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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

THE TRANSFORMATION OF A CLASSROOM

In one class of very bright students in our middle school (grades 7 & 8), bullying had gone underground, so that teachers and administrators were not aware of it. Once discovered, a very successful process unfolded over a five-month period. After, the students presented the process to the national Conflict Resolution Network Conference in June. The students were so excited by the conference experience that they decided to email Oprah in hopes of presenting the problem and process to the world through Oprah. Since the students say it best, we will allow their email to Oprah to explain:

I am one of a group of 8th grade girls from Winnipeg, Manitoba. There was a lot of bullying going on in our classroom for the past two years, mainly the boys on the girls. The bullying included sexual harassment, name-calling, mocking, physical abuse, and damaging of personal property.

After a year and a half of this bullying going on, four out of the six girls reported the bullying to the vice principal. The four girls told the vice principal everything that was going on. The vice principal suggested that she would suspend the boys, but asked our opinion prior to doing so. All the girls unanimously decided that that was not the best.

We felt that confronting the bullies with the truth about how their bullying made us feel would be more productive and so it was. The guidance counsellor who does a lot of mediations was brought in. We went through a series of mediation sessions with four girls and two boys. During the mediations, we brought up the sexual harassment that was happening. Two other girls were now added to our process. After the mediations, we had regular conferences with the six girls and the six boys together to discuss how everything was going in the weeks following. We discussed any concerns we had in our classroom, and between us, they were all immediately dealt with. We all sat in a circle, and one at a time, got a turn to voice our opinion.

The regular conferences continued for a while until we realized that the anger was finally put aside. Because only a small group from our class was involved, rumours started among others in the class about "what was going on". We then felt that it would be best if we told the class the story. The class was very willing to listen, give feedback and most of all, stop all the bullying in the class. Our class had an important agreement that they would call anyone on bullying if they saw it. After the meeting with the class, it was much easier to do so.

Recently we presented our approach at the Canada-wide conference on conflict resolution. We would recommend this program for anyone having bullying problems. We feel it is most effective because it gives EVERYBODY a chance to speak out and it guarantees that the bullies will not go back to their old ways, due to the regular meetings. We are writing to you to explain that our new approach is much more effective in stopping bullying, and we feel everyone deserves to know.

We discussed any concerns we had in our classroom, and between us, they were all immediately dealt with.

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RELATIONSHIPS IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE, COMMUNITIES AND CORRECTIONS

By Liz Elliot

Relationships constitute the essence of restorative justice, communities and corrections. Howard Zehr's *Changing Lenses* (1990) was the first book to systematically carve out an analytical framework for restorative justice that highlighted this perspective as a paradigm shift. Contrasting restorative justice with the more familiar retributive approach, Zehr noted that where the latter saw crime as a "violation of the state, defined by lawbreaking and guilt," in restorative justice crime was conceptualized as a "violation of people and relationships" (p.181). In their writing about a related concept, community justice, David Karp and Todd Clear describe community as defined by the "shared values and networks of relationships that encourage individual citizens to work toward the common good" (2002, p.138). A community is constituted by relationships between people who hold similar values. Core Value 3 of the Mission Statement of the Correctional Service of Canada states, "We believe that our strength and our major resource in achieving our objectives is our staff and that human relationships are the cornerstone of our endeavour." The central role of relationships is articulated in the vision of Canadian federal corrections.

However constituted by the idea of relationships, each of these entities struggles with the fuller expression of them. Restorative justice in Canada, as elsewhere, remains a largely criminal justice implementation rather than the social paradigm shift it promises. Generally adopted as a diversion or "add-on" program to criminal justice, restorative justice often becomes an individual case-driven process rather than a conduit to collective community development. The idea of justice as relational suggests that individual conflicts can be opportunities to see what is not working in the fabric of the community at large.

The implications of this broader perspective of restorative justice go far beyond the purview of criminal justice, to the realms of education, social services, health and local economies.

Communities in modern democracies have also experienced various shifts affecting relationships among their individual members. While often *articulating* values like respect, equality, honesty that are shared, *acting* on those values in everyday situations — much less in more trying instances of conflict — remains a challenge for both individuals and groups within communities. This is complicated by the erosion of some interpersonal skills, particularly those required for the healthy processing of conflict, as a result of an evolved cultural reliance on public institutions to solve the problems of the people. The increased professionalisation of "service-providers" further exacerbates this reliance, so that there is less interpersonal engagement of citizens in the gritty matters of their own community.

Corrections constitutes a public institution, which poses unique challenges for relationships. Public institutions, while operated by individual people in various roles, are governed by specific mandates, policies and legislation. While relationships exist *between* individuals in institutions, these are subject to the formality of prescribed boundaries and purposes. In the specific case of corrections, these relationships are further complicated by the security mandate of prisons, where relationships are prone to be viewed as potentially exploitable for goals that could compromise institutional security.

However, relationships are not only the essential foci of concept definitions and institutional mission statements. There are also relationships between restorative justice values-sensitive practices, communities in democracies, and government correctional agencies. Already challenged by internal struggles with the expression and development of relationships, restorative justice, communities and corrections are expected to create and foster healthy relations in their mutually inter-related work.

This requires ongoing dialogue, as the conventional terrain of relationships shifts. Restorative justice programs find themselves in unequal relationships with criminal justice institutions, where the latter may dictate the terms of engagement without genuine collaboration and consensus. Communities may not have the capacity or social capital to accommodate the expectations of a restorative process, where individuals expect that their tax dollars have relieved them of these responsibilities. In a political and media context where law-breakers are normally vilified, the relationships between criminal justice agencies, particularly community corrections, and communities are further strained.

Obviously, there is much work to be done. And all of it is worthwhile, for the health of a democracy is dependent on how civil a society really is, from individual relationships to those between communities and institutions. The key is how well we *act on and live* these values, which we all share, and which constitute the essence of restorative justice, communities, and the vision of corrections.

Karp, David R. and Todd R. Clear. (2002) *What is Community Justice? Case Studies of Restorative Justice and Community Supervision*. Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage Publications. Zehr, Howard. (1990) *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Waterloo, ON: Herald Press.

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THE JOURNEY OF RESTORING A FAMILY AFTER VIOLENT CRIME

By Katy Hutchison, July 17, 2006

I knew immediately following my husband's murder that my children were going to experience the trauma differently.

