



FLRJC Mission

Through education, advocacy, and implementation of restorative justice principles and practices, Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center provides

- individuals
- organizations
- communities

with avenues to

- redress harm
- repair relationships
- restore peace

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Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center Newsletter

Summer 2005

Local program paves way for RJ

As communities across the United States and around the world work to institute restorative justice concepts and practices, we in Western New York are fortunate to have in our own backyard one of the oldest and most successful restorative justice programs anywhere. Genesee County is a conservative rural community just 10 miles north of Attica State prison, but Genesee County Criminal Justice System is a radical

departure from the norm.

Genesee County Criminal Justice System (*Genesee Justice* for short) has been working out of the Genesee County Sheriff's Department since 1981. Dennis Wittman, the visionary behind the effort, has served as the Coordinator from the program's inception working with cases of serious crime as well as misdemeanors.



Dennis Wittmann, right, with former Genesee Justice staff member Kirby Trask

Respect and healing for victims

Genesee Justice is rooted in a commitment to victim dignity and standing. "Dignity does not come easy either in the courtroom or the community," maintains Wittman. "Victims of crime are too often victims of the justice system and poverty." The entire county criminal justice system has been oriented around the needs of victims without compromising the rights of the accused. In addition to responding to their immediate needs following a crime, victims are asked for their input in the sentencing of offenders. "Their participation adds to the wisdom of the system," says Wittman.

"Society's myth is that all victims want pure punishment," reflects Wittman. "Genesee Justice has proven that when they're attended to, victims really want safety, accountability and responsibility from the offender – not vengeance."

Volunteers and staff work with victims for months or years
Genesee Justice, continued on page 4

Upcoming Events

Fall Conference

Register now for our Sept. 23 Conference at St. John Fisher College featuring Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis and David Anderson Hooker. Use the **enclosed registration form**, and see more details on p. 3.

Pre-Conference Event at RIT

Howard Zehr will speak on "The Journey to Belonging" at Rochester Institute of Technology on Thursday, September 22, 2:00-3:30 p.m. at Ingle Auditorium in the Student Alumni Union, Bldg. 4. RIT is offering this free to all.

Peacemaking Circle Training

Nationally acclaimed Circle trainer Kay Pranis will lead a Peacemaking Circle training especially targeted at those working with youth, immediately following the conference (Sept. 24-27). See p. 4.

For more details, visit our website (www.flrjc.org) or contact the office (473-0970).

Two of FLRJC's "Founding Mothers" retire from Board

by Sue Klassen



Nancy Donnatucci

Two founding board members of FLRJC, Lois Davis and Nancy Donatucci, submitted their resignations from the board in May. As the only remaining founding board member, I wanted to share glimpses into my years of working with them and the strengths they brought to the board.

Together, Nancy and Lois bring a half-century of combined experience in local judicial and mediation organizations. When I joined the not-yet-incorporated organization in the Fall of 1999, Lois and Nancy were already guiding its birthing process.

Nancy has been a Social Worker in the Rochester community since 1974, and Program Manager for Neighborhood HOPE from 1989-2004. Neighborhood HOPE empowers people directly affected by neighborhood conflicts to resolve those conflicts in a peaceful way with their own resources.

Nancy brought her commitment to conflict resolution and her knowledge of the community to FLRJC, serving faithfully for six years on the board and committees. We especially appreciated the Wheel-of-Fortune style game she developed through which students learned the basic principles of restorative justice. I remember shouting over the noise of the crowds at a Peace Fair with Nancy until we were hoarse, explaining the game to youth and cheering them on.

Family health issues, a new grandchild, and the demands of transitioning from Neighborhood HOPE to doing related work for the State have convinced Nancy that she needs to pull back from her involvement in FLRJC. We look forward to a time when she feels ready to join us again.

Lois had already helped found two prominent conflict-related organizations in Rochester — Judicial Process Commission (JPC) and Center for Dispute Settlement — before helping to found FLRJC. She has served as court watcher and as Chair of the Task Force on Courts for 15 years and on the JPC board for 20 years, as well as in Victim-Offender Conferencing Programs and several mediation programs.

Lois brought a wealth of knowledge and wisdom from this work to our board and to



Lois Davis

the nominating committee. Her quiet, strong presence helped us keep striving for diversity and community representation on our board.

For the last year or more, Lois has not been able to do the restorative justice conferencing and circles she would have liked to have done. "I do not see any possibility that this will change," she wrote in her resignation letter in June. Though we as a board still feel the hole from Lois' presence, we have released her to care for her husband and herself, but will continue to recognize her as a Board Member Emeritus.

To both Nancy and Lois, we express our thanks for their commitment to restorative justice and the work of FLRJC.

