

Modeling RJ City—Lessons Learned
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IIRP's The Next Step: Developing Restorative Communities
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Background

- 2002 working group began meeting monthly in Charlottesville, Virginia.
- Non-profit in 2005 following a workshop in October 2004 with Dan Van Ness on RJ City and Dennis Wittman of Genesee Justice's presentation and discussion strategic community models.
- Can't get a job/grant unless you can prove yourself first and have your non-profit in proper order
- Abundant Life and Eddie Howard (if I'd pick up Dylan Rosenthal)
- New program RJ coordinator for the Juvenile and Domestic Court

Who we are

- Represent: educators, pastors, law enforcement or the courts, as social activists and leaders
- Working knowledge of restorative justice/practices, ongoing training
- Wary of resting all our efforts in a particular program that would be too dependent on political whims and shaky funding.

The RJ City simulation model can be found on RJ Online's website and is still a dynamic project in evolution. It is essential for such a planning model to be in place, however imperfect, to stand side by side with the existing justice systems so that discussions can continue to draw in people who prefer virtual experiences.

<http://www.pficjr.org/programs/rjcity/latest/profile>

Genesee Justice is an example of a networked restorative program that existed in collaboration with a traditional approach to justice from the sheriff's office in Genesee New York for 25 years.

Restorative Community Foundation is a new non-profit organization whose mission is to help communities develop a strategic community plan for restorative practices, see that key community leaders are trained and supported in their efforts to transition existing services or establish needed services to support the hope and healing potentials of restorative justice/practices. Our current efforts are with the Charlottesville/Albemarle community, which we hope will be successful enough to be used by other cities as a model for their own planning. www.restorativecommunity.org

Charlottesville/Albemarle Project

The Restorative Community Foundation is in the process of identifying the cost of current justice and discipline policies in our community. There are many people in our community who are aware of the challenges our community is struggling with and believe that there may be opportunities for addressing economic and educational disparity by taking on leadership and support for restorative practices.

The area is a largely affluent, progressive and well-educated population that has traveled and lived internationally. There is an increase in mature professionals retiring to

the area, which has driven up the cost of living. The tension between the university community and the local community has a long and established pattern that divides people predominantly along racial lines. And while money is spent on providing for better-than-average state allotments for public school students, the academic success of minority students does not reflect well for a place that values education. Poverty and race have been intertwined for generations throughout the state but it is magnified in our area. Albemarle County has 54% fewer individuals living in poverty than the national average, while Charlottesville City (where the university is located) has 30% more individuals living in poverty than the national average – even when the student population is factored out of the figures. There have been budget increases (averaged for the two municipalities) between 1997 and 2005 of 823% for the regional jail, 422% for the juvenile detention center, and only 60% for schools. As our community is waking up to circumstances that generations of people have tried to educate us about only to be summarily ignored or thought worse of, we must face the fact that we have failed to protect the integrity of a large measure of our citizens and their families at great cost to us all.

Current recommendations:

Work with schools, youth programs, and their families to strengthen their understanding of restorative practices when addressing behaviors so that we can improve academic commitment and success.

Complete the organization and establishment of the Abundant Life Program's efforts with ample and secured funding so that community has access to restorative practices, conferencing, training and a coordinator for victim's needs. Then use the success of this project to set up similar services to areas designated by the Quality Community Council.

Expand the services currently being offered through Central Virginia Restorative Justice, a program attached to the Juvenile and Domestic Court

Support the reorganization of the Charlottesville Mediation Center and help find funding for more preventative or non-court programs at a sliding scale cost to citizens.

Continue the community discussion and consensus phase as laid out in the organizations plan of action and 'A Restorative Community would likely have...' (attachments 1 and 2).

Continue to serve on Task Forces, Study Groups and organizations representative of restorative practices.

RJ City Step 1: Community Discussion and Consensus

Tipping Point – Are We There Yet? Or What Seems to be Working?