As I withdrew into myself and struggled not to imagine the graphic details of the last moments of his life, my children bombarded me with questions about the hard facts surrounding his death. I came to understand this reaction was normal, natural and necessary. In order for them to face the reality of the violent way in which their father's life ended, they needed to piece together the mechanics of his death. The smallest and seemingly inconsequential pieces of information came together and formed a blueprint for their processing of the trauma. As adults we tend to block out this type of thinking process. We are fearful of the pain. Some medicate, some drink and many simply bury the natural curiosity for information that exists within all of us. Because of this we leave questions unanswered. However, children will not allow that; and we can learn from them.

Addressing my children's most basic feelings of fear was paramount. In my situation, I was confident the perpetrator did not pose a risk to my family and was able to convince them of that over time. However, in many instances of violent crime, the family does live at risk and in fear. In these situations it is critical to have the support of trained victim service workers and law enforcement professionals to minimize the risk of re-victimization.

Normalcy is key. It is easy and sometimes necessary for us during a crisis to temporarily hand over the day-to-day managing of our children to well meaning friends and family. I found those close to me were also dealing with trauma reactions and grief, and while they were able to distract my children in the short-term, with out-of-the-ordinary activities and restaurant meals, it was the quiet routine of home that my children needed most. Too much had changed following their father's death. They needed the security of being in their own beds, eating simple and nutritious meals, having plenty of downtime to reflect and regroup. Should safety be an issue in the home following the violence, these routines must be replicated as soon as possible in another secure location.

Following the initial shock of being victimized by a violent crime, I found time did soften the edges; gradually and naturally moving along the process of healing. For my children however, time simply meant an increased rather than decreased awareness of the crime as they matured. For a while, their questions became more frequent and more difficult to answer; usually posed at time when I was trying not to be immersed in reflection about the reality of the violence we had experienced. At this stage it was helpful to involve close friends and family who could reflect on the tragedy, yet be slightly removed from the epicenter of emotion I still occupied.

Children intuitively pick up on the stigma associated with violent crime. In an effort to distance themselves and feel safe, society often makes generalizations about victim families that are untrue and hurtful. It is important to discuss this with children and explain that they

are not defined by the violence that has touched their family. At the same time it should be stressed that nothing the children did brought on the violence.

Children watch the process we follow to obtain justice very carefully. It is important to keep an open dialogue about the police and court proceedings as they occur. The notion of unacceptable behaviour and punishment; the way in which we view discipline in our family unit expands naturally into the discussion of crime and consequences. It is here that we need to reflect with our children on the importance of relationship rather than process when determining effective ways to deter unacceptable behaviour. Few would argue that a restorative approach to conflict resolution does not work within the family unit. Most of us have seen the benefits of working through a problem around the dining room table. Families traumatized by violent crime may, in some situations benefit from applying the same method of discussing the hurt and initiating healing. The concept of restorative justice makes sense to children. They understand that isolation and shame are often not effective deterrents to bad behaviour. Young people can be emotional risk-takers when it comes to confronting pain and discussing harm with those that caused it. As adults we can take a cue from our brave children and work together to repair harm and rebuild lives.

And finally, children need to know that it is okay to move on. Once the trauma and grief have mellowed, once everyone is safe, there exists the possibility of a new and good life for the family.

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“WHAT WE SEE DEPENDS MAINLY ON WHAT WE LOOK FOR”

– JOHN LUBBOCK

In my past, when faced with an issue or problem, I had the tendency to view my situation from a single frame. What I mean by this is that I viewed any particular situation from one point of view, namely my own. Needless to say, this was not always the correct choice as it leads to a convergent mindset. I faced my problem with a sort of tunnel vision, which led me to believe that my solutions and actions were the only viable options available to me. These mindsets led to a number of criminal convictions and inevitably to me serving eight months of a three year sentence in a federal prison. It was during my incarceration that I was lucky enough to encounter the Restorative Justice team at my institution; and form my first creative partnership. It may be awkward to some of you to hear the words “incarceration” and “lucky” in the same sentence, but it was truly a life changing experience.

This was a partnership between the person responsible for committing the crime and the victims of crime. It enabled me to add multiple frames to my perspective and view situations from other points of view, such as that of the victim. It was truly a point of revelation as, for the first time in my life, I felt the impact of my actions on those surrounding me. To use a metaphor, picture a rock tossed into a clear lake. As we all know it makes an initial strong

disruption, immediately affecting everything in its path. In the same way, my crimes did the same to the people around me. Is that it? No; the rock causes an expansive ripple effect that is more gradual and slow, but nonetheless affects everything in its course; forever changing the landscape and setting that it encounters. These insights led me to “chase the ripples” and look for partnerships “across the whole lake”. The ripples and ability to use multiple frames and perspectives led me not only to the victims of crime, but to our communities, our youth, our police services, our court system — and in a sort of karmic circle — back to where it all started; Correctional Service of Canada.

It was truly a point of revelation as, for the first time in my life, I felt the impact of my actions on those surrounding me.

I began to work with the community to raise awareness; speaking with youths to steer them away from choices that lead to criminality and towards alternatives that lead to positive contributions towards society. I tried to achieve this by using my experience to help them visualize the ripples of their actions and thus enabling them to use multiple perspectives when making their decisions.

At the same time, another creative partnership came in the form of education. To be able to view situations from multiple perspectives, such as that of the victim, motivated me to want to help those affected by crime. I wanted

to give back to society what I had taken from it as a youth; thus stopping the ripples. After completing an Undergraduate degree, I am now completing a Law Degree focusing on social justice. I feel that this partnership will enable me to raise awareness in our court systems, with our politicians, and with our police in order to work with our communities and victims of crime to reverse the ripples of criminality.

The journey I had embarked upon in my institution had brought me back there once again to foster new collaborative action. Through conversations with my former parole officer and Restorative Justice Group, I have formed partnerships with the Victims Services Unit, looking for a way to work with victims of crime. In addition, I have had the privilege to work with Correctional Service of Canada to make this contribution and share my journey with you.

I plan on continuing my work where creative partnerships emerge and collaborative action exists.

“Great discoveries and improvements invariably involve the cooperation of many minds. I may be given credit for having blazed the trail but when I look at the subsequent developments I feel the credit is dueto others rather than to myself.”

– Alexander Graham Bell

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ONE PERSPECTIVE ON VICTIMIZATION

By John Green

There was a baby boy, who through circumstances beyond his control, was given up to the care of a Child and Family Social Services Agency. The boy was too young to question whether or not his mother had loved him. He was too young to express need or disagreement when he entered the child care system.

His experience was one of rejection and instability during the first four years of his life through foster placements and trial adoptions. Ultimately, he became the youngest child in the agency's history to live in a group home comprised of older damaged children. Several reasons existed for the instability of placements. Firstly, in the 1960's, racially appropriate placements were extremely challenging. Secondly, such placements were not sought after by child care agencies as a priority.

