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Restorative Justice

bors and such.”

When she moved back up to the North Shore, she saw that many youth that were getting into trouble were not given those same circumstances and tools to understand their actions. “Kids were just labeled for the rest of their life. This is awful. Once they get into the system there is this shame that is not conducive to dealing with life. There’s a difference between being guilty of something versus being shamed for the rest of your life,” she states.

Kay Pranis, who is a well known trainer and writer on peacemaking circles and restorative justice, frequents the North Shore. She was the first person to bring presentations around this practice into the area. Kay has authored and co-authored a number of books on circles including: *Peacemaking Circles: From Conflict to Community*, *The Heart of Hope: A guide for using peacemaking circles to develop emotional literacy, promote healing, and build healthy relationships*, as well as many other books, articles, and publications.

Steve Borud, a Cook County probations officer for 30 plus years, asked Inger to attend a presentation with him around this structure a few years back. Once seeing that it was sticking, Inger decided it would be best for the program to be umbrellaed under the North Shore Health Care Foundation, to build it up in a solid way with a process that would help build sustainability.

Inger Andrees has worked with the North Shore Health Care Foundation on the executive committee and has been part of the strategic planning. She wanted to start incorporating incubation, helping incubate up and coming organizations and umbrella them under the foundation until they could become their own 501c3. “It’s kinda like a birthing program, we help to birth new programs,” she comments. The North Shore Health Care Foundation works to address health care gaps and needs in Cook County. The foundation provides and leverages funding, educational opportunities, and advocates to achieve a healthy and thriving community. Some of the programs developed under the foundation are: Care Partners- providing elderly care, oral health-providing dental, free of expense for youth up to age 26 and elders, and now the Restorative Justice Program.

Inger Andrees and district attorney Molly Hickin were invited to give a presentation at Moose Lake Correctional Facility a few years back. The facility had a 6 week class that inmates were able to go to about restorative justice practices. This effort was organized by the inmates with a waiting list of over 100 people who wanted to get into the class and learn about it.

When the pair arrived to give their presentation, they were shocked to learn that the prisoners had raised \$5,000.00 by selling pizza to give to the Choices and Voices program. “This is them realizing and having hope and believing in reconciliation philosophy. It gives them life. That their life can have meaning and purpose again instead of being labeled the rest of their lives. It was such a powerful time. It was so humbling and honoring at the same time to receive that kind of donation from prisoners themselves. That was before we were with the North Shore Health Care Foundation and that check really helped keep things going. The intention behind that, the energy, was just so beautiful, and put a lot of momentum behind moving forward with the program,” Inger says.

There were 150 people in the room listening to the presentation at the Moose Lake Correctional Facility that day. “It was very moving, seeing the hope in people. It shows that those people that have been labeled bad or criminal want to heal and have an opportunity to move forward.... True restorative justice is coming face to face and really working through the conflict, and that takes courage. It is not a cop out,” says Inger.

The Restorative Justice program is in partnership with the Cook County Attorney’s Office, Sheriff’s Office and the Cook County Courts. It is made possible by dedicated and caring community volunteers trained to help victims and offenders find accountability, healing, and reconciliation.

Free training was offered back in November at the Tofte Community Center this year. Ted Lewis, who has been working in the field for over 25 years from the Duluth Restorative Justice Center, came to give a presentation and training on the framework of what Restorative Justice is and how to use it, not only within the legal system, but among ourselves and communities. “Restor-

ative Justice is an alternative dimension of justice, as well as addressing harms and conflicts. It focuses more on the relational dimensions, prizes dialogue, combines accountability and healing, allows for reparations after relational trust is rebuilt, and is a non punitive approach, but holds people responsible for their actions. It addresses the needs of victims and gives them a strong investment in being part of a process,” he comments.

Once you complete the training, if you are interested in being a facilitator, you are welcome to volunteer and begin to take cases. There are always 2 facilitators for each case that hold a circle. The role of facilitators is to create a safe space in which parties can have positive, empowered conversations. There is adequate preparation of all parties, attention to the web of relationships, guidance by third party facilitators, and an invitation for support people and family to be present. This process focuses on the power of storytelling and listening, as well as the importance of being heard and understood. Practical and consensual agreements are then created by all involved for the outcome. The discussion asks: 1.) What happened? 2.) Who was affected? And 3.) What repairs can be made? There is a system designed in the form of a software program that is able to alert the Cook County Restorative Justice program of referrals from probation, the district attorney’s office, courts, law enforcement, and also the local public high school.

The Cook County Restorative Justice program is made up of community volunteers and has an advisory council consisting of around 11 people. The committee meets monthly and is crucial to the program. “That was the key thing in the beginning. Making sure we had stakeholders from the community that represented all different partners,” Inger says. The individual council members make up and represent many entities within the community. Tribal Chief Council Bobby Deschampe, Human Services Director in Grand Portage Jacki Kozlowski, probation officer Keeton Riley, a local law enforcement deputy, the district attorney, the principal of the high school, the director of the Cook County violence prevention center, a cook county commissioner, and the director of public health and human services are all a part of this advisory committee. Everyone collaborates, as this is the only way this work can be done. In the last 4 _ years the program has been able to work with and have great success with over 20 individual cases in the county.

