

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Restorative justice is a philosophy and practice used to repair the harm caused by criminal acts. It focuses on healing the victim – whether the victim is an individual, family, or community. In any shift to a restorative justice model, three questions are asked: 1) Who was harmed? 2) What are the needs of those affected? and 3) Whose obligation is it to meet those needs? As a result, restorative justice differs from the conventional legal process by focusing on the harm imposed on individuals and relationships, rather than on the actions of the person who caused the harm. The goals of these restorative efforts can include building community, reducing recidivism, offering alternatives to incarceration, supporting reentry, improving the victim experience, and saving taxpayer dollars. A common thread binding all of these elements is often community engagement, with an emphasis on nurturing relationships.

One way that restorative justice is being implemented across the country is through Restorative Community Conferencing (RCC). As part of RCC, an organized and facilitated dialogue is held between the individuals who have committed a crime and their victims. With the support of family, community, and law enforcement, these perpetrators meet with their crime victims to create a plan to repair the harm done. Research conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD)¹ has shown that RCC programs can result in significant decreases in recidivism, as measured by arrest and adjudication; victim satisfaction (with 99% reporting a willingness to participate in another RCC); and an average cost savings per youth of almost \$38,000. In the City of San Diego, this model is being implemented by the National Conflict Resolution Center in partnership with Mid-City Community Advocacy Network (Mid-City CAN), Probation, District Attorney’s Office, and Office of the Public Defender, through the City Heights Restorative Community Conferencing Pilot Project. According to the program, during the first year, there was a 100 percent agreement rate, 100 percent satisfaction rate, and 95 percent compliance rate.²

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say, “It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem. Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”
- Fred Rogers

While restorative justice is not a new concept, its applicability and use is continuing to grow in both juvenile and adult justice settings, as well as in educational institutions, due in part to the realization that in many cases victims’ needs can be better met, and that other positive outcomes, including less recidivism and cost-savings, can be realized. Those interested in learning more about restorative justice practices being implemented locally can visit the websites of NCRC (<http://www.ncrconline.com>) and the Restorative Justice Mediation Program (<http://www.sdrjmp.org>). In addition, on February 26, 2016, the City of San Diego’s Human Relations Committee and the Committee on Gang Prevention and Intervention will be holding a one-day Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices Summit. More information about this event is available at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/san-diego-restorative-justice-and-restorative-practices-summit-tickets-20010808868>.

Restorative Justice	Traditional Criminal Justice
1. Who has been hurt?	1. What laws have been broken?
2. What are their needs?	2. Who did it?
3. Whose obligation is it to meet these needs?	3. What do the offenders deserve?

¹ National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2015, May). Scaling Restorative Community Conferencing Through a Pay for Success Model: A Feasibility Assessment Report. Available online at: http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/rj-pfs-feasibility-report.pdf
² <http://www.midcitycan.org/blog/549-restorative-justice-100-successful-in-city-heights>