So there was this boy, age four, living with violent children who themselves had been victims of family violence, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. All of these children, with the exception of the boy, had one thing in common; they were all white. This led to the violent, sexual, racial and emotional victimization of this boy for the next 11 years of his life by the children residing in the group home where he was placed.

At the age of 15 the boy made a conscious decision that he did not have to be a victim. He chose to fight through his history of victimization and emerge from his dark secret as someone who could feel good about himself. He went on to successfully negotiate independent living which led to formidable challenges associated with the volatility of adolescence and the education system.

Through all of this, the boy, who is now a man, ended up doing remarkably well. I am married to a wonderful woman with whom I share two young daughters. I have never sought professional counselling, nor have I disclosed my story openly to others until now.

I often ask myself how I got here. How did I escape the cycle of abuse unlike those with whom I grew up? I am thankful to those that touched my life and who unknowingly made the difference in helping me shape my future to one with meaning and purpose.

Anne Marriot was the first social worker that treated me like a son even though some may have questioned her professionalism in doing so. Anne never had the opportunity to see the man that I have become as she passed away some time ago.

Denise Gregg was the first child care worker that allowed me to experience a sense of nurturing. Denise and I share a birthday together; ironically I am writing this very reflection on our shared day.

Giles Hebert was another child care worker who was like the older brother I never had. He encouraged me to stir things up as a form of self expression.

Mr. Mendel was my guidance counsellor at St. John's High School in Winnipeg. He taught me that help should be unconditional.

Finally, Mr. Margolis was my homeroom teacher at St. John's High School who taught me that my acting out was only the surface of my being and my potential lay deeper below.

Each of them profoundly impacted my life and unknowingly opened a door towards choice and possibility.

If someone were to examine my background without knowledge of who I've become, my story is no different than many of the abused children that became offenders residing in correctional institutions today. I too would have criminogenic factors that would indicate a high risk to re-offend or to manage in the community. The fact that this picture is not indicative of who I am is largely due to the people who influenced my life. Without their intervention, my life would have been different. It could have been one of criminality, harm, and despair.

My life journey has taught me that if we are to address the issues of harm, victimization, and the life choices which lead to criminality, we must address a number of issues. The first is to acknowledge that the term "victim" goes far beyond that of legal terminology. Victims must acknowledge that, in some cases, they are a part of a cycle of victimization, a history if you will, that is deeply ingrained within our society.

There is no doubt that the voice of victims is powerful, but through our pain we must acknowledge another voice, that of the silent victim. These individuals may not be fortunate enough to have the positive influences and interventions to help them express their choices and possibilities, and be further victimized through systemic forms of victimization. In the absence of positive influences, an individual is left in a volatile state of becoming a potential victimizer. Only when we begin to deal with the cycle of victimization will we have the ability to strike hard at the roots of crime, reduce harm, and create healthier communities.

It takes a village to raise a child...Creative partnerships, Collaborative action.

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A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL IS A CREATIVE PLACE

By Belinda Hopkins, July 2006

Everyone in a school needs the skills to be able to make, maintain and, if necessary, repair relationships in the event of a disagreement or conflict. Lack of these skills can contribute to the growing wave of violence in our communities, as a senior Scottish police officer recently commented in the national press. Teaching staff need to model these skills so that young people grow up in an environment where they feel valued, their opinions and feelings are heard and respected and, if they make mistakes or lose their way, they can be supported in putting things right and re-integrated into what is an essential supportive community. Restorative skills enable both young and old to deal with conflict and challenging behaviour in a constructive way that can repair harm and damaged relationships. A restorative approach encourages full accountability — everyone in a school needs to consider their possible contribution to any given situation.

A restorative approach in schools is much broader than may be the case in the criminal justice field. Educationalists have seen that the approach has applications at all levels of engagement — from classroom disruption by an individual student to gang warfare in the school yard, and from preventative measures such as regular class circles to build community to reactive conferences involving parents to explore whether a school suspension is necessary. Training begins with that most basic of skills — active, non-judgemental listening — and yet so many young people complain that no-one listens to them, so perhaps it is best to be reminded! The language of ‘Restorative Enquiry’ builds on these active listening skills—using certain key questions that helps the speaker recount their story, their feelings about

what happened and what they need to move on. Many teachers find this process very frustrating — they want to rescue, offer advice or reprimand. But the key to the process is the belief that the people with the problem also have the solution — and to take away the opportunity for them to find this solution for themselves is disempowering.

A restorative approach in schools is much broader than may be the case in the criminal justice field.

Restorative Enquiry has many applications beyond the one-to-one. It can be used when two people are in conflict and need to hear each others’ perspectives before exploring a mutually acceptable way forward. It can be used in what is sometimes called a ‘conference’ — a meeting in the round involving all key players in a conflict — useful after a more serious incident when parents and maybe school staff need to be involved, to be given a chance to tell their stories and to explore ways forward. The emphasis is always on staying curious — not making assumptions or taking sides — and encouraging people to get in touch with their own needs and the needs of others who may have been affected, so that everyone can repair the harm and their relationships.

But don’t people need to be punished if they do wrong? In our view punishment is the soft option! It lets people get away with their wrong doing in the sense that it does not give a wrongdoer an opportunity to hear from those affected by their behaviour and really understand its impact on them. Furthermore punishment does not usually give people a chance to make amends in a way they feel comfortable with. Enforced penance again breeds resentment. Freely chosen amends makes the wrongdoer feel better about themselves and helps to build the self esteem that is so often very low in such people.

The risk attached to punishment is that it can lead to alienation and a feeling of not having one’s story heard. Even if someone was in the wrong the misbehaviour undoubtedly has a reason and perhaps a deeper seated cause that needs attending to. Sometimes people feel unjustly treated because they were ‘caught’ whilst others escaped unscathed — or else their own wrongdoing was retaliation from earlier wrong that went undetected. All of these cases suggest that the time taken to listen to all sides must be the fairer option.

What about the time all this takes? In fact a restorative approach does not take more time than a traditional punitive approach if all the hours spent on both are totted up. In fact time invested in a restorative process tends to save time, since it gets to the root of a problem and ensures it does not crop up again because relationships have been restored. Students themselves can be trained to offer basic counselling mediation.

A restorative school is a creative place — where everyone feels part of a cohesive, respectful community. It would be interesting to think about how all these ideas apply not only to schools but other institutions — residential care homes, hospitals, correctional facilities, maybe even your own office — how restorative are these places?

