



## Partners in Restorative Initiatives(PiRI)

# talking piece

February 2015

### PiRI Vision

We envision a community in which restorative principles and values are known, respected and utilized to build relationships, repair harm, and strengthen communities.

### PiRI Mission

Partners in Restorative Initiatives works to implement restorative practices in schools, communities and the justice system through advocacy, education, training and facilitation.

Partners in Restorative Initiatives may have seemed quiet for the past two months without our December and January newsletter but we *have* been very busy.

PiRI has been training students and teachers from the Rochester City School District Douglass Campus and Wilson Commencement High School. In January we provided weekly training for staff at Young Women's College Prep Charter School and we held a 1 day Peace Circle training for Rochester Career Mentoring Charter School.

On January 12th we had the privilege of presenting restorative justice to a criminal justice class from RIT. For some of the students it is the first time they have heard about this type of process.

We trained a group of graduate students from the University of Rochester Warner School and co-trained with a colleague at York Central School in the peace circle process.

In February PiRI will be working more with students and staff from the Douglass Campus, then over the next coming months we will be working with Brockport Central School and Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES.

We are so excited to do whatever we can to assist schools and any other community group learn about and instill restorative practices into their culture. Many of these schools have benefited from grants and generous donors as their own budgets are very tight. If you want to help our local communities and schools instill common sense approaches to discipline, accountability and building relationships please check out our website and donate to Partners in Restorative Initiatives. Every little bit helps.

## Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Our volunteers have helped us facilitate and train people in the use of restorative practices throughout our community for many years. To honor those who are so essential to the work of implementing restorative practices, we began 2015 on a warm note of friendship and relaxation at a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on January 8.

We were pleased to welcome:

School psychologist Helen Boehm-Morelli, one of our longest-standing volunteers, who is a steadfast advocate for restorative practices in the Rochester City School District

Isobel Davies, who served for many years on the Courts Committee and was instrumental in our efforts to implement restorative re-entry circles for women in the Monroe County Jail. Izzie brought her beautiful son for all to enjoy.



Pictured above: Kathy Sweetland, Jeanne Carlivati, Isobel Davies, Vicki Burns, Mary Meissner, LaVerne Mcquiller-Williams, Barbara Brody & Sue Lione

Continued on next page



Jeanne Carlivati & Betty Reinhart

Mary Beth Spinelli, who has worked with Izzie on re-entry and is the restorative practices coordinator for Project INSPIRE at Ibero

Vicki Burns, who has also worked with Izzie on re-entry and serves as our volunteer coordinator

Members of Jeanne Carlivati's Schools/Education Committee were well represented by Barbara Brody, Sue Lione, Diana Vega, Betty Reinhart, and Mary Meissner.

Betty Reinhart was recognized for completion of the requirements as a certified Peace Circle Trainer

Mary Meissner received a certificate acknowledging her completion of the requirements as a certified Community Conference Trainer

Also in attendance were:

Jude Lardner, who graciously provided a workshop in Mindfulness for us last year and says she is interested in progressing through our certification process

Our newest volunteer, Jeanette Schmid, who has recently served as a presenter in Ed Minardo's restorative practices classes at RIT and Brockport. Jeanette brings to Rochester a wealth of knowledge about Family Group Counseling which she has used in her social work practice in several countries around the world.

Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers. Without you, we would not be able to bring our restorative work to the community.



Vicki Burns & Kathy Sweetland



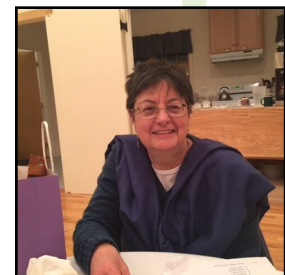
Jude Lardner



Jeanette Schmid



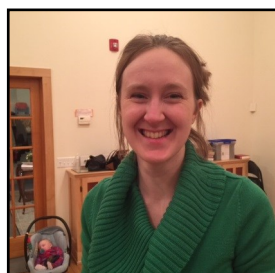
Sue Lione



Barbara Brody



Mary Meissner



Izzie Davies



Diana Vega



Helen Boehm-Morelli

# RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

Jeanette Schmid, PhD

Passed into legislation in New Zealand in 1989, Family Group Conferencing is based on ancient Maori practices and echoes the inclusive, restorative approaches of many indigenous groups. It is accepted in New Zealand as a formal procedural alternative to traditional social work interventions and encompasses longstanding cultural traditions. These laws, which have been replicated in many other countries, provide a different route to problem resolution for those involved in both the child protective and youth offender systems.

