



Bringing People Together

PiRI Vision

We envision a world where restorative principles and practices are known, respected and used to redress harm, restore peace, improve relationships, reduce violence, promote healing and build healthy communities.

PiRI Mission

Partners in Restorative Initiatives, located in western New York, works with schools, courts and communities to instill restorative practices through education, advocacy, training and facilitation.

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talking piece

spring 2009

PiRI Joins NYADP for Violence Prevention Meeting

Matthew Dreitlein

In April PiRI welcomed David Kaczynski, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (NYADP), and two of his coworkers at a roundtable discussion on urban violence. The roundtable brought together over two dozen community leaders in order to identify concrete steps to be taken in the prevention of violent crime.

Kaczynski said that the organization's mission had changed following the virtual cessation of the death penalty in New York, and that NYADP now focused on finding common ground among five key groups: victims; law enforcement; advocates for the mentally ill; restorative justice practitioners and families of the incarcerated.

Colleen Eren, NYADP's Organizing Director, facilitated the discussion and said the objective for the roundtable was to identify goals that could be accomplished locally, as well as items to be addressed by the state legislature. Those participating in the roundtable were informed that their comments would not be attributed by name so that they could express their opinions freely.

Some of the community leaders commented on the limitations of available resources, especially on money from Albany, but others said that the Rochester area was hampered by a lack of cooperation and execution among organizations.

"Rochester has all the solutions to the problems, but we are in silos," said one participant. "We need to integrate."



Photo by Krista Rozanski

David Kaczynski
NYADP Executive Director

"I sit on so many boards that go over stuff over and over, but nothing happens," another speaker said.

Many participants said they felt it would be helpful to map out assets currently available in the community.

"It's important to look at where we are using resources to collectively achieve targeted goals [in order] to be as efficient and as effective as possible," said a participant.

Kaczynski noted that Rochester is expected to benefit from added financial resources through Operation SNUG (guns spelled backwards). This initiative, based

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What's happening at PiRI?

Photos courtesy of MJ Ebenhack



MJ Ebenhack and Nate Lindsey lead kindergartners in the Hoky Poky to end their Talking Circle at Peace School in Uganda

Photo by Krista Rozanski



Jeanne Carlivati sitting with students in a Talking Circle at School #29

Photo by Krista Rozanski



David Kaczynski, Marie Verzulli and Colleen Eren from NYADP

Trainings

We offer general and advanced trainings and certification in both Community Conferencing and Peacemaking Circles, with specialized trainings for community groups and schools. Supported by a generous grant from Project Safe Neighborhoods, we trained over 200 people in 2008—two and a half times the number we had trained the year before.

Work with schools

We continue to be contacted by schools that are interested in our training, while we reach out to potential funders in order to provide restorative tools to students and teachers. We are continuing to train and support staff at Monroe High School, School #39, #29 and Avon Central School District.

Work with courts

We have completed our second case in East Rochester Town Court. Courtroom renovations have temporarily slowed the number of referrals, but even so, support for the program has grown.

In Batavia, PiRI trainers have coached Genesee County's Community Conferencing Program facilitators through their first three cases.

Work with community

Through training, education and direct facilitation, PiRI works within the community to build community resiliency and resolve conflict. The RICH program continued to make progress building partners in the city, while our board members reach out to communities far and wide, spreading Restorative Practices as close as RIT and as far as Uganda.

Conferences

In collaboration with the Western NY Restorative Justice Coalition, we are hosting a two-day conference in October 2009. We are also actively searching for a Special Events Director. If you are interested in the position or would like to recommend someone you know, please contact Sue Klassen at office@pirirochester.org.

Encouraging Beginnings at School #29

Matthew Dreitlein

Thanks to teachers who yearn to build a community in their classrooms – and administrators who understand that test scores are not all that is important – Restorative Practices have begun to help shape the lives of students at School #29.

Students and teachers at the elementary school are coming together in Peace Circles to share and reconnect to one another in a safe environment. PiRI volunteers visited the school this spring and participated in a day of Circles.

“I think the co-teachers in the room are very open with the students in terms of their sharing and modeling so the students were able to be open in their sharing as well,” said Jeanne Carlivati, PiRI Board Member.

Carlivati sat in on two circles at the school, one in a kindergarten class and one with fifth-grade



Photo by Krista Rozanski

Jeanne Carlivati talking to students in circle at School #29

graders. In the circle conducted in Wendy Ferris’s fifth-grade classroom, discussion topics ranged from the abrupt departure of family members to ways of building friendships.

“As it turns out, one of my friends from kindergarten had just died the day before, and when it was my turn I actually started to cry and explained to them that I was feeling like I could have been a better friend,” Carlivati said. “This did bring up lots of discussion.”

respectful of each other.”

