



THE TALKING PIECE

Swapping wisdom: Nigerians visit C4RJ

One of the most inspiring aspects of restorative justice is its resonance in other cultures. We were honored to witness this phenomenon recently when a delegation of Nigerian jurists, lawyers, community activists, and business people visited to learn about our practices.

The 20 visitors were part of an exchange program with the graduate department in conflict resolution at UMass Boston. Dr. Darren Kew, associate professor at the McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies, was their host and made arrangements with C4RJ for the visit. The Nigerian men and women listened attentively to C4RJ Executive Director Jennifer Larson Sawin and C4RJ co-founder Interim Chief Wetherbee of Carlisle (ret. Chief Concord), MA as they described the value of dialog for victims and those who've harmed them so that victim needs are met and offenders learn and are supported in repairing the harm.

This process, sometimes formatted in a circle, "breaks the barrier between the community and the police," said Chief Wetherbee. "In the circle, even though I may be there in uniform, I am a member of the community." Wetherbee calls restorative justice "the missing piece" in policing, one that avoids continued

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Justice Joel Agya of the Taraba state high court (left), and Chief Justice Iorhemen Hwande of the Benue State High Court (right) flank C4RJ's summer intern Tara Krishna (center).

Restorative justice conference as family reunion

By Jennifer Larson Sawin,
C4RJ Executive Director

Picture if you will: a group of chairs out on a hotel patio. Every five minutes, a door opens and a familiar face emerges. People rush to greet one another. Long-lost reunions kicked off the third annual National Conference on Restorative Justice in Raleigh, North Carolina, in June. Interim Chief Wetherbee (ret.) of Carlisle, MA, and I got to be there.

We knew that C4RJ's police-community partnership model was unusual—the European Forum on Restorative Justice had noted it last June in Spain (see Summer 2010's *Talking Piece* for more). We were keen for our U.S.-based peers to examine it too. When the summons came for us to present a paper, our bags were packed in ten minutes flat.

Conference-goers numbered 300 and represented a wide swath of practitioners, academics, international consultants, students, and community activists. Few criminal justice agencies were present but several judges, district attorneys, and probation and police officers attended.

We had nightmares about our workshop being empty save for one or two reluctant back-row folks. But the room was full, questions abounded, and Chief Wetherbee's New England humor charmed. Our workshop title,

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A new “rap” sheet: getting creative on repair

By Christy Barbee, C4RJ Chief Case Coordinator

In our restorative agreements, victims and offenders alike benefit from customized ways in which repair can unfold. And everyone involved gets a chance to be creative! We’ve had great ideas from volunteers, police officers, victims, and offenders.

In addition to our tried and true exercises on decision-making, here’s a smattering of some of the ideas put forth in circles.

Recently, a community member suggested that a middle-schooler detained for tagging buildings put together **a mini curriculum** for his art class to share what he’d learned about graffiti—both what can be cool about it, and also what it costs businesses and communities. Would that everyone could have seen the way the boy’s eyes lit up. Both he and the town will benefit.

A police officer, aware that a young woman shoplifted for the thrill of it, suggested she take on a more positive thrill. She went on **a service trip** that she had been afraid to go on, and she had a blast while showing her parents and the victim that she could be responsible and proactive.

A boy who’d made harassing phone calls wrote and produced **a rap song** about why he’d done it and why he wouldn’t again. He played the recording at the close of the case to an astonished circle.

A young woman who wanted to work in animation made a great **comic-book style presentation** on why making homemade explosives could be so dangerous.

Knowing a young adult offender would not be able to pay certain expenses, a volunteer offered **job-coaching**, including how to research positions, write a résumé, dress and speak, and whom to ask (and not!) to be references for him. He’s since landed a full-time job.

In a case where a young teen was vulnerable to his friends’ risky choice suggestions, he wrote **“escape” excuses to get out of a tight spot**. For example, “I can’t—I promised my brother a video game tournament...gotta run.” He intended to keep these lines on an index card in his back pocket and promised to share them with a DARE officer at school so his own peers could also benefit.

If you have a great idea, let us know at info@c4rj.com.



Restorative justice conference as family reunion

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“Police and communities in partnership: how ‘selling out’...is the way forward,” was intentionally provocative. Some restorative justice purists believe that the criminal justice system is fundamentally broken and coercive. We proposed another view: that police are critical to our operations, provide checks and balances in the community, offer safety to victims, and combat lifelong labeling by the system of those who cause harm.

Beyond the workshop presentation, I was delighted to meet Ms. Nontombi Naomi Tutu (see photo) who was a keynote speaker. We exchanged words of greeting in Setswana, my mother tongue from growing up in southern Africa. She was wise in reminding practitioners in the field of restorative justice that each of us has caused harm as an offender, and each of us has experienced harm as a victim.

For more on our presentation and paper, visit our website at www.c4rj.com. We’re grateful to the conference organizers and the CHNA 15 for helping to underwrite our expenses.



