



**Getting Started** *in Restorative Justice*

A GUIDE FOR NEW ENGLAND

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## Table of Contents



SECTION I	<b>DEFINING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE</b>	2
SECTION II	<b>USING THIS GUIDE</b>	4
SECTION III	<b>RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS</b>	
	CONCORD RESTORATIVE CIRCLE	6
	FRANKLIN COUNTY RESTORATIVE PROBATION PROGRAM	10
	HAMPDEN COUNTY COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD	14
	PEACEKEEPING CIRCLES AT ROCA	18



## Dear Reader

**The purpose of this resource guide** is to assist you in choosing restorative justice for yourself and your community. In these pages you will find a directory of established restorative justice programs in New England, along with contact information for the volunteers and practitioners who staff these programs. We describe how these programs work, who the staff is, how they are funded, and whom they serve. We hope this information will broaden your understanding of the practical applications of restorative justice and the myriad ways restorative principles can be implemented within the justice system, social services, schools, churches, and communities.

More than a directory, this resource guide is designed to serve as a manual for getting started in restorative justice. In our experience, successful programs in restorative justice are the work of ordinary citizens who desire a different way of doing justice in their community. We share the unique history of exemplary programs—how they were conceived and how they were nurtured—to inspire and instruct others who are seeking their own way toward restorative justice. This background story, often overlooked, is enormously helpful for those who wish to get started in restorative justice. These pages tell more than just what programs do now: we tell who started them and why, what help they received along the way, the obstacles they faced, and the strategies they used to overcome them. Our hope is that these stories will help light your path as you begin your own journey to realize a restorative vision for yourself and your community.

# What is Restorative Justice?

## Restorative Justice is VALUES

Restorative justice is a value-based approach to conflict and harm. These values are often identified as inclusion, democracy, responsibility, reparation, safety, healing, and reintegration. But one value is more essential than any other—respect.

*“If I had to put restorative justice into one word, I would choose RESPECT. The value of respect underlies restorative justice principles and must guide and shape their application.”*

HOWARD ZEHR

## Restorative Justice is a SET OF PRINCIPLES

Restorative justice is a set of principles used in dealing with conflict and harm.

- Crime is fundamentally a violation of people and relationships.
- Victims and the community are central to justice processes.
- The first priority of justice processes is to assist and heal victims.
- The second priority is to restore relationships in the community.
- The offender has a personal obligation to victims and to the community.
- The community shares responsibilities for restorative justice through partnerships for action.
- The goal is to heal those affected and right the wrongs.

## Restorative Justice Differs from TRADITIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The traditional justice system focuses on these three questions:

*What law was broken?*

*Who broke it?*

*What punishment is deserved?*

Restorative justice focuses on these three questions:

*What harm has been done and to whom?*

*What needs to be done to repair the harm?*

*Who is responsible for repairing the harm?*

## Restorative Justice is a PROCESS

Restorative justice is a process for dealing with conflict and harm.

*“Restorative justice is a process whereby all the parties with a stake in a particular offense come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future.”*

TONY MARSHALL

### For Victims

Restorative justice empowers victims to have a voice in the justice process, offers them an opportunity to ask questions and seek answers, affords them a role in the sentencing decision, and provides them with avenues for healing and closure.

### For Offenders

Restorative justice enables offenders to be accountable for their conduct; affords them opportunities to make amends and express remorse; offers them constructive ways to repair harm as well as support for making responsible choices; and creates a forum for forgiveness, reconciliation, and reintegration.

### For Communities

Restorative justice re-invests citizens with the power to contribute meaningfully to the resolution of community problems; allows citizens to articulate and affirm the moral and behavioral standards of the community; provides a forum for addressing the underlying conditions which generate crime; and contributes toward the creation of safe, thriving, and peaceful communities.

## Restorative Justice is a SET OF PRACTICES

Restorative justice is a set of practices for bringing victims, offenders, and communities together to resolve conflict. These practices include:

- Victim-Offender Dialogue/Mediation/Reconciliation
- Family Group Conferencing
- Community/School Conferencing
- Peacemaking Circles
- Reparative Boards
- Victim Impact Panels
- Victim Services
- Community Service
- Restitution
- Reintegration Services

**Restorative justice is not simply a way of reforming the criminal justice system; it is a way of transforming our entire legal system, our family lives, our conduct in the workplace, our practice of politics. Its vision is of a holistic change in the way we do justice in the world.**

JOHN BRAITHEWAITE

# Using this Guide

There is no blueprint for developing restorative justice.

