

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a framework that engages victims, offenders and the community in repairing the harm caused by crime. It gives those most affected by crime options for participation in a variety of restorative practices that promote healing.

Overview

Minnesota began using RJ in the early 1990s and became the first state in the U.S. to establish a full-time RJ planner within a Department of Corrections (DOC). Today, each Minnesota correctional facility has a restorative justice representative and RJ committee of staff and offenders working together to raise facility awareness of RJ, and organize and promote various activities throughout the year.

In 2007, a Probation Officer RJ Network was established to promote RJ philosophy and practices.

The DOC has also embraced the use of restorative responses in the workplace to provide an alternative format for staff to deal with workplace conflict situations.

RJ Grants

Fourteen DOC grant recipients across the state provide RJ services to victims, offenders, and community members. Each grant site is involved in a comprehensive research effort to assess the effectiveness of RJ practices.

OFFENDER, VICTIM AND COMMUNITY ROLES

Offender's Role

In the existing criminal justice system, offenders may play a passive role and not be held accountable to right the wrong they have committed. However, in the RJ framework, offenders become active participants in reparation efforts. Offenders are held directly accountable to victims and are confronted with the personal impact of their crime. RJ requires them to make amends to the victim and community in whatever way possible.

In Minnesota, offenders are given information on RJ practices and activities, and how they may participate while incarcerated in a DOC facility.

Expanded Role for Victims

Through RJ, victims are offered opportunities to regain the sense of empowerment they may have lost as a result of crime. Victims can express how they were personally impacted by crime and their resulting needs.

For interested victims, RJ provides a variety of options to dialogue directly with offenders and community.

Community Participation

The role of the community also changes dramatically with RJ. 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.

VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS IN COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE (VOICE)

There are a number of options for communication between victims and offenders incarcerated in a state prison or on community supervision. Depending on the method of VOICE chosen, various stages of preparation are involved.

Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD)

A VOD is a process in which the victim or surviving family member of a severe crime requests to meet with the offender in a safe and structured setting. Following intense preparation with trained facilitators, which may take months, victims and offenders are able to meet face-to-face.

Other options are available if meeting face-to-face is not desirable. These options include speaking through video or audio, or having written exchanges.



Surrogate dialogues are also available, allowing a victim to meet with an offender who committed a similar offense.

VOCARÉ

Another surrogate group option is Victims, Offenders, and Community - A Restorative Experience (VOCARÉ). Victims, offenders and community members meet in a circle process to talk about the causes and consequences of crime.

Victim Impact Programming

Victim impact programming provides an opportunity for victims and survivors to speak about their experiences. Several opportunities for them to do so are available during RJ Week and National Crime Victims Rights Week. During these annual recognition weeks, Minnesota correctional facilities invite victims and survivors to speak to offenders and department staff.

Apology Letters

Apology letters are a tool to communicate an offender's acknowledgment of fault, injury, responsibility, insult and/or pain caused. These letters are offered from an offender to a victim and relate to a specific incident. Once approved, the letter is kept on file until a victim requests to receive it.

Letters demonstrate regret and the offender's feelings about the incident. They do not excuse the incident or request forgiveness from the victim.

Exploring Justice

The Exploring Justice Project provides an opportunity for law students and offenders to dialogue about the concept of justice. Victims, survivors, judges, attorneys and other criminal justice professionals serve as speakers.

Examples of Restorative Justice Activities in Minnesota Correctional Facilities – Fiscal Year 2007

- Over \$406,000 in restitution was collected from offenders in DOC facilities.
- Close to \$250,000 was collected from inmates for Aid to Victims of Crime.
- Inmates at Stillwater raised over \$4,000, with proceeds donated to the Minnesota Correctional Education Foundation, the Tubman Family Alliance, meals for the homeless and other programs.
- At St. Cloud, inmates made nearly 14,000 wooden toys that were distributed to needy children.
- Faribault offenders built a playhouse that raised \$5,000 in a raffle. The proceeds were donated to HealthFinders to provide health care to uninsured families.
- A fund was established through the Minnesota Restorative Services Coalition to assist victims with costs associated with participating in RJ programs. In 2007, offenders contributed over \$4,000 to this fund.

TRANSITION CIRCLES

The DOC is expanding the use of transition circles. These 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.

PROBATION OFFICER RJ NETWORK

The mission of the Probation Officer RJ Network is to promote RJ philosophy and practices in probation services, case planning and the daily activities of probation officers. This is done by increasing probation officer knowledge of RJ, increasing the use of RJ in case planning and providing a supportive network for probation officers interested in restorative practices.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Visit www.doc.state.mn.us/rj/Default.htm for more information about RJ activities and publications.

For information about RJ training and resources statewide, contact the Minnesota Restorative Services Coalition at www.mnmrsc.org.

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Minnesota Department of Corrections
1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108-5219
651/361-7200
TTY 800/627-3529
www.doc.state.mn.us