I remember growing up and having friends who got in trouble in the legal system, and then getting sent to a juvenile detention center. That didn’t help reform them or fix anything, it really just drew them deeper into that whole system in my observation. So after attending this training, I feel like if something like a restorative justice approach would have been taken with some of those folks, there could have been a different outcome. It gives me hope that going forward this could be a way to keep kids from going down that predetermined trajectory, within the justice system. Often they were in juvy for very small offenses. If you’re a kid being punished and you’re being told you’re bad, why not be bad? But, no one is inherently bad. This process allows the offender to see the victim as human and the victim to see the offender as human. Even if there are consequences, they can understand why. Often those consequences necessarily don’t fit the crime, and those consequences don’t recognize the offender as human,” comments Honor Schauland, a participant in the most recent training.

Commonly, these youth that have made mistakes become victims themselves of a greater punitive punishment system and are not given opportunities/insights or shown much compassion or understanding. Entering the system sets them up for failure. On a trajectory of a life of shame, thinking that they’re bad, and often that may be who they become without compassion and support, because that’s what is expected of them.

There are around 50 people that have been trained in the area over the last 4 years, and actively there are about 15 facilitators that are taking on cases and doing the groundwork.

“We’ve always said in our training, come and take it even if you’re not going to be working directly in Cook County, because we love to know that you will be taking these ideas, practices and understandings wherever you go. Bringing light to whatever community or workplace you’re in,” says Inger.

“I thought it was a cool way to reframe what justice means, and is what, I think, a better way

to handle what you would call petty crime. It’s a way to handle those things by involving the community and making it more personal instead of it being a more punitive approach. This, I think, provides a better outcome, especially for youth. I think it’s a really scalable model beyond the justice system for how to resolve conflict and I can see how using this approach and these tools will benefit not only individuals, but us as a whole community. I am excited to see how we can do something like this in Lake County as well,” comments training participant Lucy Carlson.

Restorative Justice practices are unique and valuable in the way that the victims are able to have a voice in the process, and have expressed a higher satisfaction with the outcome of the situation. It can be incredibly healing for both parties to come together, understand each other and reconcile the conflict. Offenders that have gone through a restorative justice process have lower rates of recidivism, and higher rates of completing community service and restitution. This process holds a safe space for youth to understand their actions and repercussions of those actions. This will commonly lead to a more constructive path forward with a better understanding of themselves and others. It can also save money for the county as an alternative to court sentencing. The collaboration of trained community volunteers increases community investment and strengthens services.

I felt the instructors were really good at conveying the core intention of Restorative Justice. That they really lived it. Walked the walk, talked the talk. It was very apparent that everyone’s heart was truly in it that was involved. I learned that there is always a healing that takes place when there is a willingness of people to come to the table and communicate. It’s a very positive thing as far as reconciliation or healing goes,” says Robin Sunquiet, another participant in the training.

It is worth mentioning that the language of victims and offenders does shape ongoing social realities. The larger issue is that harming and harmed people are always more than the behaviors or consequences that are part of a person’s life experiences. “Ours is a system that harms people who harm people to show that harming people is wrong. All that does is replicate and reproduce harm until harm saturates our very existence,” - Fania Davis.

The Restorative Justice movement has seen a worldwide expansion and there are resource centers available in almost every major city and town across the country. There are many flaws within the current criminal justice system and its impact on communities. Especially minority communities with whole generations condemned to vicious cycles of incarceration. It also aggravates social, economic, and racial inequalities.

This framework of Restorative Justice provides a very radical and compassionate model to help us come together to be stronger communities with understanding in mutual aid and harm reduction. Restorative Justice gives people who have been harmed the chance to talk about the impact of the incident and seek answers about why it happened in a face-to-face meeting, via video, or through letters. It also helps the person responsible for the harm to understand the impact of their actions and can encourage them to change their behavior.

Starting with youth carries over and moves us forward. It can and will substantially change our future in our communities and the future of individuals. With this framework, individuals don’t have to become products of their conditioning and environment. They can find their sense of identity and true selves if given the opportunity and encouragement to do so.

The Restorative Justice program is always looking for donations as it is a non profit, and those funds help support these important programs in our community. The dates have not been set yet, but there should be upcoming opportunities for another free training in the year 2023! In the meantime, you can find out more about the Cook county Restorative Justice program at <https://northshorehealthcarefoundation.org/programs/restorative-justice/>

There are also many great resources to be found at the Duluth Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking website: <https://rjp.d.umn.edu/>.

If this topic has sparked an interest in you, please consider what more you could do here in this region to support models and resources of relationship building and reconciliation within our communities.