While programs undergo common stages or phases, they do not develop at the same pace or in the same way. We identify what we believe are the key stages for developing restorative programs, along with the key tasks usually accomplished at each stage. This is just a guide: use it as you see fit.

## CHOOSING Restorative Justice

Why do people decide to pursue restorative justice? For some, the decision arises from a personal experience as a victim or an offender. For others, it is the result of long work experience with the current justice system or of deeply held values and convictions. Still others are motivated when conferences or journal articles open their eyes to alternatives. Regardless of their motives, there is a moment when one or more persons choose restorative justice. What inspires you?

## FINDING the Openings

The next task is to find allies. Developing restorative justice is never a solo enterprise. Reaching out to others who might be interested is an activity which may take months or even years. And it is always important to reach out to those who work with victims as well as those who have connections to offenders and the system. Along the way, people will also discover those who are not yet open to restorative ideas. The key is to find those who are both willing and ready to join or lend support to the project while respectfully maintaining communication with those who are not. There is rarely a straightforward path to finding openings, and this stage is often a surprising adventure in building collaborations.

## CREATING a Working Group

Once you have found a set of people committed to pursuing restorative justice, your next task is to develop a shared vision for your group. What are your core values and do these reflect the values of restorative justice? While it is tempting to jump to the nuts and bolts of your future program, it is important to spend time laying the foundation. Often there is a need to train the working group in restorative principles and practices; throughout this phase, it remains important to extend invitations to diverse segments of the community to join the working group.

## BUILDING an Organization

At some point, a working group must have a particular focus and mission. What kind of program does it want, who will it serve, and how will it function? A concrete proposal with detailed specifications as to the scope and target of the restorative process, as well as the nuts and bolts practices that will help staffers fulfill them, should emerge at this point. Roles and tasks will be assigned. Sometimes promotional materials will be produced, and formal funding will be sought to support the program. There is often a need both to recruit more volunteers and to provide specific training in restorative practices.

## BEGINNING AND GROWING the Work

The work begins with the first case, used to work out the kinks or discover what additional training or learning is required. Most programs begin slowly taking on more cases and continuing to train additional volunteers and allies. Often the media will take an interest in a new program; developing publications can introduce the program to an interested public and others who may become interested in the program.

As the work develops, others often express interest in expanding the program to reach more neighborhoods or to deal with different types of conflicts. As always, the need to recruit and train volunteers and others requires basic training in restorative principles as well as the program's specific practices. A program also may focus on boosting its funding and coordination. Finally, a new program should emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes and of shared leadership among the group as it continues to hone its fundamental vision and celebrates its accomplishments.

## NURTURING the Core

The heart of restorative justice remains its principles and values. The more mature a program becomes, the more practitioners realize the importance of remaining true to those values. There is a continual return to where it all began—choosing restorative justice again, discovering the core values and vision within a community, and finding the way to make that vision a reality through a concrete set of practices. Learning how to achieve all this with others in the community nurtures the core of restorative justice and ensures its continuity.

## Concord Restorative Circle

The **Concord Restorative Circle** is a community-based alternative to the traditional judicial process involving crime victims, offenders, and members of the Concord community operating in partnership with the Concord police department.

**On a cold November night**, three 13-year-old boys took to the streets of a small New England community, spray painting the outside walls of nine businesses. A total of 21 people touched by the crime, including the boys, their parents, the store owners, a police officer, and a number of trained community members, met for three and a half hours in a circle to resolve the matter. Slowly and painfully an agreement emerged within the circle. The boys were asked to write a letter of apology, perform community service, and paint over the graffiti. In a letter to the editor of the *Concord Journal*, the boys acknowledged that their actions were “thoughtless and a bad choice” and apologized to “all the storeowners, community members, and anyone else that we have harmed.” One storeowner, initially wary about the experience, left satisfied with “the opportunity to talk with and confront the three young people who briefly went astray, and to keep it at a level of civility.” One of the fathers felt that it was “extremely positive. The kids came face-to-face with people they harmed. They realized the wall was not just a wall; there are people behind it.”

### CHOOSING Restorative Justice

Working with inmates moved two community volunteers to explore alternative approaches to addressing the harm caused by crime. Di Clymer and Jean Bell learned about restorative justice and organized a forum in the fall of 1997 to introduce these ideas to the wider community of Concord. The gathering, attended by 230 community members, was moderated by the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University and featured presentations by Vermont Commissioner of Corrections John Gorzack, a local judge, and a court mediator. For Bell, Clymer, and Joan Turner, another community member, the forum and other follow-up meetings strengthened their resolve to initiate a local program based on these principles.