Each family has its own unique culture shaped by the broader culture on the one hand and family history on the other. Family Group Conferencing allows each family network to itself decide who belongs in the family circle and who should thus be involved in the decision making. Family groups manage the decision-making process according to their own cultural norms. Within these parameters families everywhere can participate in a conferencing process. Service providers are able to present their concerns to the family in clear, accessible terms. The family circle addresses these concerns with detailed, specific plans.

What does this process offer that is fundamentally different from other approaches?

- Family Group Conferencing gives families a non-punitive, non-shaming way of engaging with authorities. The concerns relating to the young person are addressed while the strengths and assets of the family group are shifted to the foreground.
- Family Group Conferencing expands the circle: In the case of restorative justice, this is done by acknowledging the offender, victim and others affected by the wrongdoing. In child protective situations, the family's resources are expanded by including relatives and others concerned about the child. By calling the extended family group together, this network of support is affirmed. It is also made visible and more concrete to both family members and service providers. One child said when seeing her family present: "These are all the people that love me, and not even all of them!"

- By widening the circle and reinforcing the collective, Family Group Conferencing not only identifies the informal supports available, but by including service providers in particular aspects of the conference, also engages and advocates for the provision of additional services.
- The process encourages the customized application of resources to meet individual family needs. Additionally, each member can decide when and how to contribute to keeping the child safe in terms that are manageable for each individual.
- The Family Group Conferencing process affirms and reinforces the decision-making and nurturing capabilities of the family as a network. Solutions are tailored to the needs of all parties present, recognizing the mutuality of relationships.
- It allows groups of people with diverse and even conflicting interests to find an agreed-upon path forward. Plans that are supported by all parties are more likely to be implemented. If a plan falls apart due to unforeseeable circumstances, a substitute plan is quickly formulated. Thus, children and adults are protected.

Family Group Conferencing enlists the support of the collective family in potentially adversarial situations by empowering them to develop a constructive safety plan, subject to the approval of the authorities. Plans are monitored collaboratively by family members and the authorities, thus meeting everyone's needs.

Family Group Conferencing is not only a useful conflict resolution tool, but, because it is primarily a decision-making vehicle, it can be applied outside of the child welfare and criminal justice systems in situations where families are stressed by migration, mental health issues, chronic and/or terminal illness or physical disability, and impending loss of a loved one. This collective approach affirms family connections and value to one another.

## February Quote

Change begins with understanding  
and understanding begins by  
identifying oneself with another  
person: in a word, empathy.  
- Richard Eyre



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# RIT Students Explore New Options

By Ed Minardo

On a cold, snowy day in January, Jeanne Carlivati and I hosted an event for the class of Associate Professor Judy Porter. The Rochester Institute of Technology students consisted of 11 individuals participating in Professor Porter's Winter Intersession course that explores various criminal justice models... in travel mode.

Rather than asking professionals in the field to come into the classroom, Professor Porter brings the students to the programs. This helps students to receive a greater experiential understanding of the programs and the people who run them. Professor Porter also helps students realize the vibrant and diverse ways in which criminal justice is conducted in the Rochester community.

Students were greeted with snacks and refreshments and quickly ushered into the friendly and familiar configuration of our Circle process. Nothing works better when introducing restorative initiatives than the experience of being in a circle and trying the process out personally. Participants were given a brief overview of restorative principles, which emphasize relationship building, accountability, storytelling and stakeholder involvement.

Following their time in the Circle, students watched a PowerPoint presentation on the various ways that restorative practices have been used and a video that gave personal insight into how a restorative circle helped the stakeholders work through a painful situation.

