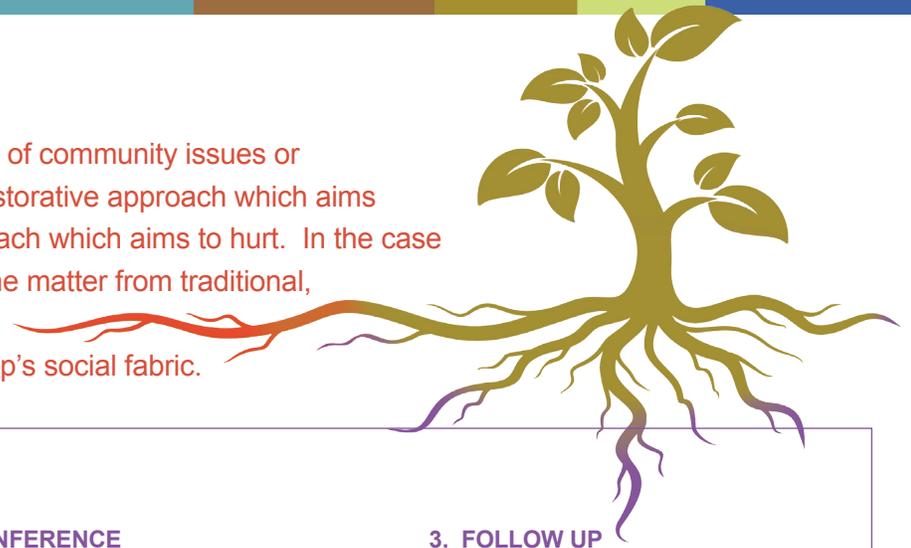




The Conferencing Program

Conferencing is a process that gets to the root of community issues or personal misbehavior. The process uses a restorative approach which aims to heal and repair rather than a punitive approach which aims to hurt. In the case of misbehavior, conferencing works to divert the matter from traditional, legal or legalistic discipline systems which are not designed to restore the community or group's social fabric.



Conferencing Process

1. PRECONFERENCE

In this phase the Facilitator gathers information to understand the context of the misbehavior or problem. This includes discussions with the affected parties, victims and offenders when there are such, families, community leaders and so on.

2. CONFERENCE

The Conference is a meeting where the group discusses what created the context of the problem and how it affected everyone involved. The goal is to reach a written agreement that holds the responsible parties accountable for how the harm will be repaired.

3. FOLLOW UP

The Facilitator checks up on the specific action steps that should be taking place to ensure the agreement is completed.

What Facilitators Do

Conference Facilitators get to the root of the problem by focusing on these essential questions:

How did we get here?

How can we avoid being here again?

(In the case of a community problem) What do we want?

As Facilitators pre-conference, they teach the Restorative tools to all potential participants. Conference meetings are made safe, honest and productive when everyone sticks to the circle protocol, asks clarifying questions, and speaks only from the "I."

The result of a successful conference is a written agreement negotiated by all parties, but most importantly by the needs and desires of the victims whenever there are victims. If the Facilitator and the group identify conditions that contribute to the problem, various people might agree to action steps of their own.

When the agreement and follow-up is complete, the Facilitator either closes the case as successful or passes the matter on to more traditional means such as the police, Courts, or DCYF.

Why Conference?

In schools the criteria for conferencing include chronic and emergent issues:

Chronic

- Chronic Absenteeism
- Chronic Disruption

Emergent

- Alarm Pulls
- Assaults
- AWOL
- Bullying
- Cyber bullying
- Drugs, under the influence
- Drugs, possession
- Drugs, distribution
- Fights
- Property Damage
- Plagiarism/Cheating
- Sexually Inappropriate
- Theft

Research

The Youth Restoration Project and Central Falls School District received a \$3.68 million Safety in Schools grant from the National Institute of Justice to fund and research the conferencing in five schools. Two-thirds of the money is dedicated to conferencing and supporting the efforts of the school communities to infuse Restorative Practices in their systems. The other third goes to researching the effectiveness of conferencing. All data collected observe a strict protocol approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), HIPPA and FERPA. The data are stripped of any personal identification to preserve the confidentiality of the individuals, before it is given to the Urban Institute, the grant's research partner.