They were joined in their resolve by Leonard Weatherbee, Concord’s chief of police, who explained, “The undertaking is enormous, the complexity of it is huge. But I’ve always been interested in pursuing the concept and putting it into practice here.”

### FINDING the Openings

Bell and Turner first approached the local district court judge in the spring of 1998 about the possibility of incorporating a restorative justice program into the Concord courts. The result was a meeting of court personnel, the police chief, a victim witness advocate, probation officers, and community leaders for a presentation and discussion of applying restorative justice principles within the court system. At the conclusion of this meeting, the judge asked the chief of probation to investigate possible next steps.

When it became clear that the courts would not pursue these ideas, Police Chief Weatherbee approached Bell and Turner with a new proposal. “We are not going to let this drop,” he said. “We will make it happen through the police department.” The enthusiasm and commitment of these three advocates formed the foundation of the Concord Restorative Circle (CRC).

### CREATING a Working Group

In September 1999, Bell, Turner, Clymer, and Police Chief Weatherbee began to explore which type of restorative justice program would meet the needs of Concord. Weatherbee provided leadership for the endeavor; Bell and Turner agreed to organize the community. They invited many of those who had expressed interest during previous meetings to join a planning committee. Six months later the committee produced a draft document that articulated a shared vision for a restorative justice program that would bring together parties affected by a specific crime to meet face-to-face to address the harm done.

This program, which they named the Concord Restorative Circle, would provide the police department with an alternative way of dealing with young offenders. By bringing together victims, offenders, and representatives of the community as equal participants to learn what harm was done, they believed that CRC could help all those affected work together to devise a fair and appropriate response and to restore trust in the community.

**They realized that the wall was not just a wall; there are people behind it.**

FATHER OF JUVENILE OFFENDER

## **BUILDING an Organization**

With its main objective accomplished, the planning committee officially disbanded; some individuals eventually became volunteers for CRC, while others moved to less active roles. With clarified key values and aims in hand, Chief Weatherbee, Bell, and Turner set out to determine the nuts and bolts of how the process would work. How would cases get assigned to CRC? How would they proceed once they received a case? How many community volunteers would they need? What sort of training should they have? What different roles would be required?

The core of all CRC work depends upon the implementation of a circle process that assures that all are equal, will be treated with respect, and have an equal opportunity to speak. The work of each case is divided into pre-circle, circle, and post-circle tasks.

Pre-circle tasks involve choosing cases for CRC intervention; notifying victims and offenders about the CRC option; meeting with victims, offenders, and their families prior to the circle to establish a supportive relationship; determining who should represent the community at the circle; keeping police and community members informed of the outcome of these meetings; and setting the time and place for the circle.

Circle tasks include setting up the room, providing refreshments, greeting all parties as they enter, explaining and guiding the circle process, and writing up the final agreement.

Post-circle tasks involve monitoring the fulfillment of the obligation, reconvening a final circle to inform all interested parties of the outcome, and setting up a follow-up meeting for the police and CRC volunteers.

Clarifying these tasks helped define the roles for the police department and for CRC volunteers. The police department tasks required officers to fulfill two roles: the chief needed to initiate and oversee the process and a designated officer needed to present the facts of the case. The CRC tasks entailed three roles: coordinators to manage the details of the case; facilitators to work directly with victims, offenders, and their families; and keepers to manage the actual circle meeting. Each role was then defined with a detailed list of responsibilities. By the spring of 2000, 20 community members made a commitment to take part in the program. They participated in ten hours of training that spring and an additional full-day session in the fall.

## **BEGINNING AND GROWING the Work**

In January 2001, the CRC took its first case. CRC has been operating continuously since that first case. It may have as many as three cases going on simultaneously, conducting about five per year. CRC works with several kinds of crimes, all of which have involved juvenile offenders. Staff members have worked on 14 cases involving a total of 35 students in the past three years. The offenses have involved vandalism (graffiti and despoiling personal and public property), stealing, a bomb threat, firing a dangerous weapon, shoplifting, possession of alcohol in school, and misusing a credit card. The reparative agreements reached by consensus have included letters of apology, written reflection on the harm done and what was learned through the circle experience, time spent assisting those who were harmed, community service, researching costs of harm done, paying to repair the damage, and designing ways to communicate the lessons learned to others.