The benefits of restorative practices have been recognized by administrators as well as teachers.

“The kids are empowered,” Dr. Clinton Strickland, Principal of School #29, said of students participating in circles.

Over 90% of the school’s teachers have been trained in some form of restorative practices. To date, 27 teachers have been trained in Peace Circles and over 90 teachers and administrators have participated in and discussed the value of restorative practices. Strickland said that he is supportive of further training.

“We are all on the same page,” he said, referring to the administration, teachers and PiRI. PiRI became involved with the school over a year ago after joining in a roundtable discussion with Strickland. The principal meets monthly with community organizations in order to build partnerships.



Photo by Krista Rozanski

Teacher and students participate in Peace circle

For the kindergartners, circles have become a normal part of the school day.

“The teacher does circles every day right after lunch so they knew the routine very well,” Carlivati said. “They did use a talking piece, and the kids were very

Grants Bring Camp to Monroe High School

JoAnn Welsh

PiRI was pleased to learn that we will receive \$20,000 in support of the Restore Monroe Youth Leadership Camp in Restorative Practices. The camp is a program in collaboration with Monroe High School and A Horse's Friend (AHF).

Restore Monroe Youth will consist of a two-week program for 20 eighth-graders and five juniors and seniors. In the first week, students will be trained in restorative practices at the PiRI offices, where they will take part in peace circles, role playing, script writing and much more. They will also meet with a nutritionist and a physical education specialist to develop guidelines for healthy lifestyles.

In the second week the program shifts to Highview Farms, where the kids will learn to ride and care for horses while having the opportunity to enjoy nature through cook-outs and hiking. Founded by Genesee County native Matthew Doward in 2006, AHF is dedicated to demonstrating positive alternatives to Rochester urban youth.

"It has very little to do with riding on a horse, and a lot to do with responsibility and teamwork," Doward said in an interview with *The Democrat and Chronicle*.

The initial \$5,000 in funding for the program came from the Polisseni Foundation. Based in Fairport, the organization was founded by Wanda and Gene Polisseni in 1983 to honor the memory of their daughter Kimberly. It originally served to support law enforcement and abused children but has since broadened its mission.

An additional \$15,000 was granted by the Tauck Foundation, a private, family-run

foundation that donates to non-profit organizations. Since 2006, part of the Tauck Foundation's focus has been forging partnerships with independent youth agencies in order to develop summer travel programs for low-income, middle school students.

"The director of the Tauck Foundation called this 'an exciting and risky project,'" said Mary Reed, PiRI Board Member. The risk stems from the lack of any previous collaboration between PiRI and AHF. Reed said the foundation was impressed by the "alignment" of purpose of the involved organizations and their commitment to connecting the camp to restorative programs in Monroe High School in the following school year. ○

New Circle program has its roots at PiRI

Gail Ferraioli

"Circles of Caring" is a new program is designed to support people who are transitioning from a marriage relationship. The concept was developed by four local mediators, all of whom received training at PiRI.

Mediators Beth Danchy, Bobbie Dillon, Gail Ferraioli, and BJ Mann will provide the new program for individuals, couples and families experiencing the ending of relationship. In the program, Circles will meet at Asbury Church for approximately three hours and will be facilitated by two trained circle keepers.

It was with great pleasure the four mediators were able to debut this circle concept this spring to mental health professionals in the beautiful space of the Rochester Area Mennonite Fellowship building.

Therapists were chosen to learn about this program first, as they are keenly aware that divorce is one of the most stressful experiences in people's lives. It affects children, extended family and friends, yet rarely do these individuals have a chance to collectively and openly discuss their feelings and concerns with the formerly married couple.

To convey the essence of the process, the mediators presented information in circle format about their partnership, the circle tradition and its application to a specific population. Presenting the program in a circle format allowed the discussion to take

place in a safe environment of mutual sharing.

The goals for couples who participate in this new program are to allow their extended community to recognize their mutual interdependence; to raise awareness of the normalcy of feelings; to facilitate the communication, identification and release of the effects of divorce; and to improve and sustain relationships among members of a caring community

Three circle choices are available: circles for individuals who are experiencing separation and divorce to share feelings in a

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Circles Impact on a School in Uganda

MJ Ebenhack

How does one establish a partnership and build trust with people from a very different culture located half-way around the world? This was the question foremost on the mind of PiRI Board Member M.J. Ebenhack as she set off on a site visit to the Peace Nursery and Primary School in Uganda.

Ebenhack is the President and CEO of AHEAD Energy, a nonprofit organization headquartered at the University of Rochester that works with communities in Africa to assist in transitioning to more robust, cleaner, healthier energy systems. Ebenhack, who has attended two multi-day trainings with renowned Circle Trainer Kay Pranis, provided information on conducting circles to her travel partner, University of Rochester undergraduate Nate Lindsey, prior to the trip.