Here are a sampling of the reflections we received from the students after their visit:

- ◆ I have never heard of restorative justice and the peace circle process and it was really interesting to see a different approach to healing in the criminal justice system.
- ◆ I left feeling that I learned more from the field trip than the reading and in less time. To be able to experience something is definitely the best way to learn. We have too many criminals because we haven't evolved our thinking into actions with the criminal justice system.
- ◆ Suspending kids from school is only going to give them the benefit of removing them from the act and won't teach them what they did wrong. Having something like this (circles) will change that, and will change the effect on kids dropping out of school.
- ◆ I never thought I would share personal thoughts and feelings in class. When I was in high school, I traveled to Australia to study the Maori and Aborigines. I never thought these practices would be reinvented into something we could use here.
- ◆ I would use this with my own family. It's been forever since we all sat down and expressed our feelings and problems and how those affected us individually. I would like us to become closer again.
- ◆ Initially, I was zoning out with the presentation since it looked like it would be a class therapy session. It wasn't until the end of the video that this concept clicked with me. There was one clip of a man choking on his words, saying something like "I can't give you your son's life back, but I can tell you I am sorry". It immediately made me think of when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and my brother was hit by a 17 year old drunk driver. I realized a circle would have been a perfect opportunity for me to talk to that guy. Originally I had written a letter to the judge about his lenient sentence, but I never really felt better about anything even after the kid had been locked up. I wish I had known about restorative circles because I definitely would have wanted to make this happen.

Partners in Restorative Initiatives continues to be honored to maintain its affiliation with institutions such as RIT and progressive, innovative professors like Judy Porter who continue to feed fresh minds with experiences for students to explore ways to make our communities healthier.



Photo By: A. Sue Weisler/RIT

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## “You Are My Other Me”

On Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, Mary Meissner and Jeanne Carlivati trained a group of 12 graduate students from the Warner School at the University of Rochester in the 1 day Introduction to Circle Training.

All of the participants had previously attended a presentation for students and staff at the U of R in December. Each of these students is either in the graduate program for school counseling or mental health counseling and was interested in learning more about the circle process to help them build relationships with future clients.

Even though these students had spent the last year together in classes, the workshop provided many opportunities for learning about each other in a deeper way, which they really seemed to enjoy.

As part of the training the students had split into two groups and planned their own circles. The first circle was to provide support for a family member with a serious illness. For an opening, one of the participants who writes beautiful poetry recited her poem about possibilities. After hearing the poem, each person was asked to choose one word that describes how they were feeling. In the first round each person rated themselves on a scale of 1-10 about how they were feeling about the illness and why they felt that way. In a second round participants made further comments and sought connections with each other. The circle was closed by looking to the person next to you and sending them off with a wish based on something that they had expressed in the circle.

The second group planned a celebration circle to honor staff for National Counselor Week. After opening with a physical activity, the first round asked the participants to think about a time when they felt that their role in the school really mattered. They chose to pass the talking piece a second time to comment, add or make connections with each other. Their closing was very powerful. One participant, who had grown up in Mexico, had everyone stand and recite an ancient Mayan creed, first in Spanish and then in English. It translated to “You are my other me. If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself”.

This particular closing certainly seemed to capture the essence of what circle work is all about and once more reinforced why we do this work.

## Our Calendar

### Looking forward...

- February 3 Peace Circle training in York
  - February 10 Peace Circle training for 7th grade Douglass students
  - March 10 Peace Circle training for 10th grade Douglass students
  - March 30 Restorative Practices Workshop at Brockport Central School
  - April 14 Peace Circle training for 9th grade Douglass students
  - April 17 Restorative Practices Workshop for Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES
  - April 27 1 Day Peace Circle Training at PiRI—Open for Registration
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***talking piece*** is the monthly newsletter of Partners in Restorative Initiatives. A talking piece is used in Peace Circles to create a space for each person to talk and for others to listen.

Send mailing updates, corrections and submissions to:  
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Archives at [www.pirochester.org](http://www.pirochester.org)

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## talking piece

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