

Restorative Justice News

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

WINTER 2006/2007

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Restorative Justice Signposts	2
Coordinator's Corner	3
People Are Saying...	4
Show Me Results!	4

Plan Aims To Cut Juvenile Crime Melinda Rogers, The Forum Newspaper—19 Feb 2007

Lois Balko's family wanted closure after her 15-year-old son was beaten by another teenager two years ago at Moorhead's skate park. Partially wanting to press charges against her son's assailant, Balko was torn over putting the boy into the juvenile court system. What she really wanted was an apology from the offender and a chance to explain how the fight affected her family. "We wanted to make sure the kid understood that this is serious and you can't get away with it," Balko said. "When it comes to juveniles I'd rather see them rehabilitated or taught than to have punitive damages brought against them."

Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota's Restorative Justice Program gave the Moorhead family that opportunity. The program, also offered in Clay County, pairs victims, offenders and sometimes a panel of community members together to discuss a crime and how the incident affected each party. Instead of funneling a young, first-time offender into a formalized rehabilitation scene, the program aims to change participants' behavior by requiring them

Cost of treating juvenile crime

Clay County officials say a program aimed at rehabilitating juvenile offenders by involving community members, the victim and the perpetrator in the process saves money and reduces recidivism rates among offenders.

Per Case Cost

⇒ RJ Program	\$112.05
⇒ Juvenile Court	\$393.24

Recidivism Rates

⇒ RJ Program	20%
⇒ Juvenile Court	36%
⇒ Difference in rates	16%
⇒ Number of reduced cases	26
⇒ Cost savings to County	\$10,319

to interact with the people they hurt through their crime. Together, parties establish a restitution plan for an offender including verbal or written apologies, community service, financial repayment, mandatory counseling, required education and other consequences. If a plan is completed, potential charges against an offender are dismissed. *(Juvenile Crime: Page 2)*

Restorative Group Conference Case Study: Church Burglary

A juvenile female burglarized a small, rural church. The cost of losses and damages was over \$700. She and her family were active members of the congregation and a relative was employed by the Church.

The case was processed through Clay County Juvenile Court who determined the formal, legal sanctions. But given

the inter-relationships between the juvenile, her family, and others affected by the incident, the juvenile's Probation Officer also recommended Restorative Group Conferencing.

The juvenile wrote a letter of apology following the incident, but there were still many unanswered questions.

(Case Study: Page 3)

Restorative Justice Program

Clay County Sheriff's Office
Jill Wenger, Coordinator
915 9th Avenue North
P.O. Box 280
Moorhead, MN 56560

Phone: 218-299-5213
Fax: 218-299-5228

Email: jill.wenger@co.clay.mn.us



Plan Aims To Cut Juvenile Crime (continued from page 1)

The Balko family chose to enroll in the program in lieu of pressing charges after their son's scuffle. Meeting the offender's family face to face and hearing the boy apologize to her son brought solace not found in a court system, Balko said. "Once we were able to talk about our feelings we felt much better. We felt that justice had been served," Balko said.

Stories like the Balkos' are evidence the program's approach works, researchers, county officials and members of law enforcement say. According to newly released research by North Dakota State University on Clay County's program, youngsters who went through the restorative justice program were less likely to repeat delinquent behavior than counterparts processed in a traditional juvenile court system. Restorative justice program participants also experience fewer new offenses and – if repeating an offense – typically commit a less serious crime than those not enrolled in the program, research shows.

"This type of program assists in redirecting the behaviors of the clientele. In the near term this is beneficial to the citizens who are victims, the community as a whole and the youth themselves whose improved behavior will bode well for the quality of their future lives," said Thomas McDonald, a professor of criminal justice at NDSU. University researchers examined 164 juveniles referred to the restorative justice program and 166 youth processed in regular court from 2000 to 2003. They discovered that youth in the program experience "significant better outcomes than youth referred to traditional court processing up to three

years post referral."

The program served 119 juveniles last year, said coordinator Jill Wenger. It serves ages 7 to 17, although most clients are in their teenage years, she said. Youth offenders are most commonly referred to the program from law enforcement and schools. Theft, disorderly conduct, property damage, assault and traffic violations are the top offenses that lead them to the program, Wenger said.

