

**Using crime to reweave the social fabric:
Developing social capital/informal social control
through restorative processes -
Stories from the street**

A woman from an inner city neighborhood community justice circle that works with African American juveniles saw one of the 'circle kids' with a group of other kids on a street corner getting into a fight. Because she has a relationship with the youngster through the circle, she pulled over and called to him to get into her car. He jumped into her car and got himself out of potential trouble.

Two community members in a downtown neighborhood met through participation in a community restorative justice conference and discovered they live near one another. They subsequently worked together to organize a clean up of their block.

A community member felt empowered after participation in a restorative justice conference to speak to a man smoking marijuana at her bus stop. She told him that she has to catch the bus there and it is not okay for him to smoke marijuana in the bus stop. The man left. She stated that she would never have done that prior to her experience in the community conferencing process.

One member of a community justice circle group working with a 19 year old offender spoke of seeing the applicant in the community a couple of times since the last circle. He recalled one incident where they greeted one another and he expressed pleasure at that exchange. "The other time I saw you, but you didn't see me," the community member continued. He went on to describe the applicant on his bike, talking to someone in a car who was in the street holding up traffic. He looked at the applicant and said, "That tells me about you and whether your attitude is changing. That was not respectful." While working diligently to support and help this young man, the community is also clearly setting out standards of behavior for everyone in the community, not just the offender.

As a result of an assault by another juvenile an adolescent boy moved to distant city to live with his father. Following a victim offender mediation regarding this case, the mother of the offender contacted the mother of the victim expressing concern for her loneliness since her son moved away. The mother of the offender suggested that they do something together. They discovered a mutual interest in theater and began to attend plays together.

In the peacemaking circle process with a juvenile, the Community Justice Committee discovered that one of the problems in the family was constant conflict between the juvenile and his brother. A minister who is a member of the circle spent time with the brother and encouraged him to attend the next circle, which he did. During that circle it became apparent that both brothers were very interested in car racing. A community

member offered both brothers a pass to the local racetrack in exchange for some help from them. A new relationship was created with this community member and the relationship between the brothers was strengthened by emphasizing common ground. The brother voluntarily attended the next circle for the offender.

In an upper middle class suburb of St. Paul, an adolescent girl was charged with marijuana possession. Initially, the mother could not believe her daughter could be involved with drugs. In the family group conferencing process, which this city uses for all diversion cases, the mother was confronted with the reality of her daughter's use of drugs. The mother became concerned about the role of the broader community context in her daughter's behavior. She suggested to the police department that there was a need for a community wide dialog on shared values and community standards to communicate clear boundaries to the young people of the community. The police department worked with this mother to organize a process called Focus on Community United by Shared Values, whose aims are to establish a committed relationship between the youth and adults of the city, to focus on developing the character and capabilities of all people, young and old alike, and to be responsible members of the community.

Several volunteer community members of a Community Response to Crime panel gave their home phone numbers to a juvenile, suggesting that he call them if he has a problem. An eighty year old victim of an attempted burglary, disappointed that the offender re-offended after promising never to do it again, met with him, and asked insistently over and over, "How am I going to know you won't do this again?" She calls him regularly to make sure he stays out of trouble. A victim of juvenile vandalism participated in the circle process. Shortly after the case was resolved he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. A circle member who had worked closely with him throughout the case visited him in the hospital, taking him homemade soup and flowers. Another circle member played the violin at his funeral. As a result of the interventions used in these cases informal support systems were created which did not depend upon formal system services.

The responsibility to rally around the victim can take countless forms. Churches in a small town in Florida organized to reach out to the families of two college students who were murdered by high school students in the Florida town. Representatives from the Florida community traveled to Maryland to plant trees in memory of the murdered young men. They also provided housing for the family of the third victim who was severely beaten and was hospitalized in the Florida town. Victims of the Oklahoma City bombing who traveled to Denver, Colorado, to attend the trials were provided with extensive support by churches and community volunteers in Denver. In Billings, Montana, Stars of David were hung in windows all across the city to show support for a Jewish family who had experienced hate crime vandalism.

Twelve middle school students were involved in vandalizing an empty home in the community. During the peacemaking circle process the students and their parents identified the lack of a place for students to hang out together as a contributing factor. Members of the community justice council worked with Community Education to

develop additional teen activities in their summer program and are exploring the feasibility of a teen center in the community.

In a suburban community the victim, offender, offender's mother and neighborhood residents gathered to resolve vandalism of a neighborhood tree house which had caused extensive conflict in the community. While the police officer was working to find a suitable place to meet, a neighborhood resident, who had participated in the process in another case, suggested that they could resolve the case themselves without the police, and they did. The agreement addressed both the individual responsibility of the offender and the responsibility of the neighborhood to be more connected and get to know one another. The agreement was accepted by the police. Extensive use of family group conferencing by the police department as the response to juvenile crime has resulted in an increase in community skills in problem solving and conflict resolution.

In spite of difficulties with the offender, participants in a peacemaking circle project in a diverse inner city community express confidence that through this process the community will be strengthened. "What's most important here is the community coming together. The details of how we do it are not as important as the community doing something." Use of the circle process as a response to crime has increased the community's sense of capacity to address very difficult community problems.

"What do you do here?" the woman asked. She noted that the atmosphere around the building had changed. "There were always lots of kids hanging around, making a lot of noise and they never helped open the door when my arms were loaded. Now it's quieter and when they are around, they run to open the door for me and want to know if you are in there doing circle." The woman she was speaking to had done several circles with neighborhood kids and it had apparently changed the climate of the neighborhood.