Professor Jon Powell (left) and Dean Melissa Essary (right) of Campbell University Law School stand with Ms. Nontombi Naomi Tutu (center). Campbell University was host of the National Conference on Restorative Justice. Ms Tutu is third child of Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and served as the conference’s keynote speaker.

We met the challenge!

Back in February, The Cahn Funds for Social Change issued a challenge. For three months it would match every gift to C4RJ up to \$6,000. So many of you responded that we not only met that goal, we surpassed it! Our friends at The Cahn Funds were so pleased they agreed to award C4RJ an additional \$2,500 in 2012 to support our work with those affected by crime in the community. Victims are healed, offenders are held accountable, and things are put right in our community, **all thanks to you!**



Why the envelope? ...and other ways to help

We love sharing our work with you through *The Talking Piece*, e-blasts, and op-ed pieces in newspapers. The envelope is here for you to support our work if you're so moved. Or use it to drop us a note. C4RJ serves 10 regional communities, and referrals keep growing. Your support helps us meet the needs of those affected by crime. You might also consider providing:

- Earmarked support to victims and offenders who need counseling or other services
- Financial support to fund a qualitative longitudinal study
- Support costs for a guest speaker
- Sponsorship of *The Talking Piece* quarterly newsletter
- A new (or gently used) laptop for mobile case-related use
- A new (or gently used) laser printer to improve office network
- Frequent flyer miles for staff conferences

Let us know how you would like to help. Visit our website at www.c4rj.com/giving.php or contact Executive Director Jennifer Larson Sawin at 978.318.3447 or jlarsonsawin@c4rj.com.

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victimization of victims and labeling of offenders. Many of our guests nodded knowingly.

Nigerian high-court judge Joel Agya embraced the concept of including the victims in the process instead of treating them as only a witness. "I am excited by hearing the victim and communities are actively involved. I am hoping to adopt this back in Nigeria."

Nigeria gained independence in 1960 but was wracked by several decades of military dictatorship and conflict over the oil-rich regions of the Niger Delta. Elections in April 2011 proved mostly free and fair, raising hopes that a new era of stability will ensue. Systems of indigenous justice thrive, sometimes without involving official criminal justice agencies.

Kevin Nwosu, Director of the Settlement House (a dispute resolution nonprofit based in Abuja, Nigeria), said he was impressed with the active and positive role of the police in C4RJ, and that he looked forward to pursuing something similar at home. "It is a turnaround of the mindset."

But perhaps it is not such a leap. One participant said, "We have a saying in Nigeria. [Correct] with one arm while pulling close with the other."

What an apt description of what we do.



C4RJ is now on Facebook!

We love sharing news about C4RJ and restorative justice practices with you. But as interest in the field grows—from school bullying responses to prison reform—there's often more to share than we can fit into our newsletters and e-blasts. And yes, it's also high time we catch up with the social media outlets of our day. So "Like" us on Facebook (search for "Communities for Restorative Justice") and engage with us online!

SHOUT OUTS

Many, many thanks to . . .

- Generous supporters: **Acton-Boxborough United Way, Concord-Carlisle Community Chest, CHNA 15, First Parish in Concord**, and the **Sudbury Foundation**. We'll make you proud!
- Our many individual supporters, and particularly a lovely **anonymous Littleton supporter**.
- **Trinitarian Congregational Church** for meeting space for the C4RJ retreat.
- Volunteer **Candace Julyan** for a detailed recording of the C4RJ retreat.
- **Sue and Tom Curtin, Debra Stark, George Dallas, and Brec Saalfield** for helping at Concord's Picnic in the Park, and to all those who stopped by to say hello.
- Volunteers **Paula Von Kleydorff, Nikki Spencer, Barbara Howland, and Dave Watson** for carrying the C4RJ banner in Carlisle's Old Home Day parade.
- **Debra Stark, Larry Powers, and Phil Kolling** for making our May Acton outreach event so rewarding.
- **Det. Matt Pinard** of Littleton PD for co-training police officers in March.
- **Dan Holin**, Executive Director of Jericho Road Project, for advice on growth.
- Volunteer **Bridget Saltonstall** for inviting C4RJ Executive Director Jennifer Larson Sawin to speak at the annual Patricia Ellis Lecture at Nashoba Brooks School.
- Congrats to **Cpt. Bongiorno** of Arlington PD for landing the Chief position at Bedford PD!





COMMUNITIES FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE


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About C4RJ

Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ) is a community-police partnership that offers restorative justice to those affected by crime. Restorative justice recognizes that crime is a violation of people and relationships, not just a violation of law. Police refer cases to us. In the aftermath of wrongdoing, our “circle” process includes in the decision-making those affected by crime: victims, offenders, loved ones, supporters, community members, and law enforcement officials.

This newsletter, *The Talking Piece*, is named for an object (often a river stone) passed around the circle to engage individuals in the deliberations. The person holding the talking piece speaks while others listen. With this newsletter, we are passing the talking piece to you and would love to hear your views on our work. Contact us at info@c4rj.com or by calling 978.318.3447 to relay your thoughts.

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