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RESTORATIVE APPROACHES TO POLICING

Program Descriptions



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Photo from Longmont Community Justice Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

In February 2021, The National Center on Restorative Justice hosted a “Think Tank” Institute on Restorative Approaches to Policing. This event brought together law enforcement officers and community program leaders from around the country that are involved in innovative approaches to policing grounded in the philosophy, values, and practices of restorative justice.

In the lead-up to the event, representatives from each of the programs and police departments involved were asked to fill out a survey providing some basic information about their program or approach. This information was then distilled into the one-page descriptions of each program included in this report.

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THE JUSTICE PROJECT OF SOUTH FLORIDA (JPSFL)

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

The Justice Project of South Florida (JPSFL) aims to reduce the arrests and incarceration of youth; increase cultural competency, racial equity, and social justice; as well as promote positive interactions between law enforcement and communities of color. JPSFL facilitates youth dialogues, restorative justice practices trainings, cultural sensitivity workshops, restorative justice peace circles, and promotes undoing/dismantling racism initiatives. Diversion participants engage with police officers in monthly "police youth dialogues" where they can ask questions and build relationships with officers.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

The Justice Project of South Florida is a diverse team of individuals that have received training in cultural competency and adolescent behavior as well as how to facilitate peace circles and police youth dialogues using a restorative justice approach.

Before participating in police youth dialogues, officers attend training to learn basic RJ principles and how to conduct circles. Concepts of implicit bias, trauma, and juvenile brain development are also introduced. Pre-meetings are held with youth participants to explain what will happen and to prepare them for the dialogue.



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BACK ON TRACK COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS - FLORIDA

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Back on Track works in partnership with the Leon County (Florida) Sheriff's Office to co-facilitate a monthly police youth dialogue program. Back on Track also runs a 14 week RJ program called "Community Connections" where teens (generally on probation or diversion from court) learn empathy skills and receive support in achieving their goals.

Participants in Back on Track generally start off rather skeptical and distant, but the level of intimacy and mutual support grows perceptibly in the few hours spent together in dialogue.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Back on Track relies on a close collaboration with the Sheriff's Office. They coordinate the attendance of youth on probation. We facilitate deep listening and learning.

Community Connections stands out partly because of volunteer participation. We have a one-to-one ratio of participants to volunteers, and close to 30% of program graduates return as volunteers. We have just become the beneficiary of a stipend program to support volunteers/interns and we hope this will grow, seeding the next generation of restorative justice professionals in the community most served.



LONGMONT COMMUNITY JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP (LCJP) COLORADO

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

When a Longmont police officer responds to a call for service, they can refer the case directly to LCJP's Community Restorative Justice (CRJ) program if two criteria are met: the Responsible Person (offender) is taking responsibility for their actions and the Harmed Party (victim) gives consent for the case to go to restorative justice in lieu of court.

LCJP trains volunteers to facilitate a group dialogue in a model called the Community Group Conference that involves all stakeholders: the Harmed Party, the Responsible Person, their support people, police, and community members. The Harmed Party and community members' voices are prioritized in identifying how the Responsible Person will make things right through specific actions recorded in a contract. If the Responsible Person completes the contract and does not re-offend while under contract, they will not have a criminal charge on their record from that incident.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

- 1) LCJP works with youth and adult Responsible Persons (offenders) facing misdemeanor and felony-level charges.
- 2) LCJP receives cases directly referred by police. No criminal charges are filed and there is no indication of a conviction on their record when a Responsible Person (offender) successfully completes the program.
- 3) 75% of LCJP's conferencing roles are filled by volunteers.
- 4) 95% of LCJP conferences involve a police officer as a participant.
- 5) LCJP uses a strengths-based approach that intentionally focuses on naming the strengths, talents, and interests of the Responsible Person and using those in the creation of reparative agreement items.



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LONGMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT - COLORADO

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Restorative principles were foundational within our leadership philosophy and the development of our management systems.

Restorative principles were central to how we built and developed relationships with our community.

We utilized restorative principles within our behavior modification processes for internal affairs.

We referred cases to our local RJ service provider (Longmont Community Justice Partnership).

We also implemented programs that included restorative principles that addressed addiction, mental health, and other social issues in our community.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

The value of introducing healthy and caring relationships to those who feel and believe they have minimal value and worth is remarkably powerful.

An example of our work includes a case in which two of our police officers faced very serious consequences for their actions. Both could have been terminated. We chose to use a restorative process that saved the police officers' jobs, reconciled broken relationships with other police departments and their police officers, and repaired broken trust within our police department.



