrals.

Secondly, ERMS continues to experience a misunderstanding of the differences between Restorative Justice and other police outcomes such as community resolution. The shift in experienced managers who understand the difference and promote RJ in their teams may have impacted how many police officers are referring.

A possible third explanation could be that COVID saw less reported crime, and therefore staff may have had more time to consider alternative or 'add-ons' such as RJ in their workloads. Following the pandemic, staff are beginning to see their workloads, demands and priorities changing which may leave less time to consider RJ. It is reported that high numbers of vacancies and increased caseloads are seeing many staff and officers working over the expected capacity and may be focusing on 'have to do' work. In addition, Essex Police saw a drop in reported crime this year with many of these reductions for offences such as those that would ordinarily receive an out of court disposal. This could also provide an explanation for a reduction in RJ referrals.

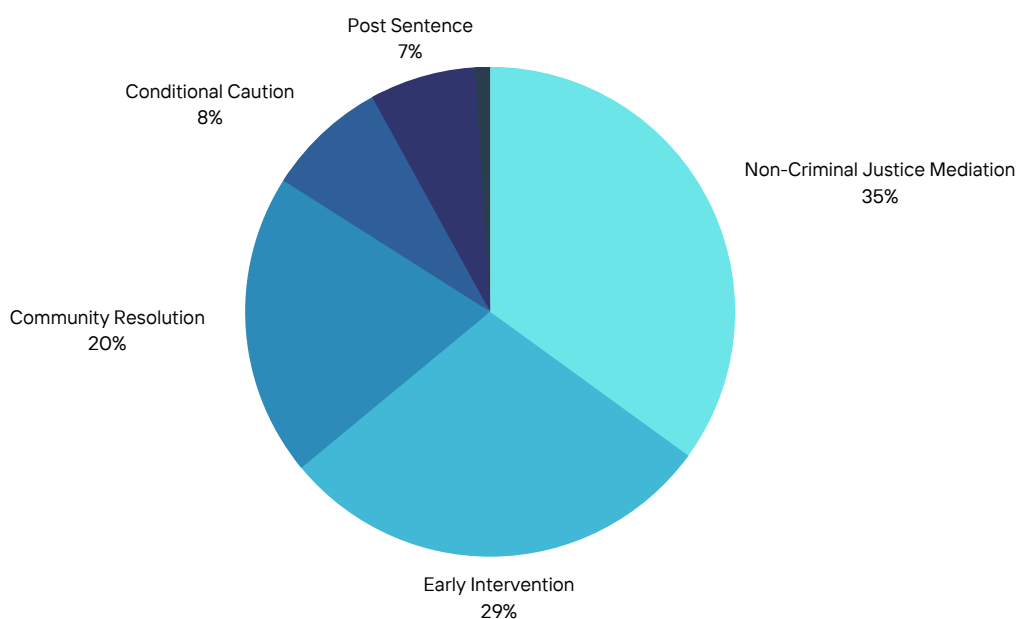
Additionally, changes in the way HMPPS assess, manage and refer RJ cases have been implemented which have caused uncertainty and a decline in referrals. This is particularly true for the most serious and complex cases, which saw a reduction in HMPPS referrals of 35% for cases of this type in the last year. The new HMPPS process has seen cases waiting for up to 30 weeks for an initial panel assessment discussion and no complex and sensitive cases have reached a successful outcome (communication between parties) since November 2021. ERMS have been working with HMPPS to reduce the delay whilst maintaining stringent and appropriate risk assessment and increase the number of HMPPS referrals and successful outcomes across all referral types.

Work will continue throughout 2023-24 to increase awareness of the availability of RJ and the obligations criminal justice partners have under the Victims' Code of Practice to offer RJ to victims. We will support colleagues through training programmes and making direct contact with victims and offenders where possible to encourage self-referral.



"I feel that the service provided is commendable and appropriate, I was able to deal with my Autistic, ADHD and learning disabilities son's case and was able to explain to him what his actions meant. This was all in a way that he understood and was a positive impact, all in all a great outcome for us as well as the other party concerned. Thank you"

Referrals by CJS outcome



Incident types

Neighbour disputes remain the largest incident type with 41% of the referrals. Violent offences continue to account for around a third of total referrals with 32%. Harassment cases continue on a downward trend from 14% last year to 8% this year. Reflecting the overall decrease in post-sentence and complex cases, sexual offences reduced from 14 referrals last year to 3 this year.

In previous years, the Essex Restorative and Mediation Service has focused on increasing referrals of complex and sensitive cases. Since the new HMPPS framework, referrals for cases of this nature have decreased and appear unlikely to rise significantly in the near future. The service, therefore, will focus on increasing referrals of burglary and assault.

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service and Essex Police continued their efforts in improving access to RJ for survivors of domestic abuse. As a result of our actions, Essex Police policy has changed to allow staff and officers to refer cases involving domestic abuse for an RJ process. The team received 10 domestic abuse related referrals this year and this will remain an area of focus. ERMS aims to increase domestic abuse related referrals by 25% to 13.

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service received 24 hate crime referrals in the year 2022-23. This reflects no change in the number of referrals of this type and reflects the overall decrease in referrals. ERMS will continue to engage with local hate crime partners and strategies and aims to improve hate crime referrals by 25% (30 referrals).

Case outcomes

ERMS made contact with 599 potential participants this year, with 136 people in 33 cases having communication with the other parties involved. In over half (55%) of those cases, communication took place face to face between the parties supported by facilitators. This is an increase in direct outcomes from last year which saw 31% of cases end in this kind of communication.