The number of community volunteers has expanded as the number of cases has increased. Initially new volunteer trainings took place each year; however, now that CRC has a stable core of volunteers, these trainings are held on an as-needed basis.

In the past year, Chief Weatherbee asked the CRC to develop the capacity to take on cases involving under-age drinking. Now two CRC volunteers and a professional substance abuse counselor meet with individuals and their parents to frankly discuss the issues underlying under-age drinking. The circle pattern for this type of case is continuing to evolve.

## **NURTURING the Core**

Meeting in both large and small groups provides CRC members with ongoing support and training. Within 48 hours of the conclusion of each case, the volunteers involved gather to debrief and consider the lessons learned from the experience. Full group meetings include presentations of each case from the smaller group, followed by discussions to ensure that the lessons learned can be incorporated into the larger group's body of knowledge and applied to new cases. Initially, full group meetings happened monthly; however, as the caseload and demands on volunteers' time increased, these meetings became quarterly.

Confidentiality became a key issue early on as a result of the large group presentations. Now cases are discussed in ways that do not provide personal information that would allow those not involved directly in the case to identify individuals.

At each full group meeting, volunteers present real cases and role-play to strengthen their skills and to confront the complex issues that arise in this work. Today, with 45 active volunteers, CRC is exploring ways to return to the useful and intimate volunteer meetings of its earlier years. By reducing the number of meetings and breaking the large group into small discussion groups, CRC's staff hopes to engage all volunteers in the processes of fine-tuning the CRC model and remaining aware of the changing assumptions that each new case may require.

**Restorative Probation** uses alternative sentencing measures to work with offenders and victims to fully examine the harm that has been done by an offense, to think of ways to repair that harm, and to ensure that a plan of reparation is carried out.

## Franklin County Restorative Probation Program

**Wanting to show off to his friends**, a teenager stole tires worth \$2,600 from a local car dealership. Although he had never been in trouble before, the youth did not view taking “a few” tires from a large corporation as a serious offense. The young man, as part of his restorative probation, was required to meet with a community board to discuss the harm he caused and to determine how he might repair that harm. The dealership’s owner attended the first meeting to help the youth understand that the dealership was not “a big, huge conglomerate” and that “he took money that we don’t have.” As a result of his probation meetings, the young man agreed to pay off the cost of the tires by working at the car dealership sweeping floors, filing paperwork, and placing follow-up calls to customers. The owner was content with this arrangement. “Where I come from, if you make a mistake, you always have a chance to make it better,” he said. “How do you learn if you get beat up and spit out for what you did?” The arrangement worked out well for all parties concerned and at the completion of his obligation, the owner offered the young man a permanent, after-school job.

**Where I come from,  
if you make a mistake  
you always had a chance  
to make it better.**

CRIME VICTIM

### **CHOOSING Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice programs in Franklin County were inspired by a vision of community-based justice set out in the 1992 Supreme Judicial Court report *Reinventing Justice 2022*. Hoping to address a declining public trust in the justice system, the report called upon local courts to solicit public views about county court policies. Judge Thomas Merrigan often felt discouraged by the revolving procession of offenders appearing before him in the Greenfield and Orange District Courts. Hoping for a better approach, Judge Merrigan along with local attorney Diane Esser applied for funding from the SJC to involve the community in finding a more effective response to local crime.

### **FINDING the Openings**

Four town meetings attended by 475 local residents were held across the county to discuss the court and its operations within the community. In December 1994 the results of these town meetings were compiled at a daylong session attended by 100 community volunteers. The community task force developed 12 recommendations for court reform, including the pursuit of restorative justice programs in Franklin County. The task force recommendations resulted in a large group of volunteers committed to court reform. The group was awarded funding to hire a staff person, Lucinda Brown, to coordinate the effort and, in her words, to “serve as the legs” for the large number of community persons involved in the project.

### **CREATING a Working Group**

In 1995 a group of 65 volunteers began to work on the restorative justice recommendations of the task force. After visiting programs in Vermont, the group decided to pursue the concept of sentencing circles through training in restorative principles for community volunteers and judicial personnel. The training led to a large number of community volunteers ready and eager to begin their work in sentencing circles, but relatively few cases were referred. To expand the restorative options in Franklin County, the working group shifted its focus from sentencing to exploring the possibilities of restorative justice in probation. The courts enthusiastically embraced this program. As Brown explains, “You need to go where there is interest. That is where you begin.”