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JUSTICE MATTERS FOR COMMUNITY WELLNESS: AN IDEA FOR MOVING INTO NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDICATORS THAT COUNT

By Lorraine Berzins

There's a story of a man who lost a coin in the middle of a lawn, but his friend finds him looking all over for it on the sidewalk. "Why are you looking all over for it here when you lost it over there?" — "Because it's dark over there, this is where the street lamp is".

Everything we now know about the complex set of factors and conditions that contribute to the events that get labelled **crime** tells us that to be looking for solutions by putting the spotlight on the criminal justice system, — to punish certain individuals, — is to be looking for solutions in the wrong place. But it has long been the only place on which the street lamp has been focused. Research tells us this does not work. We must move both spotlight and resources back into the community, within which we all strive to co-exist.

But how do we awaken a community's curiosity about how well it does criminal justice so that more socially responsible, restorative approaches start to be seen as desirable? We need to **make visible links** between the criminal justice practices in a community and their impacts on the concerns that already matter to its citizens. We need to tap into the interests and stakes a community has in improving its quality of life.

Our biggest challenge: to move deeper into communities in creative ways that can bring new partners to the justice table.

AN IDEA:

We discovered that the Community Foundation of Ottawa is about to start a Vital Signs® annual check-up through which it proposes to measure the vitality of the city, identify significant trends, and assign grades in 10 to 12 areas critical to Ottawa's quality of life. We have started a process to engage our

Community Foundation in adding, **the assessment of the impacts of criminal justice services and outcomes on community wellbeing** to their identified list of critical areas. By integrating some indicators about criminal justice services and outcomes into an existing initiative about community wellness, it will become possible to show our community the linkages between these justice indicators and its other sectors of concern.

WHY:

The human impact of crime, fear of crime, and the experience of the conventional criminal justice system, can take a severe toll on people and entire communities: post-traumatic stress, health, family conflict, absenteeism from work, economic impacts, high costs in social assistance, correctional expenditures, and a climate of mistrust. These are the negative consequences of crime that no criminal justice system can remove. It is communities that need to help people deal in a healthy way with the ripple effect of crime and the criminal justice process, because our courts of law have not been designed to address or fulfill these needs.

WHAT:

In order to alert our community to this, we hope to develop 'healthy justice' indicators and methods for accessing accurate information about them. We are thinking of exploring factors related to myriad concerns such as:

- victim services including care to prevent post-traumatic stress after-effects;
- court backlogs;
- Restorative Justice options;
- other services for support and healing;
- sentencing trends, — who/how much/ for what;
- costs, local jail conditions;
- impact on families, health impacts, economic impacts, social service cost impacts;
- victimization and recidivism;
- at-risk communities and groups;
- reintegration strategies for offenders and their families in order to prevent further criminal behaviour and victimization, ...and more

EARLY SIGNALS OF OUR COMMUNITY'S INTEREST:

Our preliminary exploration with the Community Foundation of Ottawa (CFO) has been met with a very promising response. Their first report is due out in just a few months, so there is barely time to scratch the surface of issues so recently raised. But already they have decided to include 'wait times for criminal cases related to court backlogs' in this year's Vital Signs, because of the impact of such stresses in relation to many of their quality of life and social justice concerns. They are prepared to hold up linkages between some of their other indicators and some factors we know are related to crime and crime prevention. This is consistent with their aim of 'connecting dots' in a way that can enable the community to draw certain implications and come to know itself in ways that it otherwise wouldn't.

(Barbara McInnes, President and CEO of CFO, in *The Ottawa Citizen*, Ottawa to get yearly health 'check-up', by Don Butler, March 20, 2006).

AN IDEA WORTH PURSUING IN YOUR COMMUNITY...?

There are already 155 Community Foundations, and growing, in Canada. Indications are that Community Foundations Canada sees the criminal justice concerns we have begun to describe as being of interest and importance.

Perhaps this is an idea you may want to explore in a community near you...

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PARTNERING IN THE MAINSTREAM

By Bill Staubi

I am engaged in a number of volunteer activities that involve either marginalized communities or people organized around emerging social issues. In the last 12-18 months I have noticed a challenge that each of them share eventually, and one that I believe is also facing the Restorative Justice (RJ) community; or will be soon. That challenge arises out of their success and is the challenge of partnering in the mainstream; or in other words, adjusting to a wider spread acceptance of what you are proposing.

One might naturally think this is the ultimate goal of any smaller dedicated group of people trying to advance a great idea. But when that moment arrives where the greater world “gets it” there is often a feeling of frustration and a dangerous risk of things falling apart. Why does the cusp of success have this dual edge as the cusp of failure and what does it mean in the effort to inculcate restorative measures into the justice system?

When a dedicated group of people have formulated an idea, a vision, and a plan for achieving it, it is natural that those things are shaped by the world view and values of that group. Even broad minded thinkers and holistic planners have a frame of reference that has edges that contain it. The harder a group has fought for its idea, the more entrenched those edges can become. Most often those edges transform into assumptions about the “right” way to do things, the right way to fit into the big picture.

As well, when people have fought hard for an idea, championed for a position in the larger scheme of things, or challenged an entrenched status quo there is usually a goal point in mind. Often, the closer the group moves towards that

goal the closer they are also moving to mainstream engagement in their cause. Those first key victories can seem close enough to touch.

But the “mainstream” brings with it new people, in larger numbers, and sometimes faster than previous efforts to recruit new people. It brings people with variations in their understanding, values, commitment, skills, perspective, and personal needs and goals. It can be overwhelming to include these new supporters, to respond to their questions, and to integrate their contribution; especially when resolving conflicting desires and ideas. Existing members can resent having fought “the good fight” only to have new people come along just as things are getting easier. Adding the mainstream to a movement is a bit like adding water to juice — you increase the volume, but will it taste as sweet?

One challenge folks in Restorative Justice and related fields often suffer is the expectation that they rise above human emotion.

So, can you have it both ways? Perhaps. Discussion about how to partner in new ways, or how to strengthen existing partnerships, need to include discussions about shared values. But not just about the values around RJ but also the group’s values about working together. Is the group ready for flexible control of direction and issues and have you discussed how to integrate opposition and conflicting views? Is your old structure still the best and have you thought about when it is best to stick together and when to splinter into groups attacking a problem on multiple fronts?

One challenge folks in RJ and related fields often suffer is the expectation that they rise above human emotion. For example, I often

hear suggestions that RJ advocates ought to be perfect at resolving conflicts amongst themselves. Or I am at meetings where people are reluctant to express some feelings because it wouldn’t be consistent with being an “RJ type person”. But this just holds one back. Acknowledging a disappointment that a favoured plan has been changed is no crime. Being upset or jealous, or angry reaffirms the humanity in each person that fuels the passion for a cause.

