

"It's Never Too Late To Mend"

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# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WEEK

Restorative Justice is a concept which emphasizes healing the wounds of victims, prisoners and communities which have been impacted by crime. The main practices and programs of restorative justice reflect: Identifying and taking steps to repair harm done, involving all stakeholders and transforming the traditional relationship between communities and their governments.

By Barry Dodd

Restorative Justice Week is observed in over 18 countries all around the world. This year it was observed during the week of November 18-22, 2002.

Some of the programs and outcomes typically identified with restorative justice include: Victim offender mediation, conferencing, circles, victim assistance, ex-offender assistance, restitution and community service.

Three principles form the foundation for restorative justice:

1. Justice requires that we work to restore those who have been injured.
2. Those most directly involved and affected by crime should have the opportunity to participate fully in the response if they wish.
3. Government's role is to preserve a just public order, and the community's is to build and maintain a just peace.

There are four key values of the restorative programs:

1. Encounter: To create opportunities for victims, offenders and community members who want to do so, to meet and discuss the crime and its aftermath.

2. Amend: Expecting offenders to take steps to repair the harm they have caused.

3. Reintegration: Seeking to restore victims and offenders as whole, contributing members of society.

Restorative Justice can help to rebuild family, friends, community and self. It's a positive concept that leads one to take responsibility for the pain and anguish that one has caused and enables that person to be part of the healing process.

One of the new programs that the Minnesota Restorative Justice and DOC has made available to prisoners is the Inmate Apology Letters. This program is designed for inmates who wish to write letters of apology to their victims, to have an opportunity to do so. Apology Letter packets can be picked up in the Library. These packets will encompass questions to consider when writing an effective apology letter and a victim information form to fill out with your letter.

Letters cannot be sent directly to your victims. Send your completed letter and victim information forms to the facility Restorative Justice Representative for review. The Restorative Justice Representatives for Stillwater State Prison are case-workers Guevara and Wheeler.

For some victims, an apology can be a positive step in their healing process. Many victims want to hear the offender apologize and some victims may not want anything from the offender. An apology done poorly can do more damage than good. If you're writing an apology letter, accept responsibility for your actions and do not make excuses. Never ask the victim to forgive you. If your victim wants to forgive you, that decision lies solely with them.

*Apology—an acknowledgement of some fault, injury, or insult, etc., with an expression of regret and a plea for pardon.*

4. Inclusion: Providing opportunities for parties with a stake in a specific crime to participate in its resolution.

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