



# talking piece

October 2015

## Rochester Restorative Youth Diversion

### 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.

Some exciting new developments occurred at the September meeting of the Rochester Restorative Youth Diversion committee which Partners in Restorative Initiatives has participated in for many years. Senior representatives of the Rochester City School District attended the meeting including Director of Teaching and Learning Christiana Otuwa, Director of Administration Adele Bovard, Director of School Safety Lori Baldwin, Chief of School Innovation Kirstin Pryor, Director of Counseling and Social Work Ruth Turner, and Chief of Curriculum and School Programs Jennifer Gkourlias.

There was a wonderful discussion of the many restorative initiatives the district is engaged in and the substantial personal and professional commitment reflected by the personnel involved. Kirstin Pryor, Ruth Turner, and Jennifer Gkourlias are members of RCSD's RocRestorative Implementation Team which consists of seven staff assigned to manage the implementation of restorative practices throughout the district.

The Rochester Restorative Youth Diversion committee will be the mechanism the district and community groups will use to discuss ongoing restorative initiatives and identify strengths and opportunities for improvement as they occur. The district is very responsive to the assurance that restorative practices are implemented throughout the district with attention to quality, consistency, and fidelity to core principles and subject to routine evaluation of effectiveness. The district will be publishing a monthly newsletter called the Restorative Times which will feature the restorative work that is going on in each of the buildings.

### October Quote

**Accountability is understanding the harm you have caused and doing something to make it right.**

**-Howard Zehr**

## Restorative Questions

There are many ways to bring the principles of restorative practices into the classroom. Cordula Kennell, English teacher at Avon High School has been doing it for years. She presents her methods of using circles and restorative practices in her classroom through the Academic Circle Training that she developed and offers each summer at PiRI.

I recently read about another English teacher in Canaan New Hampshire who attended a training on Restorative Practices from IIRP and has been very impressed with how her students responded to using the Restorative Questions to address their own behavior and to analyze classroom material. (*Teaching literature using Restorative Questions*, by Laura Mirsky Restorative Works, 9/30/15)

If you would like to read her story, you can find it using this link:  
[http://restorativeworks.net/2015/09/teaching-literature-using-restorative-questions/?utm\\_source=+Restorative+Works+News+-+September+2015&utm\\_campaign=Restorative+Works+News&utm\\_medium=email](http://restorativeworks.net/2015/09/teaching-literature-using-restorative-questions/?utm_source=+Restorative+Works+News+-+September+2015&utm_campaign=Restorative+Works+News&utm_medium=email)

Heidi says she was “blown away” by the discussion’s impact, remarking, “It really helped them focus on *everything they do*: to realize that they’re responsible for the choices they make and have the ability to affect another human being. It was proactive, not reactive.”

Some of our readers might remember Karissa Sauder, an intern from Eastern Mennonite University on her way to Harvard Law School. Karissa is now a Harvard graduate working as law clerk in Philadelphia.

There was a nice article on her in the Spring Summer 2015 of the Eastern Mennonite University Crossroads periodical. I thought I would share that article here for those of you who remember her.

## From Harvard Back to EMU, With Love

By Bonnie Price Lofton with Steve Shenk | July 20th, 2015 , Crossroads

As a 2014 graduate of Harvard University Law School, **Karissa Sauder '10** left a big impression on the 50 prospective honors students and their families who visited EMU one February weekend.

She jumped right into a big question on their minds: As highly accomplished high school students - with lots of choices of where to enroll in college - why should they choose EMU?

Because, she told them, if you end up at an Ivy League school for graduate studies like I did, you'll be envied by your classmates for the experiences you had at EMU.

Sauder spoke of growing up within a Mennonite school system in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and almost avoiding EMU for that reason alone: "I thought I needed to expand my horizons and get out of the Mennonite world."

Now, with the benefit of years at Harvard ("an entirely different educational experience"), she realizes that EMU did not keep her cloistered. On the contrary, it expanded her worldview, "more broadly than I could have imagined."

Sauder cited the transformative impact of her cross-cultural semester in the Middle East - "probably one of the most incredible things I'll ever do in my entire life" - and says some of her Harvard friends felt jealous of her experiences, compared to their more mundane study-abroads. She spoke of her semester at EMU's Washington Community Scholars' Center, during which she interned on Capitol Hill, accompanied a Congressional delegation to Civil Rights sites in Alabama, watched Barack Obama inaugurated as president, and studied women and third world development under an Iraqi professor.

On the main campus, Sauder was on the field hockey team, vice president of the Student Government Association, head of the student pre-law society, and both a ministry assistant and pastoral assistant. "There's an atmosphere here that's hard to explain," Sauder told the prospective honors students. "But it's really as if the entire school is permeated with a cross-cultural mindset, of thinking beyond your own narrow

surroundings to the much bigger world out there." Her experiences attracted interest at Harvard. Her professor of criminal law supported her proposal to bring lawyers doing restorative justice to campus, where they spoke to his class and did trainings with students. "People loved it.... They had never even heard of something like restorative justice, which was such a central part of my EMU experience, and they were fascinated."

Sauder followed in the footsteps of a previous student named Obama by working for the prestigious *Harvard Law Review* journal, where she was managing editor. (Obama was *Law Review* president.)



