



Editor's Corner

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the concept of restorative justice and what it means to prisoners. Can it really work? Can we change the way our justice system works and can we use restorative justice for sentencing guidelines? If so, what would the victim, the community and the offender gain from this?

Restorative justice is a new framework for the criminal justice system and it is quickly acquiring support by corrections agencies and professional organizations in Minnesota.

The restorative justice framework is based on the following assumptions:

- Crime results in injuries to victims, communities and offenders.
- All parties should be included in the response to crime including the offender, the community, and the victim if they wish.
- The victim is central to the process of resolving the crime and the harm done.
- Accountability is based on accepting responsibility and repairing the harm done.
- Crime is defined as an act against another person or the community, rather than an act against the state. The state has an interest in resolving the problem but is not the primary actor. The offender becomes accountable to the victim and the community, not the state.
- Restoration or making things right replaces the imposition of punishment for its own sake as the highest priority of the system. Restitution would become common, not the exception.
- Results in a restorative justice model are measured not by how much punishment was inflicted, but by how much reparation was achieved.
- Crime control rests primarily with the social system. The criminal justice system can have only a marginal impact

on the level of crime because it can only respond to crime after it occurs.

- Offenders are accountable for their individual choices but communities are also accountable for the conditions which may exist that contribute to crime.

What this means to me is that offenders will have a chance to heal the hurt they caused to themselves and to their victims. I feel that accountability by the offender is necessary to make a life change. If you deny your problems or blame everyone and everything else for whatever drove you to commit a crime, you can never really let it go and go on to lead a productive life. Now I'm not saying that past hurts don't contribute to the cause of a crime but never getting over the past sticks you in a place where change is impossible. Forgiving yourself and asking forgiveness from others is essential to healing.

In MCF/Shakopee I have been able to participate in restorative justice almost from the time I got here. Once I got past the past and was on my road to recovery, it was a personal choice to share my story and so I joined the Speaker's Bureau. This program is open to almost all of the inmate population here. Going out into the community I share what it's like in prison (many people have misconceptions of prison) and I tell of the options open to battered women, rape victims, and women in dysfunctional families. Having come from a background where all these things were a part of my life I feel I can give a clear insight into these situations. And though I know what I have to say may not change a person's life, I carry the hope that something might touch someone who needs to hear it.

Restorative justice is also at work here in MCF/Shakopee through the inmates raising puppies for Canine Companions for Independence. The inmate is not

paid for this. The hours and hours of training and care is strictly voluntary. These puppies will go from here, after approximately 14 months, into advanced training where they will be matched with a handicapped person who they will share their life with. These dogs make a great difference to the lives of the people they are matched with. (Look for more on this in the February issue).

Other ways restorative justice is at work at MCF/Shakopee is through the many inmates who participate in fund-raising by phone for the March of Dimes every year. This year inmate callers raised a whopping \$5,537 breaking their own record by more than \$2,000. Congratulations ladies for your enthusiastic contribution!

Inmates are also involved in Braille typing for the blind, making biscuits for sale for Canine Companions, and making toys and baby clothes for mothers and children in need. The Parenting Teens group has adopted a children's home and will be sending cards and letters to children who are otherwise forgotten. Other inmates are always on the lookout for ways to help the community.

As you can tell this is a subject near to my heart and I hope you can see the importance of projects like these for the offender and the community.

Some of the information gathered here is from the DOC publication The Backgrounder

Happy Reading,

Laurie