Last year, 7% of Community Justice Panel (non-criminal justice such as neighbour disputes) referrals and 22% of criminal justice intervention referrals resulted in communication between parties. This year, 9% of Community Justice Panels and 26% of criminal justice intervention referrals resulted in communication. A lower number of referrals and a change in how ERMS facilitates neighbour dispute cases is believed to account for the increase in positive, direct outcomes in these cases.

"I loved the energy of facilitators. They made the mediation easy, they created a very positive environment and it eased us into the process, it is helpful when you have positive-minded mediators"

Feedback

ERMS committed to increasing the feedback return rate this year to 30%, an increase of 7% from the year before. Feedback requests were sent to 96 participants with a target response of 30% returns completed with feedback received from 23 harmed parties and 6 parties responsible for harm.

Feedback continues to be positive this year with a 97% overall satisfaction rate which reflects an increase from 89% last year and 100% reporting that they would recommend the process to others, increasing from 94% last year. 100% of those responsible for the harm reported they had a better understanding of the consequences of their actions and that they would behave differently in future as a result of the RJ work they experienced.

599

victims, harmers and people in dispute contacted by ERMS this year.

55%

of all communication between participants happened face-to-face

97%

overall satisfaction rate

100%

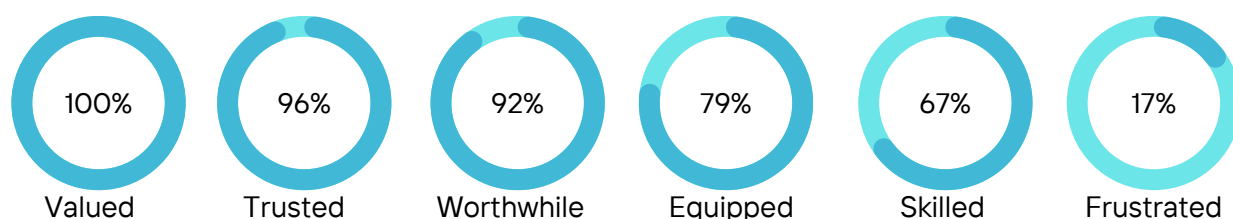
of participants would recommend us to others

WE VALUED VOLUNTEERS

The Essex Restorative and Mediation Service relies on its team of dedicated volunteers to deliver an effective service. This year the volunteers logged 757 hours of case work plus training and other meetings, and 13 new volunteers joined the service.

24 (67%) volunteers responded to the ERMS annual volunteer survey and had been volunteering between 1 month and 8 years. 100% of those who responded said the service was 'good' or 'very good' to volunteer for.

The chart below demonstrates the words chosen as an answer to the question "In volunteering with ERMS I feel....".



ERMS asked the volunteers what they liked best about the role. Responses included:

- Meeting a variety of people
- The work is varied and flexible
- It's rewarding / we make a difference
- Good support received

This year, we continued to value volunteers through annual events including a regular newsletter, a friends and family picnic, a thank you gift during volunteer week and an appreciation event which was rated 5 out of 5 by volunteers who attended. This work allows ERMS to support the PFCC to deliver on commitments made to volunteers in the 2021-2024 Police and Crime Plan. This plan recognises volunteers as one of the building blocks for success and commits to invest in those who volunteer for roles within the PFCC's office.

To account for natural turnover of volunteer resources, ERMS aims to recruit 10 new volunteers next year and upskill 3 experienced volunteer facilitators to act as 'buddies' and mentor newly trained team members.



"I am proud to be a volunteer with Essex Restorative Justice. I think it is an amazing service that can change people's lives"

" I sincerely believe that ERMS is the very best when it comes to RJ practices and processes. This is down to recruiting the right people and then training them and supporting them to provide the absolute best of RJ services."



"One of the main reasons I'm learning to drive is so I can take more cases. That should tell you all you need to. I love volunteering for this organisation"

WE RAISED AWARENESS

ERMS completed around 30 formal training inputs to partners last year and attended many more meetings and events in which RJ was promoted. In addition to this, a recorded training session was included on Essex Police's internal intranet and supervisors and managers were encouraged to watch and share with their teams. Further sessions and awareness inputs were delivered in-house by our partner agencies such as Essex Police and The Probation Service.

Feedback from our volunteer appreciation event was published on the PFCC social media pages and was watched more than 300 times and gained 27 interactions. A link to this feedback was also included in the PFCC newsletter which reaches more than 9,000 people across Essex.

ERMS was represented in national meetings held by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners where we were able to feed into the national picture of restorative justice.

The ERMS manager was invited to speak at the Gloucestershire Constabulary annual Restorative Justice conference about their work in community RJ, which was a real privilege.

This year, the RJ Strategic Board for Essex created a pledge for partners to sign up to which demonstrates their commitment to improving the use of RJ in the county. This pledge will be further promoted throughout 2023-24 to ensure the awareness of and commitment to RJ continues to increase.

A training plan will be written up for 2023-24 to include all partners and will be supported by the Essex RJ Strategic Board.

FUTURE FOCUS

1. Increase referrals of burglary and assault by 30%
2. Increase domestic abuse related referrals by 25%
3. Increase prison access and cases coming directly from prisons
4. Recruit 10 new volunteers and upskill 3 volunteers to act as 'buddies'
5. Increase Hate crime referrals by 25%
6. Invest in a new case management system to provide better reporting and comparison capability.



"It is a very good thing that people like us have access to your service, sometimes in life the greatest cause of misunderstanding is miscommunication, and having a service like this to help make things easier between both parties is such a good thing, all I can say is thank you"

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