Upon arrival at the school Ebenhack and Lindsey first conducted Talking Circles with the teachers. They then led circles in all the classes, kindergarten through seventh grade. A primary goal of the circles was to establish relationships that were open and honest and facilitate information sharing.

For students whose education is based in rote learning, participating in a Talking Circle was a big change and there was some initial hesitation and timidity. However, it was evident by the end of the visit that the Circles had established lines of accessibility between the



Photos Courtesy of MJ Ebenhack

MJ Ebenhack leads a talking circle with students at Peace School.

students and their visitors.

One very significant circle was conducted with the cooks and maintenance staff at the school. The cooks expressed a desire for an improved kitchen, including a four-burner stove that would allow them to stand while cooking. Daily cooking was being done for up to 200 students using nothing more than a pot on an open fire. Cooks had to squat on a dirt floor in a shed blackened by smoke. The primary cook – a young mother – often cooked with a baby slung on her back, exposing her and her child to harmful smoke and pollutants.

During the 10-day visit, arrangements were made to pour a new concrete floor and plaster over the blackened walls, as well as to install a 4-burner Rocket Stove, water heaters and a water tap in the kitchen. An opportunity was provided for the cooks to talk at length with the contractor in charge of installing the stoves. By allowing the cooks and maintenance staff to take the lead in determining how the kitchen would be reconstructed, much goodwill was developed and the kitchen works well.

By all measures, the visit was a resounding success. School Director Morris Bbaale emailed Ebenhack on behalf of the school's teachers and board members, thanking her and Lindsey for their collaboration with the school.

“The Talking Circles you conducted were very helpful especially to hear everyone’s point and view,” Bbaale wrote. “You have set a great example for us all. You have bought something new to our community.... We hope you can come back soon as you have left a great impact on everyone’s life.”



Photos Courtesy of MJ Ebenhack

Nate Lindsey leads circles with students in Uganda

Training Leads to Restorative Practices on Campus

Mark Klemens

This spring the University of Rochester joined the ranks of universities and colleges across the country that offer restorative practices as an alternative means to settling selected disputes among students. This new program followed the January training in restorative circles by PiRI and Duke Duchscherer (see the related story on the training in our Winter 2009 Newsletter).

Two restorative circles were held, each involving a group of students facing longstanding, unresolved issues. The process began with pre-circle conferences to apprise participants of the format of the restorative circle process, including the ultimate goal of reaching an agreement. A quiet area in the university library assured a setting without interruptions.

The method of restorative circles used contained elements of nonviolent communication (NVC). One of the elements of this method called for a member of the circle (designated by the speaker) to relate back to the speaker what had been said. This was a new experience for nearly everyone. Some said they found it to be extremely meaningful and helpful, while others indicated that the feedback seemed to cause an interruption of people's thought-processes.

For many of the participants, however, the opportunity to hear an opposing view in a safe, structured environment was valued. As many who have participated in circles know, it is hard to come away from the circle without a new way of seeing a situation.

Restorative practices are a key component of many colleges and universities in the US. Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, NY has one of the best known programs. The University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and Colorado State University also have programs. ○

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on the CeaseFire campaign in Chicago, is slated to award funding to the cities of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, New York City and Westchester County to promote community-based violence prevention.

Prior to the discussion, PiRI hosted a coffee hour during which community members were welcome to meet Kaczynski and hear about NYADP's new direction. Kaczynski and Marie Verzulli, NYADP's Victims' Rights Advocate, followed up the roundtable by speaking with Jeri Dube at Mindpulse, and the podcast of that interview is available on our homepage at www.pirirochester.org. Verzulli is the sister of Catherine Marsh, who was murdered in 1996 by a serial killer in Poughkeepsie, NY. Kaczynski's brother Ted is serving a life sentence for a series of mail bombings. ○

talking piece is the quarterly newsletter of Partners in Restorative Initiatives. A *talking piece* is used in Peace Circles to create a space for each person to talk and all the others to listen.

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Deadline for the Summer issue:
August 15th, 2009.

Newsletter archives on website:
www.pirirochester.org

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supportive environment (offered July 12); circles for divorced/separated couples who wish to mark the ending of one type of relationship and the beginning of their new lives (July 19); and circles for family and friends of divorced/separated couples to validate their changing relationships in a supportive environment (offered by arrangement at a time convenient to all parties).

There is nothing more gratifying for an organization than to see participants utilize its principles and carry them out into the community. PiRI wishes Circles of Caring great success in helping individuals realize the promise of new beginnings. For more information or to learn how to register for a Circle of Caring, please visit www.CaringCircles.net or call Marcia Geary at (585) 461-5621. ○