Finding ways to celebrate past achievements can engage newcomers in the group’s culture and history. Finding ways to acknowledge or even grieve changed plans can give veteran members a way of letting go with integrity. Changes in direction can be thought of as side-tracks, or we can reframe the experience from walking a single path to dancing our way around the ballroom — when done to the rhythm it is both beautiful and elegant.

Success will bring the mainstream; it cannot be avoided. The mainstream will bring challenges. We need to accept they will come and talk openly and personally about what the challenges mean to us. Looking for the ways that these new hands and hearts can strengthen what we are doing and seeing how our experience can help others achieve what they want will make sure we get through the dance with hardly any toes stepped upon.



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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ASSOCIATION — 2006

By Danny Graham

In 1991 I jumped into the criminal justice system as a defence lawyer in a legal aid setting in Halifax, Nova Scotia. For the next eight years I tried — struggled — to square my values with what was going on inside the system. They didn't square.

My clients were on a revolving assembly line. Victims were getting the shaft, and the general public lived in a bubble — oblivious of the perverse outcomes that too often resulted from criminal proceedings. So I went in search of answers.

I eventually read Howard Zehr's book *Changing Lenses*, where he contrasts retributive and restorative approaches to crime. It created personal reverberations that I haven't shaken to this day. Zehr's work described a "win-win" possibility in a criminal justice world where I had only come to know "lose-lose", or at best "win-lose".

Dissatisfaction with the current system gurgles up from time to time from credible sources, but informed debate is never sustained in the general public. For example, the federal auditor general once audaciously asked about the overall benefit of the system upon learning it had little impact on the outcomes it aspires to. It costs over 10 billion tax payers' dollars each year.

And more than the money it costs, we can lament what it has done to our sense of community — how it has contributed to a bifurcated sense that the world is made up of "good people" and "bad people".

I was surprised to learn that the modern form of restorative justice in Canada began as far back as 1974 in Kitchener-Waterloo and even more surprised to read influential writer

John Braithwaite's position that, through most of history and in most cultures, reparative or restorative approaches were the standard instead of the exception.

Interest and enthusiasm in Canada for this "new" subject was very high in the 1990s and in the first years of this decade. A program was promised in a federal Speech from the Throne, but never materialized. Parliamentary committees expressed strong interest in restorative justice, but little political will or government resources followed. At both the federal and provincial levels of government it was a time of big talk and little action.

We have now settled into a time of little talk and little action. The subject of restorative justice remains stunted like a health food store on a side street — dwarfed by the criminal justice system that dominates every element of the market place.

Restorative Justice is a big idea with deep roots. It inverts our expectations by creating an opportunity out of a difficult problem. It invites us to re-examine our relationships with our fellow citizens. And it requires brave unapologetic eyes-wide-open altruism. It is not a panacea, but the research, particularly into recidivism and satisfaction, is promising.

In Nova Scotia we learned — imperfectly — that it is possible to create systemic change in the direction of restorative justice, but it isn't easy. We also learned that every successful initiative, big or small, requires a galvanizing driving force. We had a Steering Committee and across Canada, Restorative Justice programs have grown most effectively at the community level as a result of the hard work and inspirations of committees of people.

Restorative Justice has little potential for national growth without similar dynamics. I therefore support the establishment of a national association devoted to the subject. The do-nothing status quo is unacceptable.

Restorative justice will never achieve its enormous potential without a focused and coherent plan to make it happen. This requires an organization. What it looks like and who is involved is open for debate, and subject to a variety of cautions — including:

1. It should represent the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds that exist in the Restorative Justice community, without being paralyzed by size or polarized by agendas.
2. It should be arms-length from government (although it could have government members).
3. It should be clear on its purposes (dialogue, resource, education, skills development, research, growth, advocacy and/or other).
4. The volunteer base should be made up of volunteers with the skill, motivation and time needed to create sustainable results.
5. It should be properly resourced (preferably by a variety of sources, both government and non-government).
6. It should be transparent and democratic.

We welcome all questions, thoughts, or cautions.

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

By Laura Holthus

About a year ago I had been approached by a friend and colleague about Restorative Justice. He had asked me to submit my thoughts and experiences on this issue for sharing to a larger population. At the time I agreed to do so, but when it came to sitting down and writing something coherent and with purpose, I realized that there was no way I could do so. My experience with this school of thought was minimal as I had no previous experience to draw upon. Eventually, I was “let off the hook” so to speak.

As a federal parole officer with CSC, I had only a vague idea of what Restorative Justice offered to both victims and perpetrators. Professionally, I had never seen this at work and as a result had difficulty understanding the benefits. Largely, I had been a pessimist. After speaking with my colleague, I reviewed my caseload, and tried to envision any one of those individuals participating in the process. I was at a loss. I was also hard pressed to envision any benefits that would be garnered by either the victim or the offender in each case.

Then in the fall of 2005, I received a call from an individual with the Restorative Justice program, advising me that a victim had requested the process, and I was the supervising parole officer of the offender involved. Immediately I asked myself: Did I think that this person would be willing to engage in, be open to, or benefit from, this process?

I must say that I was taken aback. This particular offender was not anywhere near the top of my “sketchy” list. I had inherited this offender from another parole officer, and there were

some “adjustment” issues that had presented themselves. At the time of request, the offender and I had begun the early stages of developing a decent working rapport, respect and some trust. I suggested to the representative that I would speak to the offender, but not to expect a lot in the way of openness or co-operation.

Restorative Justice, while not changing or over-writing the past can positively impact and redirect the future.

So I spoke to my charge. His response was what I had expected: reticent, cautious, and somewhat negative. He was concerned that his participation, or not, would impact his parole status. I assured him that this would not be the case; as his parole officer I could not and would not force him to engage. He asked me for my opinion: Did I think he should participate? Would there be a benefit to either side of this equation? Would it do any good? My response was, unequivocally, “Yes”. After speaking to the representative, even with my limited understanding, I truly believed that this could, and would, accomplish a great deal; much more than “doing time” and programs.

Still cautious, he decided that he needed to know more about the process, and then make an informed decision. Subsequently after meeting the representative, he made the decision to follow through with the process.

Following the Restorative Justice meeting with the victim, I noted a change in the offender. He had been making gains during our contacts however, there seemed to be more self-assurance and self-esteem. He felt that he had

answered the questions posed, openly and honestly. He remarked that the victim did not attack him, his lifestyle or his past. He advised that the victim was very interested in what he is doing now, how he was making use of his time, did he learn anything from the sentence imposed.

