

Restorative Justice

A PROGRAM FOR THE COMMUNITY

“Healthy communities feel a sense of belonging, security, and responsibility to each other.”

When we think of “community” we may think of a local geographic area or neighbourhood. However, our communities are not limited to the people who live in a particular neighbourhood, but also include merchants, workers, visitors and friends.

We have the right to feel safe and secure. Restorative justice helps communities build a sense of safety and a capacity for collective action by enabling community members to be active in responding to crime.

Crime affects everyone and we need to work together to repair the harm and create safer communities. Restorative justice actively involves community members by providing an opportunity to:

- Take responsibility for, and actively participate in, achieving justice in your community
- Focus on the causes of crime and do something about them
- Support the victim and ensure there are opportunities in the community for the offender to make amends

The real essence of restorative justice is in a face-to-face meeting between the victim, offender and community members. During the meeting you are given a chance to talk about the crime from your perspective, and about your concerns and feelings.

Conducted by trained facilitators, this meeting helps all parties develop a better understanding of the crime, of each other, and of the steps needed to make amends. The meeting concludes with an agreement outlining how the offender will repair the harm caused by the offence.

Restorative Justice

A PROGRAM FOR VICTIMS

“Victims have the right to be heard – they deserve a chance to help restore balance to their lives and their community”

Many victims have expressed dissatisfaction with the current justice system. They feel that their needs and concerns are forgotten because victims of crime have a limited role in the criminal justice process.

Restorative justice recognizes that as a victim, you have distinct needs. Needs such as:

- The opportunity to have a voice in the process and the chance to talk about your experience
- To have your experience, your feelings, concerns and suffering acknowledged
- To gain some understanding of the offender's motivation for committing the offence

Restorative justice not only recognizes these needs, but it also allows for YOUR involvement in determining how those needs can best be met. The real essence of restorative justice is in a face-to-face meeting between the victim, offender and community members. As the victim of the incident, you are an important member of the group. Conveying the full impact of the incident would be difficult for anyone else. The meeting will allow you to:

- Receive the support of the community in a structured process
- Meet with the offender in a supportive environment to express your feelings and to ask questions
- Have your fears and concerns addressed
- Say how the harm done by the incident might be repaired
- Get information about the crime, offender and legal process

It is natural to feel uncomfortable attending a meeting with someone who has harmed you. It is also common for the offender to feel anxious or fearful about facing you. It is important to understand that the meeting will be conducted by trained facilitators who are sensitive to your needs. The objective is to help all parties develop a better understanding of the crime, of each other, and of the steps needed to make amends. The meeting concludes with an agreement outlining how the offender will repair the harm caused by the offence.

Your needs and concerns are central in determining how the harm can be repaired.

Restorative Justice

A PROGRAM FOR OFFENDERS

“Accountability means accepting responsibility and acting to repair the harm done.”

In our current system, committing a crime means you are often blamed, stigmatized and punished.

This focus on punishment as the only way of correcting behaviour does nothing to encourage you to be accountable for your actions.

Crime hurts victims, communities and offenders and creates an obligation to make amends. Restorative justice provides an opportunity to make amends through a face-to-face meeting between you, the victim and community members.

This will allow you to:

- Take responsibility for your actions in a safe environment
- Be an active participant in determining how you may begin to repair the harm done
- Hear first hand how your behaviour has affected people
- Ask for help with problems that may have contributed to the wrongdoing

It is natural to feel anxious or fearful about facing someone you have harmed. Keep in mind that the victim is also likely to be anxious about meeting with you. It is important to understand that the meeting will be conducted by trained facilitators who are sensitive to your needs. The objective is to help all parties develop a better understanding of the crime, of each other, and of the steps needed to make amends.

The meeting concludes with an agreement on how you will work to repair the harm. This can include monetary payment, service to the victim, community service or any other measure agreed upon by you and the other participants in the meeting.

Restorative Justice...

what does it mean?

In recent years, public confidence in our justice system has been declining. There is a feeling that offenders are not held accountable for their actions, and that victims and communities have little say in the justice system.

Restorative justice is a way of thinking about crime and conflict. It challenges us to look at how we think about ourselves collectively as a society, how we respond to crime and how we restore the balance after a crime has been committed. Restorative justice can come in many forms, depending on the circumstances of the case and the traditions and preferences of the community involved.

Restorative models focus on holding offenders accountable in a more meaningful way, repairing the harm caused by the offence, reintegrating the offender into the community, and achieving a sense of healing for both the victim and the community.

We deserve to have our needs met within the justice system. We deserve to have an opportunity to take part in a process that will help to repair the harm caused by an offence, prevent crime, and create safer, more secure communities.

Restorative justice is not a replacement for the current system. A restorative approach will, however, help to meet needs that are not often met by the current system. Reducing recidivism, increasing victim satisfaction and public confidence in the system will take enormous effort over many years. It will require smarter, more effective ways of making our communities safer.

A promising road toward improvement is in a way of thinking about conflict and crime that has been captured by the modern phrase “*restorative justice*”.

Crime HURTS... Justice HEALS

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