

HEALING AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: APPLYING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROCESSES IN THE WORKPLACE

*Kay Pranis****

“The more we didn’t care about them (inmates), the more we didn’t care about each other.”

- Corrections Officer, Minnesota Department of Corrections

INTRODUCTION

Efforts to implement restorative justice in the criminal justice system are often undermined by workplace cultures that are not based on restorative justice values and principles (Wonshe, 2004). Implementing a fully restorative approach to crime requires the cooperation and commitment of those working in the criminal justice system. However, people working in the criminal justice system often feel victimized or unfairly treated as employees. When staff are asked to treat victims and offenders with respect and dignity and are asked to allow them a voice, staff often become more acutely aware of the lack of dignity and respect and lack of voice they experience in the workplace. Until workplace cultures are brought more into alignment with restorative values it will be difficult to sustain restorative practices with victims and offenders.

This essay will describe efforts to apply the principles and processes of restorative justice to the criminal justice system in prison as a workplace. The initiative began as a pilot project in one facility when prison staff recognized that they could not effectively work with inmates in a restorative way until they changed their relationships

* Kay Pranis, the former Restorative Justice Planner for the Minnesota Department of Corrections, has worked in restorative justice since 1988. Kay focuses on promoting the use of restorative justice principles in the criminal justice system and communities by providing training and technical assistance to courts, correctional facilities, schools, and community groups. She has spoken extensively in the United States and Canada, has received numerous awards for her efforts, and has published thirty-seven articles and essays on restorative justice. This speech is submitted in connection with the Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution’s 2006 Symposium titled: Restorative Justice: Choosing Restoration Over Retribution.

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with one another. Based on the positive experience of the pilot project the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MN DOC) has now expanded the availability of restorative processes for staff conflict and unhealthy workplace units to all prison facilities. This model has potential applications in all kinds of workplaces.

MY LENS

Quantum physics tells us that the observer always impacts what is being observed. Consequently, there is no “objective” point of view. I believe that a writer's point of view matters, so I will share here some of the elements of the lens that shapes my point of view. I came to the work I do in a non-traditional route. I am not a lawyer. I am not a researcher. I am not an academic. I am not formally trained in the criminal justice system. I am a citizen who became deeply involved in the criminal justice system through restorative justice. Because of my work in peacemaking circles, my perspective has been greatly influenced by indigenous people of North America who emphasize the interconnectedness of all things - whatever I do is in the context of relationships with all aspects of life, past and present. My intention is to share my experience in a good way to be of service to the greater good. However, one of the most important things I’ve learned in this work is how little I know and how little I can see. I offer this reflection with the understanding that it may look very different from another point of view.

WALKING WOUNDED

I will begin with a story:

Five years ago while working for the Minnesota Department of Corrections as the Restorative Justice Planner I was asked to provide a training in the “peacemaking circle process” for a group of staff at Minnesota Correctional Facility Moose Lake (“MCF Moose Lake”) - a prison located in a rural community two hours north of Minneapolis. This training was for a group of prison staff who had volunteered to be part of an initiative to apply restorative processes to staff conflict in the prison. A core group of about fifteen mid-level and front line staff had already participated in nine days of foundation training about conflict and conflict resolution. They had also designed the broader implementation of this initiative - Conflict Resolution Initiative - within their prison. The peacemaking circle process was one of several processes being made available to staff to help resolve difficulties in the workplace.

I was familiar with the broader project and knew that the participants coming to the training had all volunteered to be facilitators of the peacemaking circle process for fellow employees. I was very excited about the project but also somewhat skeptical about corrections officers (“Cos”). I did not have much sympathy for corrections officers in adult institutions. I had heard too many stories of abuse and mistreatment of inmates and my experience was that corrections officers in adult institutions were not generally there to help inmates - unlike my experience with staff in juvenile institutions.

The training lasted four days and was very intense. It provided an opportunity for everyone in the training to talk about what really matters to them or their struggles. There were eight corrections officers in the group of twenty-two participants. By the end of the first day I was overwhelmed by the pain and anger they expressed. They hated their jobs. They hated the Department of Corrections. They dreaded going to work every day. They counted the days to retirement from their early thirties.

They also felt completely trapped. There was no other job in that rural community that would allow them to keep their house and their truck. They told me that their anger and frustration had nothing to do with the inmates - it was about the structure and climate of the workplace. I was quite stunned. I loved my job. I loved the Department of Corrections because it gave me my job and allowed me to do it. And I was proud of the MN DOC as one of the best corrections departments in the country. It was painful to hear how much they hated the organization.

All the staff described a frustrating and unhealthy workplace, but the corrections officers were the most intense in their expression of pain. They were also very skeptical about whether it could ever be any different. They were afraid to hope it could be different because that might set them up to be disappointed again.