Do I believe that Restorative Justice will be beneficial to all cases? No. Not every case is in the same place, is as open to, or ready for, healing. Not every offender feels that they have done something wrong, and not

every offender is strong enough to look into the face of human casualty.

Restorative Justice, while not changing or over-writing the past can positively impact and redirect the future. This is not a process for the “faint of heart”; it demands strength, commitment and genuine reflection. Since my encounter with the success of this process, I have a better understanding of its benefits. I look forward with anticipation to the next individual with the strength and commitment it takes to avail oneself of the peace that this can offer.

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

HEALING THE LAND TEAM

Permission to share granted by *Canada Awakening Ministries* 06-08-21

In July 2006, an aboriginal group from Fiji visited Rankin Inlet and Pangnirtung, Nunavut to assist these communities to engage in a healing process. Their focus was on the damaged relationships that exist between the descendants of the original inhabitants of the areas, and the descendants of the people who moved in later.

The original inhabitants have a legitimate claim to and a special relationship with the land, but often they hold resentments towards the later groups, and the types of changes that they have brought in erecting buildings and changing the landscape in ways that the originals did not approve. The Fiji Healing team addressed similar issues in their country and are willing to share their experience with other aboriginal communities.

In Rankin Inlet, on the morning of Monday, July 10, some of the descendants of the original inhabitants of the area began to humble themselves and repent of the bitterness and anger they held towards the descendants of the later inhabitants. They had memories of what the land was like before the landscape changed and they were resentful that the changes were made without asking for permission.

On July 10, in the afternoon, it was planned to go to the site of one of the original settlements where conflicts had taken place. It was the place where hurts and wounds had been inflicted, the effects which remain until this day. The whole community was aware of this meeting and a news reporter from CBC North radio was there to document the event.

Many in the community were sceptical and did not think anything significant would come of this meeting. The Team however believed that an important element of the experience is that authentic representatives of the original inhabitants as well as representatives of the later inhabitants be present. Some 30 individuals attended the cleansing of the land ceremony.

People placed their prayer requests, which contained their heart's desires, into a hole in the ground. Their prayers included what they wanted God to do for the land that they had inherited from their fathers. A stone memorial was then erected right on that historic site.

Wednesday morning on July 12, the area surrounding where repentance and a releasing of forgiveness had taken place and where a memorial had been erected, was a wonder to behold!

Caribou has been and continues to be very important for the Inuit, and according to the wildlife manager in Rankin Inlet, approximately 15,000 caribou showed up at the place where the forgiveness and cleansing ceremony took place and where the healing of the land had been prayed for. Local residents stated that the caribou in this number had not been seen in that area in four years.

Caribou meat, a staple in the Inuit diet, is made into stews, steaks, roast, sausage and jerky. Historically, even the hoof of a caribou is made into a delicacy enjoyed by many Inuit, and the sinew from the back of the caribou can be used for sewing.

Bones and antlers were used to make tools. Large bones can be used as shovels. Antlers can also be used to make carvings. Caribou teeth are often used for ornamentation. The Inuit take pride in the many uses they have found for caribou. The Inuit and caribou have a special bond as they share the land.

"Wow, well first of all the miracle of the returning caribou was amazing. Everyone in town was talking about that. People were on the local radio station talking about this event. These were people who had originally ignored the visit but now were asking questions."

Even before the *Fiji Healing the Land Team* had left Rankin Inlet on Wednesday afternoon of July 12, they were able to witness the small miracle of caribou returning in great abundance!

People placed their prayer requests, which contained their heart's desires, into a hole in the ground.

Rigid and dogmatic worldviews presuppose a naturalistic explanation for everything. But the indigenous people have something to share with the western worldview which is that the spiritual and the natural worlds are connected and that the things we see in the natural flow out of the supernatural. The natural has its source in the Spirit, and it is manifested into the natural from that source.

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

“HOSTING” – PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE FOR HEALING TO TAKE PLACE

The Pastor of a congregation who did some hosting had this to say:

“I saw three youths face their loved ones, the neighbours they had hurt, saying, “I goofed. I am sorry.” I saw remorse!... I saw frustrated, angry persons learn that these youths are more than one act of vandalism.... I saw shamed, humiliated parents discover that there was support in this community!... I saw a community take some responsibility for the way its youths act (lack of things to do)! ...I saw victims, offenders, supporters struggle together on how to make right what is wrong!...I saw a community take ownership of its problems!”¹

The values and principles of Restorative Justice are espoused by almost all faith groups. But what can a congregation, mosque, or synagogue do about it? When you combine it with the principles of Hospitality, Sanctuary, and Reconciliation it becomes “Restorative Justice Conferencing Hosting”.

This was the vision that led the **Ontario Multifaith Council (OMC)** to partner with **Salem Christian Mental Health Association**, based in Hamilton, Ontario, to advance their “Hosting” project. It is an innovative two-year pilot project designed to stimulate the practice of restorative justice in local communities by involving faith communities in the practical, logistical support of Restorative Justice Conferences. The partnering organizations will recruit, train, and support a network of congregations that would host restorative justice conferences for the police, schools, and community facilitators.

Members of the **Christian Reformed Church** founded **Salem Christian Mental Health Association** to provide service in Christ’s name to people who struggle with serious mental illness and psychiatric issues. Today Salem is piloting new ways of reaching out to those

individuals by offering all faith communities the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those who are impacted by crime. Recently the synod of the Christian Reformed Church recommended that its churches become involved in restorative practices. The linkage between restorative justice and mental health is now a leading growth edge in the field of mental health itself.

The **Ontario Multifaith Council** is the advisor to the government of Ontario on religious services and spiritual care issues, standards and practices in publicly-funded institutions. They have been involved promoting Restorative Justice by offering training in ‘Conference Facilitation’ for teachers, police, Faith Group leaders, and community agencies since 1999.

At a **Restorative Justice Conference**, a safe process is created for victims to confront their offender. The offender is given the opportunity to repair some of the harm, to the satisfaction of the victim and the others involved. Victims and their supporters are able to express their needs and feelings and to seek answers to their deepest questions.

“Hosting” allows a local Faith Community to provide a safe place of “sanctuary” within their buildings for a restorative justice conference. Trained Faith Community Volunteers working with Restorative Justice Conference facilitators arrange necessary logistics, provide hospitality, and act as observers during conferences and prepare an informal refreshment gathering after the formal conference. They are a visible sign of their community’s support of the victim’s voice as the offender works towards making things right.

