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March 09, 2014 9:43PM

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Q&A -- Seeking paths to justice and healing

By Margaret Smith

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Communities for Restorative Justice is a nonprofit organization and partnership of community members and law enforcement agencies that offers restorative justice after a crime. Restorative justice focuses on the needs of both crime victims and offenders. Victims take an active role while offenders are encouraged to take responsibility and repair harm they may have done.

Former Acton selectman Lauren Rosenzweig Morton has a long history of volunteerism and community involvement. She now serves as president of the board of directors of the Concord-based Communities for Restorative Justice - which includes the partnership of area police departments including Acton, Concord, Boxborough and Arlington police departments among others.

She spoke about the impact of the death of her husband, Philip Rosenzweig, who died in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and her quest to play a role in conflict resolution. "When Phil died I took the view that I wasn't going to let anger consume me--that my job was to show the world that there are more appropriate ways to deal with conflict than violence, and that's why I had donations in his memory go to Seeds Of Peace," an organization that brings together young people from regions where there is conflict.

She added, "To me, [Communities for Restorative Justice] is Seeds of Peace on a more local level. Their philosophy is one of catching those who commit harm as early in the process as possible and allowing a safe setting for there to be a dialogue about it, rather than one side versus the other. These things are, in my opinion, never black or white. There is a whole lot of gray to explore, that our current justice system doesn't accommodate. Restorative justice fills that space."

Recently, she spoke about her involvement, and how others can participate.

Please tell me how and when you got involved in Communities for Restorative Justice.

I was approached to be on the Board of Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ) in 2010. I was on the Board of Selectmen at the time. The program resonated deeply with my values. When I completed my second term on the Board of Selectmen in 2011, I joined the Board of C4RJ.

What is your role?

I am currently the president of the board.

What is the main mission of Communities for Restorative Justice?

Our mission is to provide regional communities with a complement to the traditional judicial system where:

Victims of crime are given the opportunity to address the person(s) who have harmed them, to ask questions in a safe environment, and to share ideas on ways that the harm can be repaired.

Offenders better understand the impact of their actions, are held accountable, and encouraged to make amends to those they have harmed.

The community offers support for the process, strengthening community connections, and engaging in matters of concern to its members.

How do you think this organization can be of greatest help in the community?

The circle process that we use helps all who are involved— victims, offenders, family, police, volunteers—make connections that foster empathy, accountability, and repair. Offenders have a chance to make amends in ways that are important to that particular victim. They internalize the importance of living in a way that respects others, and are much less likely to reoffend. Our volunteers also work to help the offenders learn life skills, and will make referrals for help with more serious issues if needed. Restorative justice isn't a panacea, but works very well when victim and offender are interested in exploring what happened; it helps them move forward in a healthy way.

How can those who are interested learn more and get involved?

Our website, www.C4RJ.com, explains the program in more detail, along with ways to volunteer and support the program. We can also be reached by phone 978-318-3447. Our executive director is Jennifer Larson Sawin. We have a free film screening about our work on April 29 at the Acton Police Department. Visit www.C4RJFilmActon.eventbrite.com to register. The film was partly funded by the Acton-Boxborough United Way and we're grateful!



Lauren Rosenzweig Morton. COURTESY PHOTO

NAME Lauren Rosenzweig Morton

AGE 56

OCCUPATION Homemaker and community volunteer

FAVORITE QUOTE "Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures." -
- John F. Kennedy

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DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA for someone we can profile for our Q&A series? Send your idea to beacon@wickedlocal.com.

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