The program has another upside – cost savings for Clay County. Its \$66,000 annual operating cost is covered primarily by grant funds. The cost per case for justice in the restorative justice program in 2006 was \$112.05 while the county spent \$393.24 on those processed in Clay County Juvenile Court, statistics show. Referrals to the program in 2006 increased by 54.5 percent from the previous year, Wenger said.

And with shrinking jail space, officials hope early intervention will put a stop to criminal tendencies, Clay County Sheriff Bill Bergquist said. "People sometimes make that first mistake," Bergquist said. "I feel anything we can do to help someone learn not to reoffend is a great deal."

Wenger agreed. "The reason I think the restorative process is successful is it puts a human face to crime," she said. "Juvenile offenders are faced with the individuals they've harmed, and that can make a big impact. "The message is 'We care about you, but we don't want you hurting other people,' " Wenger said.

Readers can reach Forum reporter Melinda Rogers at 701-241-5524

**"This program assists
in redirecting the
behaviors of the
clientele."**

Restorative Justice Signposts by Harry Mika and Howard Zehr

We are working toward restorative justice when we...

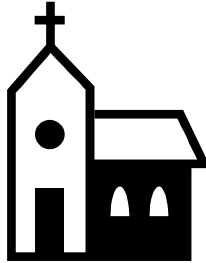
- ⇒ Focus on the *harms* of wrongdoing more than the rules that have been broken.
- ⇒ Show equal concern and commitment to *victims and offenders*, involving both in the process of justice.
- ⇒ Work toward the restoration of *victims*, empowering them and responding to their needs as they see them.
- ⇒ Support *offenders* while encouraging them to understand, accept and carry out their obligations.
- ⇒ Recognize that while *obligations* may be difficult for offenders, they should not be intended as harms and they must be achievable.

- ⇒ Provide opportunities for *dialogue*, direct or indirect, between victims and offenders as appropriate.
- ⇒ Involve and empower the affected *community* through the justice process and increase its capacity to recognize and respond to community bases of crime.
- ⇒ Encourage *collaboration* and *reintegration* rather than coercion and isolation.
- ⇒ Give attention to the *unintended consequences* of our actions and programs.
- ⇒ Show *respect* to all parties including victims, offenders and justice colleagues.

Crime wounds...justice heals

Case Study: Church Burglary (continued from page 1)

Church staff wanted to explain how they had been affected by the incident. The juvenile thought she had already “made things right” by writing the letter, but was still willing to participate. The family member employed by the church had felt a lot of tension since the incident and was hopeful that the process could move everyone toward closure. At the Conference the juvenile explained that she entered the church for the specific purpose to steal cash. The damage occurred as a result of breaking into locked rooms and out of frustration when the money was difficult to locate. She apologized and said that she had disappointed everyone. Church staff described the horror of seeing shattered windows and the massive clean-up efforts it took to get the place back to its original condition. Some members of the church were worried about their safety after hours.



For some, this incident brought back terrible memories of events they had experienced years before. They expressed extreme disappointment. The juvenile had been an active part of the church and youth group. She lost their trust and it would be very difficult to earn that trust back. The juvenile’s family spoke about their frustration following the incident and their efforts to get their daughter “back on track.” They enrolled her in an educational program that had more discipline and structure. The juvenile was excited to begin the program. Church staff were hopeful but they warned her to pay close attention to the choices she would be making in the next few years. They ended the process with a prayer. Recently, the facilitator learned that the juvenile has been “thriving” in her new educational setting. Family and church representatives are encouraged and healing from the incident.

Due to position changes in the Sheriff’s Office, Lt. Stephen Landsem will take over as the RJ program’s new supervisor.

Thank You

We offer our most sincere thanks to Lt. Jerome Thorsen for overseeing the RJ program since April 2005.