Use Public Access TV (non-commercial) to run available high-quality documentary programs with permission. IIRP has an excellent selection.

Collect and write news articles particularly when an opportunity arises to shape discussions. Several of us scan news regularly from public and professional writings, share the articles, and save them for reference. Additionally, we collect 1-2 paragraph statements with data for talking points necessary for short presentations of material.

Provide press-packs and information to better inform the press when they are at an event so that they may write articles that promote an intelligent public discussion on restorative practices.

Someday we may be able to adequately describe restorative practices in 5-10 minutes, which is the current attention span for most listeners!

Theater and Arts: Virginia Film Festival theme IN/justice (attachment 3)

Leadership in state-level Taskforces and Study Commissions: Examples are The Governor's Preventing Crime in Virginia's Minority Communities Task Force Report 2005; Virginia Commission on Youth Study of Alternative Education Options, which is looking at ways to reduce the need for out of school placements; Charlottesville City Public Schools' Discipline Task Force; and the University of Virginia's recently convened Community Relations Advisory Group, established to improve relations between the university and local communities.

Endorsements Lists (attachment 4)

Connect with organizations with restorative justice as its focus or as a listed category, examples of which are:

Restorative Justice Association of Virginia (RJAV) www.rjav.org

Victim Offender Mediation Association (VOMA) www.voma.org

Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) www.ACRnet.org

International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) www.iirp.org

Justice Fellowship <http://www.justicefellowship.org>

Centre for Justice & Reconciliation www.restorativejustice.org

Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking <http://ssw.che.umn.edu/rjp>

VORP Information and Resource Center www.vorp.com

And many more, please contact us for a full list

Model projects to develop leadership and credibility. At Abundant Life, the ministry has moved to adopt restorative practices when dealing with conflicts and discipline. They have also worked with families and/or community police using restorative practices.

Collaborate and try not to engage in turf wars over perceived lack of funding – think and act inclusively

Developed and continue to collect holistic community data for presentations and written communications

Attend conferences and find funding to send others who are interested. Provide for the costs associated with classes or training to community leaders.

Framing values that are not limited to prisons or felons as it is a 'hot button' for many people. They may miss the wider impact of justice and making things right. Restorative practices are not all about criminal matters! Get that message out first. Talk about the importance of keeping kids in school and graduating, economically responsible investments in people, self-determination in taking responsibility for a wrongdoing and so forth.

RJ City: Strengthening the Existing Model

1. Governmental Institutions (The Hub) and Non-profits with stable and sustainable funding. Need both!
2. Make sure prevention funding is in proportion to 'end of the pipeline' program funding. Invest in community non-profits and school prevention programs and training.
3. Need for a 'Truth and Reconciliation' process for public institutions that are driven by retributive or exclusionary policies. There is a deep concern about allowing current public institutions and leaders to simply switch hats without going through this process.
4. Need to return control to communities' members with more than 50% stake-holding management because:
 - Strengthens and empowers local community.
 - Community buy-in, confidentiality and trust in themselves can be regained, important for healing and restoration of self-determination.
 - When you have something to show the people they will come to you for help.
 - More timely responses to conflicts, courts can take too long or never address the issues (which may leave the people feeling less safe and more victimized).
 - Attends to crimes/wrongdoing where there is no identified offender, most of the time an offender is never found, which increases frustrations in the community and with police.
 - Attends to victimization better and over a period of time. Proper staff and support needed, or a community member who has access to outside resources can coordinate this service.
 - Better manages agreements and accountability-support work from post-conference to post-incarceration.
 - Works with the existing court programs both in RJ and historic programs so that people from the community have help navigating the processes.
5. Need to keep schools' discipline and law-enforcement at a healthy distance. There are major concerns about creating another self-indulgent mega-system that is so bureaucratic and distanced from the everyday lives of people that it is meant to serve.
6. Need to manage information technologies responsibly, protecting privacy, and intentionally build in mechanisms for correction and setting aside records. Are we working this hard to keep track of re-valorization, stories of hope and healing?