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SOUTH BURLINGTON COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER VERMONT

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

The South Burlington Police Department (SBPD) has a Community Justice Center (CJC) embedded within it. The CJC Director reports to the Police Chief. The CJC is located upstairs from the SBPD in a dedicated space. This allows both walk-in public access and the ability for CJC employees and officers to talk in person regularly about specific cases. CJC employees have access to the PD building and database and are PD employees. The SBPD refers approximately 75% of the CJC's RJ Panel cases as pre-charge cases in lieu of court and 95% of mediation cases.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

We are a team with police officers. An example of our work is a case in which one of the School Resource Officers spoke to the CJC Director about a 12-year-old boy struggling with both ongoing aggression and theft in his home. He had already worked with the CJC previously and his parent wanted the option to work with us again. We were concerned about the severity of his behaviors and whether we would be able to help him in any meaningful way. The team talked through the challenge and came up with a plan that involved getting a more extensive assessment in place.



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WILLISTON COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER VERMONT

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Our Community Justice Center (CJC) and supporting police departments work together to provide restorative panels, circles, dialogues, conflict management, and resolution to our community members, businesses, and visitors. We also work together to foster positive and meaningful relationships between our community and law enforcement members.

We also provide community members with the opportunity to volunteer as panel members and serve on social justice committees.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Our CJC and police departments have worked hard to build a relationship of trust. We work hard to acknowledge the partnership between the PD and the Williston CJC and to bring forward our mission and vision along with our shared values. We participate in shared responsibility, communication, opportunity, education, and engagement. We value and acknowledge one another's contributions to the betterment of community.



ESSEX COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER - VERMONT

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Police make direct referrals to the Essex Community Justice Center (ECJC) of cases where there was crime or conflict rather than using the traditional criminal legal system/process. They refer both youth and adults. The Department of Corrections in VT also makes referrals to us for post-conviction cases for a restorative process.

It is the policy of Chittenden County State's Attorney Office to encourage direct referrals by local police of offenders to participate in restorative processes for minor crimes at a CJC.

Generally, crimes eligible for direct referral are misdemeanors. Any case involving a felony needs to be approved by the State's Attorney, on a case by case basis, prior to making a Direct Referral. The responsible party must be willing to take responsibility for the offense and work with the restorative justice panels to address the harm caused by the crime.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

We have different staff working with the responsible party and the affected party instead of working with both. We are one of the 18 different CJsCs across the state that serve the whole state of VT. Our referrals have steadily increased over the last 5 years.

The following is a list of Restorative Services offered through the Essex Community Justice Center:

- Restorative Justice Panels
- Restorative Circles and Conferences
- Victim Support



COMMUNITIES FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (C4RJ) MASSACHUSETTS

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ) is the leader in court alternative restorative justice practices in Massachusetts and is the only restorative justice non-profit to conduct restorative justice work on a state-wide scale. C4RJ goals are that:

- Responsible Parties work to repair harm and are supported and held accountable.
- Victims can move forward with their lives knowing they have been heard and had a say in the outcome of their case.
- Communities are restored. We employ a volunteer-led restorative circle dialogue to achieve these goals.

By 2020, C4RJ's work had spread to 26 police departments throughout eastern Massachusetts and 6 police departments in western Massachusetts. We work largely with young people. In FY20, 60% of cases involved Responsible Parties under 18.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

As well as systemic reform, our work is built on the principle that changing one life, whether that of an Impacted Party or a Responsible Party, is an invaluable result. Our model is unique for 2 reasons.

- We employ a 2 circle model with 6-12 weeks of individual work between circles. The individual work, conducted by 2 C4RJ trained volunteers and focused on the Responsible Party, focuses on decision-making exercises, reflective exercises, and other items in a specific restorative agreement.
- Our direct service is primarily delivered by C4RJ trained volunteers (Facilitators). We match two Facilitators to each Responsible Party. Volunteer Facilitators are divided into regional teams and the team leads (Case Coordinators) meet with the C4RJ bi-monthly for case management and to collaboratively strategize about cases.



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THE CIVIL RIGHTS AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT (CRRJ)

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project (CRRJ) is a mission-driven program of interdisciplinary teaching, research, and policy analysis on race, history, and criminal justice. CRRJ is the preeminent academic center for the study of historical redress in the US. Our original investigations, transformative pedagogies, and top-level scholarship facilitate local and national initiatives to uncover an accurate history of racial harms during the Jim Crow era and reconcile the ongoing damage.

Restorative justice is crafted to address the needs and concerns of the descendants of racial terror, foster accountability, support reparations, honor the healing process, memorialize victims, and further racial reconciliation. We promote truth proceedings, official apologies, and memory projects to acknowledge this racialized past. These processes contribute to reconciliation by educating citizens through the public debates they stimulate and by providing structures for genuine interactions between alienated groups.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

The Historical Injustices and Present Policing Project (HIPP) provides one example of CRRJ's work. HIPP seeks to generate deeper awareness of the dynamics and legacy of historical racial violence and the role of law enforcement in this history.

Drawing on CRRJ's nationally acclaimed and unique Archive on historical racial violence, HIPP draws connections between criminal justice policies, practices, and culture today, and the history of systemic racism in our justice system. HIPP differs from many other police training curricula because it aims to situate today's criminal justice policies in a grounded understanding of the truth of historical racism.