**A lot of offenders have a feeling of redemption by trying to make things right. They go back to the community feeling unburdened of the shame or guilt or angst. It allows them to feel something affirmative about themselves.**

ORANGE DISTRICT JUSTICE TOM MERRIGAN

### **BUILDING an Organization**

The Restorative Probation Program uses community volunteers to serve on probation boards that help probationers accept responsibility for their behavior and participate actively in making amends. After considerable discussion, the working group determined that the boards would have the following structure and process:

- Four or five community members plus a probation officer and program coordinator meet monthly with probationers sentenced by the court to restorative probation.
- As a group, the panel and probationer draw up an agreement that outlines the steps that the probationer will take to understand the harm he or she has caused and to repair as much of it as possible.
- The panel helps the probationer consider a variety of options for making amends including: payments to the victim, community service, an apology to the victim, a peace-making circle with the victim, counseling, or restitution to the community.
- The panel works to help the probationer understand the impact of his/her behavior, repair the damage to the victim and community, learn ways to avoid repeating the same behavior, and forge a positive connection with the community.
- As much as possible, the panel seeks ways to engage the victim's participation with the board or with probationers on how the harm could be repaired.

**You need to go where there is interest. That is where you begin.**

LUCINDA BROWN

### **BEGINNING AND GROWING the Work**

The Orange District Court set up three boards in December 1998, and in April 1999 the Greenfield District Court organized its first restorative probation board. As of 2004, there are ten restorative boards—seven in Greenfield, two in North Orange, and one specifically dedicated to juveniles. Brown notes that restorative probation seems to “have its own organic life, and you don’t have to actively seek people to come here.”

Offenders are referred to the boards by judges for committing a range of crimes—from shoplifting and vehicular homicide, to assault and battery, and larceny. At any given time, each board carries four cases. Initially the group expected that a person would complete restorative probation in three months; now the usual time period is six months. Brown explains, “If this is going to be a meaningful process, we are going to take the time to do it right.”

A member of the panel contacts the individuals harmed by the offense, explains the process, and invites their participation, either in person or through a board member. Although initially there were high hopes that the program would provide an opportunity for victims to benefit from the board process, victims rarely want to meet with the offenders, although they are sometimes interested in talking with board members and being heard.

The primary focus of the board is what Brown calls “trust-building,” a slow process in which the offender can make amends and consider alternative behavior for the future. The board keeps in mind that this is a process about problem solving, not judging.

### **NURTURING the Core**

One of the biggest challenges of this work, according to Brown, is how to keep people “restorative and fresh rather than becoming formulaic.” This is particularly challenging for board members who have been working since 1999. Brown holds meetings four times a year for continuing education and renewal. These meetings also feature time for small discussion groups that allow board members of different boards to meet, share ideas, and learn from one another. Brown also reshuffles the board compositions, infusing new members into existing boards. “The biggest danger,” she says, “is that if people become complacent, they forget what it is that we do.”

## Hampden County Community Accountability Board

Coordinated through the Hampden County Sheriff's Office, the **Community Accountability Board** provides an opportunity for offenders in the pre-release stage of their incarceration to acknowledge and make amends for the harm they caused to their family and to the larger community.

### Nearing the end of his two-and-a-half year sentence for

**selling drugs**, the 23-year-old offender begins to meet with his Community Accountability Board. As an assignment from the three-member board, the young man writes letters to his mother, father, grandmother, and younger brother asking them to describe their reactions to his crime and the harm that he caused them. Their responses surprise him. "With this one, I cried. It was the first letter I ever received from my grandmother. The worst thing I can do is disappoint my grandmother. It hurts knowing that she knows." The purpose of this written exchange was to help him gain a greater awareness of the number of victims he hurt with his actions and choices. "They were very honest, a lot more honest than I wanted them to be. But I see that I did hurt them in a lot of ways, and I plan on restoring that relationship we once had." This young man took full advantage of the board's willingness to provide him with an opportunity for reflection about how to move forward with his life. "I've really had a lot of time to think (in jail) and find out who I am, and that's something I wouldn't be able to do out on the street. I'm just trying to find out who I am because I realize I always lived a lie."

**We were driving along and I began to cry, to sob. I never realized until that moment how many people I hurt by what I did. It was like an awakening. It was very painful but healing, because I could move on.**

OFFENDER

### CHOOSING Restorative Justice

In December 1996 James E. Kelliher, assistant superintendent of the sheriff's department in Hampden County, participated in a videoconference on restorative justice. He later reflected that the conference was "the catalyst that literally changed my perception of the way we in criminal justice should conduct business."

