

## **Reflections on bringing a Restorative and Relational approach to an Alternative School: Amy Taylor**

My partner and I spent six weeks in Jamaica completing our international placement at an alternative school for young learners and an all-female correctional facility. The opportunity that our college, George Brown, has provided will not go without recognition and appreciation. This was a pilot project for the Child and Youth Worker (CYW's) program and I am proud to be one of four who were selected. This privilege allows CYW students to become culturally competent, enhance group facilitation skills by doing life skills and incorporates restorative practices.

I will begin talking about my experience at the alternative school for young learners in Kingston, Jamaica. While getting acquainted with the new milieu, we began to notice as faculty pointed out specific students in each class for behaviour issues, attendance issues and their suspension records. In one class, a male pupil at the back of the class stood out to me. He stood out because the back of the class is where all the action takes place. Also, his large nap-sack sat on his desk blocking his face, was another clue that drew me closer to him.

Some of the behaviours the teacher and principal mentioned about this particular student were that he had had multiple suspensions from the alternative school. Also, they mentioned that he spoke out of turn, and did not follow teachers' instructions and often spoke rudely to teachers and fellow class mates. My observation was that the school often utilized was a power over coupled with an authoritarian stance marked by punitive practices such as suspension, public shaming and contacting the police.

In contrast, my approach mirrored the restorative quadrant in the social discipline window and was reinforced by the relational approach of Child and Youth Workers. I adopted an authoritative role which saw me working with the person instead of doing to them or for them. I worked towards getting the student to reflect on their actions and the impacts. I supported various retellings of their story with different scenarios to provide them with alternative imagined outcomes. Together we removed the labels and any form of blame. Also, I worked towards separating the deed from the doer. By letting him know that his behaviour did not define him this gave him greater opportunity for choices while still maintaining high expectations and responsibility for his actions.

### **Summary**

Completing my final semester placement in Jamaica has provided me with a global awareness to the larger societal and systemic issues that can be found in all countries. The strength of relationships and the appreciation for the privileges we have in Canada are brought into the foreground through travel and work abroad. Through this experience of field work I was able to incorporate and apply restorative practices with youth which lead to positive results and feedback.

This experience has helped me become a global citizen, a stronger person, and Child and Youth Worker and restorative practitioner.