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BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

Bridging the Divide (BTD) applies the practices and principles of restorative justice to build relationships and community by acknowledging and repairing harm and collectively creating strategies to create safer neighborhoods.

EXAMPLE OF THE WORK

There was one 8-week cohort of youth who were justice or street organization involved. This group was from one of our option schools. These young men did not trust or believe in the police. However, after completing the BTD process, they have become our ambassadors to the community of youth and now lead some of our youth council initiatives in our districts. They are actually advising the department on developing authentic deflection policies that utilize the practice of peace circles and authentic youth voice.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

This program, which has become the policy of the department, is directly focused on the community of youth. It is centered around the needs and voices of youth and emerging adults and driven by the same. As institutions, Law Enforcement must find a way to see the communities that we serve as experts in their own safety. We no longer have all the answers and no longer can be held solely responsible for the changes that are needed to transform the communities we serve.



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SILVER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL LONGMONT, COLORADO

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

I (SRO Staci Stallings) partnered with Longmont Community Justice Partnership (LCJP) and our Leadership Director at Silver Creek High School to create a student restorative justice team. The student team has been trained to serve in the role of Community Member in restorative justice conferences, speaking to the impact of an incident on the community. What a case at school is referred to me as the SRO, I determine whether or not a crime was committed and identify the harms related to the incident and the level of accountability being taken by the student. Considering those factors, I might decide that restorative justice is the best option for resolution. I explain and offer the program to the involved parties and if they accept, I meet with them in a pre-conference and then hold a conference with a co-facilitator, the referred person, the harmed person, and a student community member, during which we create a contract to repair harm. If the referred person agrees to this process, their school suspension is either waived or reduced at the discretion of the school administrator. I have also trained teachers at my school and campus supervisors for the entire district on the use of Restorative Conversations and Connection Circles.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Longmont Police Department Officers and Liaisons to the restorative justice program work very closely with LCJP. Officers who make referrals usually participate in the conference and, if not, another officer will sit in their place. From what I have seen and heard, the officer involvement is unique and research has shown that the referred party is more often successful in the RJ program if an officer is present in the Conference.

Our school RJ program is modeled after the pilot program at Longmont High School. Our program is distinct because it involves a partnership with our Silver Creek Leadership Academy and a student team. Another distinction is that the School Resource Officer administers the program in addition to facilitating the conferences.



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ELGIN POLICE DEPARTMENT ILLINOIS

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

At Elgin Police Department (EPD), we take pride in giving officers (and juvenile offenders) many different options and avenues to travel on the path to restorative justice. We have in-school restorative practices where the SRO may recommend the student write a paper about the topic or participate in in-school community service. We also utilize a peer jury as an alternative to juvenile court referrals.

At EPD, we recognize that children are often products of the environment in which they live. We are ready and willing to provide services not only to the juvenile but to the entire family as well. The goal is to keep the juvenile out of the justice system and provide opportunities for learning and growth through meaningful resolutions to court cases instead of traditional "punishment" and/or fines.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

Taking the time to examine the juvenile offender requires patience and an open mind. As adults, we often forget what it was like to be a child. And for those of us who were fortunate enough to be raised in stable households, it is often very difficult to truly see life through the eyes of a juvenile who may not have been as fortunate. "Problematic" juveniles arrive in schools with high ACE scores; the police, as a whole, do not create them. If we take the time to recognize, address, and treat the underlying issues with the juvenile offender (while still holding them accountable for their actions), our chances of sending a better adult into the world are significantly improved. It is time to stop drawing a line in the sand and announcing what our profession does and does not do; the time for change is now and everyone must invest in our future... and mean it.



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MINNESOTA INITIATIVES

HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM UTILIZE RJ?

The Minneapolis police department works alongside the Hennepin county attorney's office to triage youth cases for restorative justice circles. The police department directly reaches out to the restorative justice agency to address harm. Both of these processes are observed in various counties around MN. I (Raj Sethuraju) have volunteered to help initiate and visualize these processes in two of the biggest counties (Hennepin and Ramsey) in MN. In Ramsey County, a collective group made up of community members, prosecutors, and defense attorneys formulated a transformative juvenile justice initiative.

WHAT MAKES YOUR APPROACH EFFECTIVE?

For example, we introduced the restorative justice circle process to address the Columbus statue's collapse on the state capital grounds. Beverly Bushyhead and I were able to convene three circles involving various people to address historical and contemporary harm. During these gatherings, we engaged the community to explore justice through the value lens. We were able to move away from dualism and adversarial processes and examine the messiness of addressing harm. Together, we were able to harvest restorative recommendations for the harm to be repaired. On December 7th, 2020, the district court heard the prosecutor's request and suggestions and supported the defense lawyers. The organic recommendations and ownership were upheld in court. The restorative process and its recommendations were praised by the judge and those in attendance via Zoom- a great testament to the process.