Kelliher realized that many of the existing programs with the sheriff's department—specifically community service and crime prevention—reflected the principles of restorative justice. Such programs were the result of the vision of Michael Ashe, Hampden County's sheriff for more than 26 years, who views his work as more than just locking criminals away. "What we're trying to do," he said, "is integrate into the lives of the offenders the sense that when they're stealing an automobile or they're breaking into a home, they're violating peoples' privacy, their rights. Our job is to educate them and to raise that level of consciousness about the rights of the victim and also the rights of the community."

### FINDING the Openings

The videoconference inspired Kelliher to speak with others in the criminal justice system exploring their interest in applying the principles of restorative justice to a coordinated effort in Hampden County. His inquiries resulted in the formation of the Hampden County Restorative Justice Collaborative, comprised primarily of representatives from state departments and agencies (Department of Youth Services, Probation Department, District Attorney's office, Center for Human Development, Hampden County Sheriff's Department) and a few interested members of the community.

Initially, the collaborative hoped it would be able to develop an interagency program with restorative justice principles. The group further assumed that the best place to begin its work would be either the trial court, where offenders entered the criminal justice system, or the probation department after they returned to their communities.

With a focus on exploring a victim impact program, the collaborative held a week-long conference to introduce interested professionals to the ideas of restorative justice. The interest was tremendous; 45 people attended the meetings, eager to learn more. Despite keen interest from a widening audience, the group realized that creating an interagency program would be extremely difficult. Given the supportive environment of the sheriff's department, the collaborative turned its attention to developing a program within that department alone.

## CREATING a Working Group

With the shift to develop a program in the sheriff's department, a smaller group formed to explore the types of programs that might be possible through this venue. They considered two possibilities: a victim impact program and community accountability boards. The victim impact program would use a six–eight week curriculum developed by a number of organizations (MADD, CA Youth Authority, and the Office of Victims of Crime) to teach offenders their crime's impact on victims and the community, placing emphasis on the ripple effect of a crime. In addition, it would prepare incarcerated offenders to meet with members of the community upon their eventual release. The second program under consideration was community accountability boards (CAB) that would involve citizens in helping offenders re-enter the community while making them aware of the impact of their crime. The victim impact program was less complicated, as a curriculum was already in existence and primarily required an approval to begin offering it to offenders about to be released. The community accountability boards required a more complex planning process. The working group decided to pursue both options, with the curriculum providing an initial introduction of these ideas and the community boards allowing offenders to apply the principles to their personal reentry back into the community.

## BUILDING an Organization

Kelliher, along with several individuals from the working group, articulated four key restorative goals for the community accountability boards. They determined that the CAB could support offenders by helping them: 1) identify the victims of their crime and determine how to repair the harm they caused, 2) make amends to the community, 3) learn how crime affects victims and the community, and 4) learn ways to avoid offending in the future.

Each board would consist of three to six community volunteers who would meet monthly for four months with those in the final stage of their incarceration. Offenders with a pre-release or minimum-security status and less than a year left in their sentences would be eligible for the program. In most cases, these individuals would have already completed the victim impact program's curriculum. CAB members would work with offenders to create an "Offender Responsibility Plan" stipulating the conditions and activities participants would need to complete prior to their release back into the community.

In the spring and fall of 1999 the working group successfully tested the idea with community volunteers and a select group of offenders. In the summer of 1999, Kelliher met Mary Quinn, a Catholic sister of St. Joseph with a degree in divinity and an interest in peace and justice issues, who had eagerly embraced the ideas of restorative justice and was seeking ways to incorporate them into her work. With the financial support of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Quinn joined the sheriff's department full time to develop and oversee the CAB program.

Throughout the fall, Quinn held information sessions throughout Hampden County to introduce the community to restorative justice principles and this new program. By December, 20 community volunteers had agreed to take part in the CAB. They attended a full-day training where they learned about restorative justice principles using role-playing exercises.

## BEGINNING AND GROWING the Work

In January 2000, with three groups of volunteers trained, the CAB was ready for its first case. The very first case reinforced the power of community involvement in helping offenders re-enter society. The first participant was a heroin addict who had been convicted for possession and dealing. In the second or third meeting, a board member realized this participant was the man who had introduced one of her family members to heroin, an action that resulted in a number of painful experiences that ended in her niece's incarceration. Through the CAB the offender took full responsibility for his actions and the CAB member came to see him as an individual genuinely wanting to change. Many months after his release, the offender was hired at this member's workplace, and she was able to continue to support his recovery and reentry.

