



Fact Sheet

Restorative Justice

What is Restorative Justice?

- Restorative Justice (RJ) is an opportunity for those affected by a crime – the victim, offender and community – to repair the harm caused by the crime through participation in a restorative practice promoting healing.
- Each DOC correctional facility has a RJ representative and RJ Offender Council who work to raise facility awareness of victim impact, RJ practices and promote RJ activities such as the annual Restorative Justice Week and Crime Victims' Rights Week. Offenders are given information on RJ practices and activities and how they may participate while incarcerated in a DOC facility.

Offender, Victim and Community Roles

- In the existing criminal justice system, many victims feel ignored, neglected and without an opportunity for vindication. Through RJ practices, victims have the opportunity to regain the sense of empowerment they may have lost as a result of crime. Victims can express the personal impact of the crime and their resulting needs plus seek information from the offender.
- In the criminal justice system, offenders play a passive role which often does not result in accountability for righting the wrong they have committed. Within a RJ framework, offenders are active participants directly accountable to victims and are confronted with the personal impact of their crime. RJ practices require them to make amends to the victim and community in appropriate healthy ways.
- The role of the community changes dramatically with RJ practices. The community is responsible for supporting and assisting victims, holding offenders accountable and ensuring opportunities for offenders to make amends. Communities are also responsible for addressing the underlying factors and influences of crime.
- The DOC offers several RJ opportunities for victims, offenders and communities. These include:

Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD)

- A VOD is an opportunity for the victim of the crime and the offender who committed the crime to meet face-to-face in a safe, secure setting for a dialogue about the crime and its impact. A VOD is initiated by the victim or a surviving family member. The offender must be accountable for the crime he or she committed and interested in making amends to the victim and community. All parties participate in intense preparation over several months with trained facilitators prior to the actual face-to-face dialogue.
- If a face-to-face dialogue is not feasible, DOC staff and the parties can consider hosting a dialogue via video conferencing, audio conferencing, or a written exchange.

Victims, Offenders and Community - a Restorative Experience (VOCARÉ)

- If the victim wants to participate in a RJ opportunity but the offender is not accountable, a surrogate group may be convened. The victims of a crime, offenders who have committed a similar crime and community members meet in a safe, secure setting for a circle process to discuss the causes and impact of the crime. Initiated by victims, all parties participate in intense preparation with trained facilitators prior to the VOCARÉ opportunity.

Apology Letters

- The DOC has an established apology letter bank (ALB). The ALB holds letters written by offenders to the victim of their crime which acknowledge the harm caused, fault, responsibility, and regret. The letters do not excuse the crime or request forgiveness from the victim. DOC Victim Assistance and RJ staff review all letters before accepting and placing a letter into the ALB. The apology letter is kept until the victim requests it.

Victim Impact Programming

- The DOC Victim Assistance & Restorative Justice (VA/RJ) unit provides victim impact programming for offenders on an annual basis at the correctional facilities. The VA/RJ unit also works with RJ representatives and staff to invite victim speakers to address offender groups and staff during commemorative events such as National Crime Victims' Rights Week and Restorative Justice Week.

Transition Circles

- Several DOC facilities offer offenders the opportunity to participate in RJ transition circles. Facilitated by staff, RJ transition circles bring together an offender and his or her support system, such as family members, to discuss issues related to the offender's pending release.

Examples of Restorative Justice Activities in Minnesota Correctional Facilities—Fiscal Year 2015

- \$1,077,172 in restitution was collected from offenders in DOC facilities.
- \$422,726 was collected from offenders for Aid to Victims of Crime.
- Restorative Justice Offender Councils hosted fundraisers inside correctional facilities in support of crime victim service organization in Minnesota. In FY15 offenders donated more than \$30,000 to victim service organizations

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