Sue Klassen is Vice President of FLRJC.

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Design Editor: Sylvia Klassen

Send newsletter submissions, and mailing updates and corrections to FLRJC, 4 East Henrietta Rd, Rochester, NY 14620.

Deadline for the Fall issue:
October 15, 2005.

Breaking Cycles of Harm: Victims' Needs, Offenders' Responsibilities, and Community Empowerment

Friday, September 23, 2005

Kearney Hall, St. John Fisher College



Sponsors

Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center, NYS Community Justice Forum,
PeaceWorks of Greater Rochester,
Peace Studies Program of St. John Fisher College,
Rochester Institute of Technology, and the Helen L. Morris Fund
administered by the First Unitarian Church of Rochester

**Register using enclosed registration form,
or print additional forms from the website, www.flrjc.org**

Schedule:

- 8:30 Registration, Continental breakfast
 9:00 Welcome by County Executive Maggie Brooks (invited)
 9:15 Patricia Huntington-Sigel and Peggy Duffy: Victims' Perspective; Avoiding Revictimization
 10:00 Break
 10:10 David Anderson Hooker: Introduction to STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience)
 and Implications for the Community
 10:40 Howard Zehr: Restorative Justice as Community-Building
 11:10 Kay Pranis: Using Circles to Engage the Community
 11:40 Questions
 12:00 Lunch (provided)
 Speaker: District Attorney Mike Green: Restorative Justice in the Court System
 1:00 Howard Zehr: Victims' Trauma: Themes, Needs, and Implications for Restorative Justice
 2:00 Panel: Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis, David Anderson-Hooker
 2:30 Break
 2:45 Breakout Sessions (Topics and Presenters):
- Learn about the Community Conferencing restorative justice program in Milwaukee, and why it was so successful. (Alan Newton)
 - Victim advocates: Explore the potential of restorative justice and examine myths. (Patricia Huntington-Sigel, Peggy Duffy)
 - Learn more about STAR (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience) and what it can do for your community (David Anderson Hooker)
 - Explore the potential of Peacemaking Circles in trauma healing (Kay Pranis)
 - Learn how incarceration impacts families and communities, and the patterns that become established. (Tom Castellano)
- 3:30 Panel: Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis, David Anderson-Hooker
 4:00 Closing remarks: Ed Minardo

Circle Keeper training scheduled for Sept.

National circle leader Kay Pranis will conduct a four-day Circle Keeper Training workshop September 24-27 at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center is now accepting registrations for the training which will be limited to 25 participants.

Thanks to underwriting by the New York State Community Justice Forum, cost of the training is a mere \$25, plus a commitment to engage in co-keeping circles with youth upon completion of the training.

One hour of academic credit may be available at an addition cost through RIT.

The training is scheduled from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Monday and Tuesday and 1:00 – 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. Participants will have access to RIT's numerous food service venues for lunch.

Pranis returns to Rochester after having led several well received training workshops here in the recent past. She served as the Restorative Justice Planner for the Minnesota Department of

Corrections for many years. Now, she devotes herself full-time to RJ circle training, speaking and writing.

Interested persons are requested to contact FLRJC as soon as possible to register as the workshop is expected to fill rapidly – (585) 424-2923 or info@FLRJC.org. Another circle training workshop is being planned for Spring 2006.



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following a crime to protect the victims from further harm, to provide referrals to counseling and medical assistance, and to help with preparing compensation claims. Victims are kept apprised of the status of the case against the offender, and helped in the preparation of "victim impact statements or allocution," which the judge takes into account in the sentencing process.

Genesee Justice has provided assistance to 2,456 crime victims, 64% of which were women and 480 were children. Assistance includes compensation, counseling, court accompaniment, legal advocacy, and mediation sessions. "Our Justice for Children Advocacy Center has a most talented medical staff and forensic interviewers," says Wittman. "Children find the residential center a safe-haven.

According to Wittman, one out of 15 victims requests a meeting with an offender. Victims often have questions that can't be answered without such a meeting: "Why were you doing this?" "Why me?" Getting some answers can help victims restore their sense of order and safety, and help them get on with their lives.

"It's like having an open wound," says Wittman. "If you fail to attend to it, gangrene sets in and the injuries worsen. We attend to the victim and try to help them heal."

For offenders, a chance to make amends

Genesee County officials believe that the offender's first obligation is to make amends to the victim and to the community. The justice system's role is to act as mediator between those most affected and to ensure that the case is fairly resolved.