While access to the victims was not a legal option for the group, they determined that family members were often harmed by the crime and would be able to participate either in person or through letters. Offenders are now asked to make amends in numerous ways, including speaking at the Department of Youth Services or to other groups, participating in neighborhood clean-ups, or writing letters to a community paper.

There are currently 12 community accountability boards in the communities of Hampden County—Springfield, Holyoke, Chicopee, and Agwam/West Springfield. The boards, comprised of four to seven community members, have dealt with approximately 325 offenders to date. There are two Spanish-speaking boards to allow for easier dialogue between Hispanic offenders and their board members.

Volunteers are carefully screened and are asked for a one-year/two-hour per month commitment to the board. A number of people on the boards are ex-offenders committed to advancing restorative justice. Quinn is quick to note that the boards aim not only to hold people accountable for their actions and to make amends, but also to foster community support for their release from prison.

## NURTURING the Core

Quinn continues to recruit CAB volunteers and regularly holds four-to-six-hour training sessions focusing on issues related to victims, restorative justice principles, and group dynamics, as well as an introduction to the sheriff's department. In addition to the training, new volunteers spend two hours observing a CAB session prior to beginning their service.

Another important area of education involves the department personnel. In May 2000, 300 staff from the Sheriff's Department Correctional Division attended training on restorative justice principles and the work of the CAB.

To date, there is an active pool of 70 volunteers with more than 100 volunteers participating since the program's inception. Quinn attends all the board meetings and keeps in touch with these individuals in a number of ways. Twice a year she holds appreciation events—a picnic in the summer and a dinner at the end of the year—to thank volunteers for their service. She also distributes a periodic newsletter focused on the volunteers and their various activities outside of the CAB. In this way she encourages continued participation and shows her appreciation for the dedicated individuals that comprise the CAB.

## Peacemaking Circles at Roca

**Roca** is a grassroots, multicultural human development and community building organization based in Chelsea. It serves the communities of Chelsea, Revere, East Boston, and Lynn, Massachusetts.

**One hot summer day**, a twelve-year-old boy named Desi was killed in a hit-and-run accident witnessed by many young people at Roca. Everyone was devastated. After the wake, a group of girls, ages 12 to 14, decided they needed to hold a peacemaking circle to deal with their grief. They went to Roca and asked for sage, a talking piece, and a room where they could talk through their feelings about the loss. With an adult staff member present but not in charge, the young people conducted their own healing circle for Desi. They placed the boy's picture in the center, along with reminders of other important people in their lives who had died. In the circle, they grieved and talked about life, death, and the importance of appreciating people in their lifetimes.

### CHOOSING Restorative Justice

Roca's founding vision was to create a place where all young people belong; its mission is to promote justice by creating opportunities with and for young people and families to lead happy, healthy lives. Roca's staff members first learned about peacemaking circles in November 1999 when they attended a conference organized by Suffolk University's Center for Restorative Justice. Molly Baldwin, executive director of Roca, knew immediately that the peacemaking circle was a key strategy for working with marginalized youths and their families. "There is a very big difference in being told you are equal and feeling, seeing you are equal," she says. "The circle looks and feels like a place of genuine equality."

Roca's staff believed that peacemaking circles could promote genuine democratic participation by creating spaces where all voices are respectfully heard, shared leadership could emerge, and communities would grow stronger. In addition, they were attracted to the way that circles create spaces for healing, accountability, and rebalancing harmful relationships within a community. In many ways, the peacemaking circle provided Roca with a missing piece of social technology to help it accomplish the work it envisioned.

### FINDING the Openings

Two months after Suffolk's conference, Roca hosted its first four-day circle training session, attended by more than 60 staff members, young people, local police and probation officers, clergy, parents, and community members. An international group of six trainers—Mark Wedge, Harold Gatensby, Judge Barry Stuart, Don Johnson, Kay Pranis, and Gwen Chandler-Rivers—led the training and continued to work intensively with Roca over the next three years.