Under this unique project, six selected faith communities in four areas (Kitchener/Waterloo, Orillia, Halton Region, and Durham Region) will be trained and resourced to act as the “hosts”. The project will be evaluated and refined over the next two years. The project is blessed by the input and support

of some of the best practitioners and minds on restorative justice in Ontario.

Irena Lawrenson, retired OPP inspector and now Coordinator of Justice for Orillia Youth with Community Engagement (JOYCE) has said:

“The city of Orillia has a vision of being a caring community that focuses on building positive relations between troubled youth and their victims. JOYCE is part of that vision. We are delighted to have the support of Salem and OMC-local faith communities are now being approached to ascertain interest and commitment.”

Restorative justice practices bring healing to those impacted by crime. They are premised on the fact that all persons are equal; all have dignity and deserve respect; all have a voice; accountability, reconciliation, and healing are possible; all persons have that God-given capacity. It is part of one’s spiritual nature and rooted in the deepest longings of one’s soul. This initiative involving diverse faith communities in Ontario will hopefully inspire others to consider how they, too, can be involved in the humanizing and healing processes of Restorative Justice.

For further information contact the **Ontario Multifaith Council (OMC)** www.omic.ca (888) 837-0923

We are grateful to the OMC, Salem Christian Mental Health Association www.salem.on.ca/, & the Christian Reformed Church for the use of their materials in writing this article.

Michelle Landry, Project Officer, Chaplaincy & Restorative Justice Branch, Corrections Canada.

¹For the complete story, see the faith-based resources at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/portals/rj/index_e.shtml



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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK 2006

COLLABORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM

By Kimberly Mann

In 1998, an innovative pilot project based on restorative justice principles was born at the Ottawa Provincial Courthouse. The purpose of the Collaborative Justice Program (CJP) was to demonstrate that the application of a restorative approach in cases of *serious* adult or youth crime would provide for a more satisfying experience of justice for all parties involved — the victim(s), the offender(s) and the community. CJP's unique focus on cases of serious crime recognizes that the more serious the crime was, the more impact or trauma people may have experienced and thus the greater need for a healing approach.

Collaborative Justice is one of only a few programs that offers its participants options other than a face-to-face meeting. This reflects the belief that restorative justice is an approach that treats crime as harm done to people. Obviously people have different needs and personalities and no one tool will be right for every case.

Thus, CJP encourages communication between the parties through whatever means they desire, whether that is relaying information through the caseworker, letter writing, videotaping or meeting.

We recognize what a powerful and moving experience a restorative meeting can be for victim, offender, and community. When this project began, we expected to facilitate restorative meetings more frequently. We have been surprised to see that many people simply are not interested in a face-to-face meeting, particularly in the cases involving very serious crime. CJP's primary values encourage the participants to determine the degree and the nature of the contact with the other party as well as support the empowerment of the participants. We appreciate how important it is that the participants drive this process, and thus choose their manner of communication.

“The most common needs expressed by victims were to obtain information about the offence, hear the offenders' explanation, and communicate the impact the crime had on them. Offenders wanted to apologize, attempt

to repair the harm caused, and provide an explanation for their criminal behaviour.”¹ In light of the high satisfaction rates recorded by the evaluation team, obviously victims and offenders felt that their needs were met without a face-to-face meeting.

This is where I launch into a diatribe about our funding woes. Although initially funded by two very supportive federal government departments as an extended pilot project and with gratefully accepted contributions from several other sources, we now find ourselves in search of sustaining funding.

Our understanding from the federal government is that sustaining funding is the role of the provincial government; in Ontario that would be the Attorney General. Unfortunately we have not been successful in having that dialogue with them. They continuously refer us to funding through the Victims' Justice Fund (who has turned us down twice!). We have applied to many government departments, federal, provincial and municipal, to many private philanthropic organizations, we have gathered and presented letters of support from local politicians, previous clients and local criminal justice stakeholders, all to no avail.

What does it take to find sustaining funding? Collaborative Justice is a thoughtfully designed value-based program that has met the needs of hundreds of clients, has likely saved the government thousands of dollars, has been successfully evaluated, has local support from the Crown Attorney's office, the Defence Counsel Association and members of the Judiciary, and has provided support to numerous victims in a city where victims' services are woefully lacking. I say again, what does it take to find sustaining funding?

The inclusion of restorative justice values in the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was lauded as progressive. Why then does the same restorative approach not apply to cases involving adult offenders? Why doesn't the criminal justice system encourage adult offenders who have harmed others to take responsibility and to make amends? Why do victims of adult-perpetrated crime not have the same rights to restorative options?

Although we are grateful for the provincial funding for one youth caseworker, we are

frustrated at the non-existent funding for adult casework. Certainly there are far *more* adult cases than there are youth cases!

It is ironic and disheartening for us and for our community that after having witnessed numerous amazing stories of individuals' courage, generosity and fortitude; after having gained the support of local criminal justice stakeholders; after having supported hundreds of clients through a satisfying experience of justice; after years of enthusiastic interest/support from many other agencies and even from other countries (Brazil, Japan, Sweden, Latvia, England, Scotland, etc.); here we are in 2006, with two part-time staff handling one full caseload of youth cases and a very few serious adult cases!

Nevertheless, we continue to have hope for future funding and we will persevere for as long as we can because we see on a daily basis how this work assists people through a very difficult time in their lives. That alone makes it worth doing (and worth funding)!

¹ Evaluation of the Collaborative Justice Project: A Restorative Justice Program for Serious Crime 2005-02. 2005. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada

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THE SPIRIT OF COLLABORATIVE AND CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

By Esther van Gennip

I often hear people speak of the “Spirit of Collaboration” and building a “Culture of Peace”. So how do we accomplish this? It has been my experience that the main ingredients for genuine creative and collaborative partnerships are rooted in fundamental principles of dignity, respect, fostering of trust; and draw from the gifts, skills and knowledge of all partners. Through creative partnering there can be a celebration of diversity and the ability to address real needs, inequities and deep rooted identity based conflicts. Through collaboration, partners come to understand the need for an inclusive process that welcomes all community members and creates a “safe space” to discuss human identity needs and address deep rooted conflicts to restore relationships.

It is widely recognized that root causes of crime are major contributors to divided, polarized communities. Creative partnerships are capable of “bridging the gap” in fragmented communities. This is accomplished by raising awareness of universal principles of Community Based Conflict Resolution (CBCR) and Restorative Justice, while providing experiential, skills-based training to enhance the capacity within communities to address these causes. Through collaboration we recognize the integral contributions of all community members and discover new ways to engage in dialogue to understand deep rooted conflicts and respond to the needs and expectations of community members.