Coordinator’s Corner

The top story in this newsletter is a reprint of an article featured in The Forum on 2-19-07. As I studied the article I was reminded of the growing support the program has seen, particularly in the last three years. Here are just a few examples of how agencies, institutions, and community members have shown their support:

- ⇒ Staff from Law Enforcement, Attorney’s Office, Corrections and Schools have referred cases in record numbers. In fiscal year 04-05 the program averaged 15.25 new referrals per quarter, this year the program is averaging 36 new referrals per quarter—a 136% increase!
- ⇒ Graduate student Kathleen Bergseth, Dr. Jeff Bouffard, and Dr. Thomas McDonald at NDSU have generously donated their time and expertise to the analysis of the long term impact of restorative justice programming for juvenile offenders at no cost to the RJ program.

- ⇒ Dr. Shawn Ginther at MSUM has offered his proficient knowledge of outcome assessment in creating a tool for identifying victim outcomes.
- ⇒ A record number of community members have signed up to donate their time to meet with juvenile offenders in cases where the direct victim chooses not to participate in the Conferencing process or in “victimless crimes” such as traffic violations.

I am humbled by the loyalty these individuals have contributed to the RJ program. I am also cognizant that your generosity has created the potential to transform the lives of victims, offenders, families and ultimately our community. Thank you!



*Program Coordinator,
Jill Wenger*

OUR FUNDERS

The Restorative Justice Program is funded by a grant from the MN Department of Corrections and Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) funds of the Clay County Collaborative.



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LOGO (Dick Nelson, Johnston Design Office)

The Circle is the symbol of life, constantly evolving, constantly changing, but always interconnected. The circle in this case is broken into halves – one positive, one negative. The scars which can be seen on the top and bottom of the circle suggest that some type of healing has taken place. The two broken halves coming together also reinforce the completion of the hand in the middle, which can be seen only when the two halves are put together.

The Hand symbolizes healing, the human aspect of the program. It says that compassion is a key element in the process of healing.

The Heart symbolizes that the healing process needs to go deep – it must go to the center of the problem, and it must go to the soul of the person.

The Typeface for the written name is called City. It was selected because it has an authoritative feel, suggesting that it can withstand much. It says, THIS IS Restorative Justice.

People Are Saying...

“The best and most effective lessons are sometimes found outside the courtroom.”

“I think it is a fantastic idea that the victim and offender are able to meet and discuss the events / affect of the crime—wish it was for adults as well.”

“I participated because I wanted [the offender] to understand the far reaching effects of a single act of violence.”

“It's a wonderful program!”

“I liked the thoughtfulness that the offender needs to put into the process.”

Letter to Sheriff Bill Bergquist: *“I was very favorably impressed with the manner in which the vandalism of mailboxes in Glyndon was handled. The meeting was very well organized and I felt of great value to both victim and perpetrator. The young men seemed truly sorry for what they had done.”*



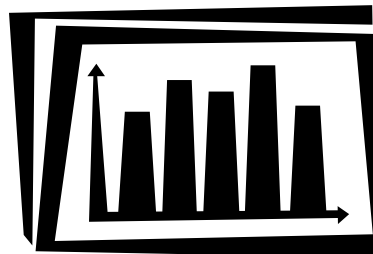
Show Me Results!

Clients Served

- 151 juvenile offenders
- 394 other participants: 184 offender supports; 82 victims; 20 victim supports, 54 community volunteers, 53 agency representatives; 1 other

Top 5 Referred Offenses

- Theft (26%)
- Disorderly conduct (19%)
- Damage to property (15%)
- Traffic violations (12%)
- Burglary (6%)



Data from Year End Report

Case Results

- 84% of referred cases resulted in a face-to-face meeting between affected parties
- 99% of meetings ended with a formal accountability agreement
- 95% of agreements were completed

Agreement Conditions

- Apologies—33 verbal, 36 written
- Volunteer Service—321 hours
- Financial Payments—\$4,093.66
- Essays / Reports—9
- Presentations—10
- Other educational and prevention activities also included in agreements

Participant Evaluations (Since 2003)

- 96% satisfied with the process
- 97% believed agreement was fair
- 98% satisfied with the facilitator
- 95% would recommend the process