For Roca, the invitation to join circles has been influenced by the lessons of the circle. "Previously we had acted like zealous, self-righteous advocates," says Molly Baldwin, "demanding that community members talk about the 'undiscussables,' yelling at them for not understanding, for example, that the school dropout problem could not be 'fixed' just by giving kids a little tutoring." During the first training circle, Roca staffers developed profound insight into their own behavior. "How many times do I decide that I'm right and they're wrong because I feel I'm on the side of social justice?" Baldwin explains. "Yet, if I'm committed to the value of belonging, then everybody has to belong. We can't have an 'us' and a 'them.' If we want our community to change—and we can only change ourselves—how do we show up and invite change collectively?"

Roca extended invitations to young people, parents, school personnel, social services practitioners, court personnel, police, city officials, legislators, and donors to sit "in circle" and to attend this training. Many accepted the invitation and dozens committed to bringing the peacemaking circle to their workplaces and communities. While Roca envisioned the circle would be most likely adopted by the courts, social service agencies were among the first to embrace the circle and restorative values.

After the first year, Roca began to host four to five community-based circle trainings each year, both in Spanish and English. Staff and community volunteers joined the original training group to lead these sessions.

## CREATING a Working Group

Roca formed a working group comprised of three staff members and three community professionals to help develop and integrate circles into the organization. This development team met for two years until circles had become fully incorporated into the organization. In addition, the Chelsea Peacemaking Planning Committee, later renamed the Community Involvement Project, began as a monthly circle open to anyone who participated in the four-day training and wanted to pursue the use of circles. The purpose of these monthly circles was to help people gain more confidence and experience in using circles and to assist people in figuring out how to bring this restorative practice into their workplace, family, organization, or community. Five years later, the Community Involvement Project continues to meet monthly and is attended by teachers, social workers, probation officers, judges, police, parents, business leaders, ex-cons, gang members, retirees, and the staff of Roca.

## BUILDING an Organization

The task for Roca was to incorporate the circle concept and restorative principles into its work with young people and the community. Roca identified five key aspects of circles that support its vision, mission, and values:

- Circles help people build effective listening, speaking, and decision-making skills that can address conflict and differences.
- Circles include the historically excluded—young people, parents, those with little or no education, those from poor communities, and others who are disenfranchised through life or circumstances—and acknowledge that all people are equal in the circle.
- Circles provide safe places for people to address and express anger, pain, harm, and/or hopelessness.
- Circles promote accountability among individuals who cause harm to other people and among families and communities.
- Circles empower the members of a community with a sense that they are able to affect positive change, thus creating a significant opportunity for hope and optimism.

Gradually, the peacemaking circle became incorporated as a key methodology in all of Roca’s youth programs and work with communities. From July 2002 to July 2003, Roca hosted more than 550 circles. Talking, peacemaking, support, healing, and planning are the most common purposes for using a circle. Talking circles bring people together to share their experiences and ideas about particular issues—from joining gangs to leaving school, parenting, addressing racism, going to college, and having a career. Peacemaking circles are held to address difficulties within a particular relationship—between youths, a young person and a parent or teacher, two adults, or among gangs. Support circles offer encouragement to a person undergoing personal changes or challenges, such as going back into school, holding onto a job, leaving a gang, or dealing with a significant loss. Healing circles are especially powerful in helping people talk about trauma, grief, and violence they have experienced. Finally, planning circles are used to promote management supervision, strategic planning, workshops, and brainstorming.

**You can’t get to a good place  
in a bad way.**

## BEGINNING AND GROWING the Work

Roca’s use of peacemaking circles has fostered collaborative and respectful relationships with all members of the communities it serves. Roca continues to sponsor four or five circle trainings a year for its staff, young people, and community partners. Several schools, units within the Department of Youth Services, and various offices at the Department of Social Services (DSS) have adopted circles.

Another result of growing the work has been the pilot partnership forged between Roca and DSS to use circles for CHINS (Children in Need of Services) families. The DSS CHINS project focuses on adolescents, ages 12–17, and their families. The purpose of these circles is to assist families in developing communication, problem-solving, and support skills. The circle involves members of the direct and extended family, supporters identified by the family, and volunteers from the community. The goal of these circles, which meet over a six to nine month period, is to develop a support system for the family that addresses the problems family members face.

## NURTURING the Core

Roca has learned it is important to remember and honor seven key principles as they continue to practice circles in a way that is consistent with the values of restorative justice.

- Circle is not a thing or program but a way to be.
- Circle is a sacred space.
- Circle fosters accountability.
- No one “controls” circle; it is a space of collective empowerment.
- Circle is about the invitation; no one can be forced to sit in a circle.
- Circle is not so much about what you do while in circle as it is about how you are in life.
- Circle provides a practice for life.





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