The REsolve project in Sioux Lookout, Ontario is an example of successful creativity and collaboration between community partners. REsolve demonstrates how an appreciation of the cultural identity needs, motivators, and inspirations of community members can strengthen the relationships and commitment within a community. Such partnerships require a shift from consulting and competition, to a spirit of collaboration, shared experiences and the responsibility of working towards mutual benefits.

A prime example of creative and collaborative action, the REsolve initiative (supported by Sioux Lookout Anti-Racism Committee — SLARC) invited the Canadian Institute for Conflict Resolution (CICR) to conduct community based conflict resolution training in Sioux Lookout. REsolve gathered participants from every sector of Sioux Lookout community to ensure diverse representation. Participants included: youth, vice-principle of high school, director of homeless shelter, community living, police, friendship center, city counselors, health care workers, business owners, a former Chief, and a church minister. The program gave participants the opportunity to explore the root cause of conflict and the complexity of legacy/identity based conflicts. This dialogue also helped the participants to promote better understanding of how their inter-relationships could effect positive social change. In short, such dialogues present information to stakeholders which can be empowering.

The success of the REsolve initiative held in Sioux Lookout demonstrates a growing commitment from community members to address conflict and restore relationships. The collaborative partnerships created by REsolve made it possible to provide CBCR training that promotes conflict resolving tools, techniques and processes. Participants of the workshops are applying the skills acquired from the program and utilizing the processes on a regular basis. The growing momentum generated in Sioux Lookout illustrates the commitment and synergy created by REsolve — CICR partnership. Unfortunately, REsolve does not have sufficient funds to pursue new opportunities requested by the wider community as a result of a new awareness in the community of the success of the project.

The irony of successful community based initiatives is that the longevity of program is determined by “shoestring” budgets. There is an on-going challenge of accessing resources for restorative justice programs. There is a need for strengthening the relationship between funding agencies and community based partners. This is accomplished through dialogue to inform partners of the socio-economic conditions, parameters and guidelines within which they can operate.

When communities express inclusion and respect as the main components of their foundations, a basis for addressing harmful conflict can be forged. REsolve is one such example of a community coming together creatively and collaboratively to work towards becoming a healthier, safer community. As this journey continues, Sioux Lookout’s community members will reap the benefits of their work, building upon this successful foundation through more meaningful and contributive relationships with each other.

It is through dialogue that communities can share their experiences, needs, and concerns.

This dialogue is an opportunity for members of the community to contribute individual pieces to the puzzle and collaboratively help figure how these pieces go together. It is the sharing of information which fosters understanding, hope, and a common vision for the future.

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ORGANIZED CRIME MURDERED MY SON

Sébastien Garneau, 19 years old, my only son, was severely beaten by members of the "Rock Machine" (now the "Bandidos") on January 15, 2000, and died of his injuries on January 20, 2000.

HEALING

The intensity and uniqueness of my experience and emotions over the past five years left me powerless to communicate, making words meaningless.

Perhaps people dislike witnessing suffering or simply prefer to leave the pain behind. We are all different, and everyone has his own coping mechanisms. I know best what is right for me and do not need to be rushed along the path before me.

My perspective and ability to trust were severely affected. I suffered from chronic depression and physical health problems: constant pain in my arms, high blood pressure and cholesterol, respiratory infections and food intolerances.

During my last break from work, I realized that healing is a gradual process, requiring a focus on "the present," something I had often heard and applied to my life. Now, when I feel vulnerable, I consider my immediate need. I live in the present, digging deep inside myself and discovering the inner me, to determine what is right for me and live in harmony.

I experienced a range of emotions: anger towards my son for getting into a deadly situation and letting me down; anger towards myself and guilt for failing to stop him; and anger towards his attackers for depriving me of an improving relationship with my son.

I slowly rebuilt my life, making decisions that, while not always wise, spoke to a better future. I adjusted to life without Sébastien, regained interest in the world and forged new friendships. My emotional reactions to his death became less intense and less frequent.

To help me heal and stop feeling like a victim, my counsellor introduced me to Victims/Offenders Encounters organized by the Centre de services de justice réparatrice.

These encounters allowed me to speak freely, fostered a mutual awareness of the impact of my son's murder on me, helped me let go of destructive emotions, helped us reach a mutual understanding of inmates' and victims' experiences and helped us abandon our prejudices.

I knew from the start that the program would help me. Each participant showed enormous respect for the feelings expressed, and the group's interactions over the six weeks of meetings were informed by compassion.

Restorative justice is part of my therapy and I attended a victim/offender encounter primarily for my well-being, to go deep inside myself and put the experience behind me. The four inmates I met have been involved in the program since entering prison, and are truly committed to their rehabilitation process. Whether victims or inmates, we were all affected by the same extreme act. The road to healing is identical for all; we have to reach rock bottom, only to resurface by forgiving ourselves and picking up the pieces, breaking free of our inner prison.

I met some former motorcycle gang members at a second victim/offender encounter. A need to meet Sébastien's murderer is slowly emerging. After hearing them talk about their personal growth since their arrest, I realized that I was not responsible for my son's death and that restorative justice was working in unsuspected ways. As one meeting ended, two inmates requested my forgiveness for their irresponsible actions because, although they had not killed my child directly, as participants in the gang's criminal activities, they had contributed to his untimely death and my grief.

From the investigators who no longer called me concerning a murder file buried and forgotten; from organizations that denied me compensation; and from people around me who had moved on with their lives; it was these inmates who provided me with something which I had long sought after, acknowledgment.

I left the prison that evening finally freed from a weight carried inside for so long. Someone who had committed a destructive act towards life had finally acknowledged the legitimacy of my overwhelming pain.

FORGIVENESS

I had lost my spiritual life, the part leading to self-healing and forgiveness.

Later, I wondered whether I could ever forgive and realized that, simply by asking this, I was continuing to heal and could hope to rediscover my spirituality and live an almost normal life.

Forgiveness does not just happen. I had to first overcome my nagging guilt for failing to protect Sébastien and then recover faith that I would be all right and could trust in people again.

I discovered a great inner strength that can turn my life completely around.

This strength made me want to meet my son's killer, to hear why he did it and how he experienced the event.

I have no negative feelings towards the prison inmates and know that I could meet with Sébastien's attacker, given the opportunity.

I consider myself a force of nature now.

Carole Bertrand

Mother of Sébastien Garneau, 19 years old, murdered



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