Sauder said her Harvard friends and classmates included people with undergraduate degrees from Ivy League institutions, from gigantic public schools and from other small religious schools, but her background proved to be unique.

"EMU's 'like no other' tagline is not a marketing ploy, it is very real," Sauder said. "EMU is where I learned who I want to be, and I've held onto that since my time here."

EMU offers its students "a unique perspective on the world no matter which field you ultimately enter," she said. "The world is hungry for people who come from places like this one."

Unlike most of her law school classmates, Sauder chose not to pursue a job with a large law firm. She said, "I'm still figuring out what I'd like my career to look like instead of that."

Buying time to consider her future, Sauder has opted to be a law clerk for Judge Eduardo Robreno of the U.S. District Court in Philadelphia. It's a two-year position designed for recent graduates of law school.

"Because of my time at EMU, I know what's really important to me. I know I want to do something that actually effects change in the world, and I know my quality of life is more important to me than my salary."

## Community Task Force



Members of the Community Task Force on School Climate continue to meet frequently to work on the recommendations to the Rochester City School District. In mid-September, representatives from the school district and the local community attended a one day program with Dr. Joy DeGruy, author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, focused on supporting the district and the Rochester community as we transform our schools.

The revisions to the Code of Conduct bring a much more restorative approach to relationships and interactions between students and adults and replace the zero tolerance focus of the past. There is a strong emphasis on using alternative ways to manage student behavior and the need to talk with students to develop a resolution to problem situations. There is an emphasis on using suspensions and expulsions as a last resort and prohibition against using them at all for minor offenses.

Specific near-term recommendations to improve school climate encompass six areas:

- *Suspensions and restorative practices.* The Task Force calls for the introduction in all schools of restorative practices which promote positive behavior and teach methods for resolving conflict peacefully. School suspensions, expulsions or arrests should be used only as a last resort and suspensions should never be used to punish violations of dress codes or cell-phone rules.
- *Resources for Supportive Alternatives.* The Task Force recommends the creation of a “student help zone” in K-8 schools where a staff member would be available to provide support or help a student cool off when needed to avoid a behavioral incident in the classroom.
- *Dialog regarding suspensions.* This recommendation is aimed at having an emphasis on fairness in communication. When students are suspended, they should have the opportunity to talk with adults in school about what happened before the suspension and then again before re-entering the classroom.
- *Professional Development in Anti-Racism.* The Task Force calls for mandatory anti-racism professional development for district leadership, and staff. Comprehensive knowledge development and strategies to mitigate the impact of racism in the school district should begin with professional learning by the School Board, the Superintendent and his Cabinet. The Task Force has also recommended that the District work with teachers to create a more culturally informed curriculum.
- *Student life.* The Task Force recommends the exploration and development of an office of student life aimed at focusing on student engagement, student voice, and quality of student life.
- *Parent engagement.* The Task Force calls for a comprehensive approach to engaging parents that would bring together the school-based employees who work with families in a unified structure with the district-level parent engagement office. Additional recommendations include a guidebook for students and parents written with their input.

We'll keep you posted as the work of the Community Task Force moves forward.

### Take Action

You can support Partners in Restorative Initiatives in working toward a restorative community with your donation. Please see our website to donate via Pay Pal, or send directly to our address, or contribute through United Way.



**LIVE UNITED** 

PiRI Designation Number  
2486

## October and Looking forward...

- October 7, 8 & 9 3 Day Peace Circle Training for NE NW School Douglas Campus
- October 9 One Day Peace Circle training at Webster Schroeder High School
- October 20-22 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Restorative Practice Pilot schools
- October 26-28 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Social Workers and Counselors
- October 30 and November 6 Peace Circle training for RCSD
- November 3-5 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Restorative Practice Pilot schools
- November 9-10 & 12 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Social Workers, Counselors and Psychologist
- November 13 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants
- November 16 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants
- November 18 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants
- November 20 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants
- November 23 Follow up training workshop for participants from October 20-22 training
- December 1-3 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Social Workers and Counselors
- December 4 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants
- December 7-9 3 Day Peace Circle training for RCSD Social Workers and Counselors
- December 14 Follow up training workshop for participants from November 3-5 training
- December 16 1 Day Intro to Peace Circles - registration open to a limited number of non RCSD participants

.....

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YESTERDAY! I WENT INTO IT (PEACE CIRCLE TRAINING) THINKING IT WOULDN'T BE FOR ME, AND I ENDED UP LOVING THE IDEA SO MUCH THAT I'VE ALREADY SCHEDULED TO START CIRCLES WITH MY FIFTH GRADE TEAM NEXT WEEK.

THANKS AGAIN!

- Greece Odyssey Academy  
Introduction to Peace Circle Training  
participant

*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 speak and  
for others to listen.

Administrator: Michelle Woodworth

Contributing Writers & Editor:  
Kathy Sweetland, Ed Minardo and Jeanne Carlivati

Send mailing updates, corrections and submissions to:  
PiRI,  
111 Hillside Avenue,  
Rochester, NY 14610  
Archives at [www.pirochester.org](http://www.pirochester.org)

## **talking piece**

To remove your name from our mailing list, please email [office@pirochester.org](mailto:office@pirochester.org)  
111 Hillside Ave, Rochester New York 14610