A meeting with a victim helps offenders recognize the human impact of their crime in a way that is rarely possible within the formal confines of a courtroom. "It is not easy for an offender to sit next to his or her victim," Wittman notes. Offenders who meet face-to-face with victims are more likely to recognize the harm they caused. Similar community conciliation meetings are held between members of a given community and the offender who violated the values and peace of that community. These carefully planned meetings give offenders a chance to make things right.

Offenders who show a strong interest in making amends are given the chance to make restitution. A judicial diversion plan is prepared and presented to the victim, district attorney, and defense lawyer. The plan is customized for each offender depending on the nature of the offense, the victim's recommendations, and input by interested community members. If the offender follows the

tightly monitored plan, charges may be reduced or dropped. If not, the case reverts to the normal court process.

Over 90 percent of offenders (342 out of 380) successfully complete their judicial diversions. Nearly five thousand offenders have contributed 356,858 hours of community services to 112 local churches, schools and nonprofit agencies. Community service has the added benefit of helping an offender restore his or her standing in the community. Many offenders report feeling better about themselves and their ability to make a contribution as a result of their community service work. They learn new skills and learn how to get along with other people. In addition, non-profit agencies have benefited from 360,000 hours (at \$5 per hour, a cost savings of \$1,800,000 of unpaid work. Taxpayers have seen a jail cost savings of \$163,000. Wittman emphasizes that community service is not a way of letting offenders off easily. The work is often strenuous, and the hours can be long.

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Community empowerment

Genesee Justice recognizes that the victims of a crime include not only those who have been directly hurt but the whole community. Crime eats up public resources and degrades the community's sense of well-being and safety.

Genesee Justice has been a tremendous boon to county taxpayers. Nearly six million dollars has been saved through court-ordered community service sentencing. Taxpayers have saved over 4 million dollars (\$70 per day) by not putting offenders in jail. Without restorative justice options, a majority of those convicted would be imprisoned at a cost of \$14,000 - \$25,000 per year. While neighboring counties are building new jails, Genesee's jail has room to

spare – the county makes money housing prisoners from other jurisdictions.

"Incarceration should be used as a last resort, only after community obligations and restrictions have failed," former Sheriff W. Douglas Call says. "Public protection is fostered by enforced community-based sanctions [rather than] abrupt, unrestricted release from jail and all that imposes upon the general public."

Genesee Justice has given judges "the creative sentencing options they have been looking for," writes Batavia Town Justice James B. Neider. Sentences can be tailor made instead of one or two sentences fit all. Judges can now get valuable input from victims and community members.

Tough, compassionate justice

After nearly 25 years, Genesee Justice has built an elaborate network. Over 100 nonprofit service agencies

are involved, 105 volunteers work with crime victims, and 110 community sponsors/volunteers meet weekly with offenders. Community members also participate in victim/offender reconciliation conferences, particularly when damage to the community is very public. In Genesee County, the community has actively partnered with the justice system.

Genesee Justice has proven that the legal system does not always have to be adversarial. We can view crime as an opportunity for healing those harmed by it. Offenders can be held accountable in positive and productive ways. Justice can be both tough and compassionate. It can promote peaceful resolution of conflict.

This article includes excerpts from articles written by Sarah van Gelder. Quotes are excerpted from YES! magazine, PO Box 10818, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110. Subscriptions: 800/937-4451 Web: www.yesmagazine.org

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No More Victims: Circles of Support and Accountability

by Sue Klassen

How can a community respond when a high-risk sexual offender is released after serving every day of his sentence? Circles of Support and Accountability (referred to as CSA or COSA) are the answer communities around the world are discovering.

CSA volunteers not only accept such offenders into their communities, but work with them as friends for a year or many years to help them avoid reoffending. CSA volunteers are not selected because they are social workers or psychologists—they are simply people who care about making their communities safer by walking with its most despised members.

A major research study pairing 60 high-risk offenders in CSA with offenders not in CSA found that the offenders who had had CSA support had a 70% reduction in sexual

recidivism compared to the control group. Furthermore, the nature of the recidivism in the CSA-supported group was less serious than the crime for which they had been jailed (e.g. an obscene phone call instead of violent rape), but not in the control group.

CSA volunteers meet regularly with their "core member" (the released offender) in a Circle format, and help the core member between Circles with the mechanics of daily life (e.g. finding housing, getting a phone, making connections). They also watch for mood changes or increased stress, which could trigger a relapse.

Community Justice Initiatives' Director Mark Yantzi quotes a CSA volunteer: "By being in a Circle, a pedophile knows he's accountable, but he also knows he counts—at least with a few people. Call it compassionate surveillance or basic psychology, the concept of Circles works." (www.cjiwr.com/resources_article_1.html)

Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center
C/O South Presbyterian Church
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