One CO in particular was very angry and expressed enormous doubt that anything could change - but, at the same time, he was there in a voluntary process. I learned later that he was considered a problem employee - constantly raising union issues and difficult to work with. The prison administration originally wanted to block him from attending the training “because he’s not the kind of person you want involved in CRI [Conflict Resolution Initiative].” However, the Conflict Resolution Initiative was committed to a philosophy of inclusion - no one who wanted to be part would be turned away. So, he was allowed to come to the training - though the CRI organizers also had doubts about his appropriateness.

Throughout the training he would engage the organizers - often saying, “Yes, I see where this makes sense, but it would never

work here.” On the third day of the training an issue arose between him and the administration which triggered intense and volatile anger. He came later that morning to tell us he couldn't stay for the training - he was too upset. We convinced him to stay for the opening round. The group then spent time helping him process his current situation and think about better ways to approach it than the usual union grievance. Because we spent a lot of time at the beginning of the training talking about which values should guide our behavior during conflict, the officer was able to react differently than he would have earlier. He chose to stay with us for that day. The next day, the final day of training, he told us about an interaction he had earlier that morning with the watch commander - someone he did not like. In their exchange the watch commander originally acted in his usual hostile pattern but then shifted because the CO was acting differently. They had a discussion and parted with respect. Later that day the CO was called to the warden's office and the decision that had caused him so much anger and grief was reversed. The warden said, “I made a mistake.”

The training did not cause the warden to consider changing her decision. Nevertheless, the training had changed the CO's responses so that he did not escalate the situation, which would have made it difficult for the warden to change her mind. The experience of a very different outcome than he had experienced in the past reinforced his commitment to changing his reactions. The training transformed him. Early in the training he had said to a young participant interning at the prison that he wished he still had her innocence, “But you can never get that back.” On the last day of the training he said, “I was wrong. You can get your innocence back.”

His attitude at the prison changed dramatically. Where formerly he was a negative force in the environment, he is now a positive force. When his temper flares he has learned to pause and look for a better way to deal with the problem, and his voice has great weight among his peers. My belief is that he was desperately trying to stay alive in a deadening environment. He said on several occasions during the training, “I promised myself I would never shut down.” To stay alive he became very angry - and hurtful.

My experience with this corrections officer was the most dramatic and his turnaround was the most visible, but his story is not unique. It is echoed among all the corrections officers I have had in trainings since.

That training was a very powerful experience for me. I came away from that training saying, “It's another set of walking wounded.” I never expected to see corrections officers that way. I also came away thinking, “If we create healing spaces for front line workers, we

will not have to teach them about restorative justice. They will just be decent because that is how they are treated.”

IMPACT OF THE PRISON WORKPLACE CULTURE ON STAFF

I think it is important to put this in perspective. As prisons go, Minnesota runs a good prison system for both staff and inmates. I knew several of the administrators of Moose Lake; they were neither cruel nor insensitive people. However, the institution they ran left many staff feeling helpless, frustrated and angry. I believe the dysfunction is in the structure and workplace culture, not the staff or administration. And, as in culture generally, it is self-replicating unless deliberate interventions are undertaken to change the culture.

There are two levels of harm and victimization related to workplace culture occurring to staff in prison. The first is systemic and produces the culture. The language I hear from staff in trainings is the language of victimization - feeling helpless, powerless, never listened to. Prison culture undermines the natural protections of relationships which might otherwise mitigate the feelings of victimization. Instructors in the MN DOC Academy teach prison staff to distrust one another as well as the inmates. They are told that the only safe topics of conversation with staff as well as inmates are sports and weather. They are taught multiple dimensions of fear - fear of inmates, fear of one another, fear of making a mistake, fear of appearing to make a mistake. That fear operates from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy. No matter how high they get in the organization, the staff works in fear that something might go wrong because severe punishment will follow. Staff are taught to suppress their feelings - to “suck it up.” In an environment of helplessness, fear, anger and suppressed feelings, people frequently turn on each other creating the second level of victimization. Ridicule, hurtful humor and gossip directed toward peers become outlets for the fear and pain induced by the unhealthy systemic culture. Staff feel victimized by one another as well as by the structure of the organization. Those personal hurts are a product of the culture and at the same time they reinforce the culture of isolation and fear. This cycle of being hurt by the structure and acting out toward others is the common environment in the prison workplace. Not every person who works in prison gets caught in that cycle, but many do.

COMMITMENT TO CHANGING THE WORKPLACE CULTURE

A small group of staff learned about restorative justice and began conversations about applications with inmates. Very quickly,

however, the conversations turned to conflict among staff and the unhealthy work environment. They decided that they could not do restorative justice with inmates or bring the community into the institution until they did some work with themselves. They began to think about how the principles of restorative justice could be applied to change their workplace culture. A DOC fact sheet about the initiative explains,

[s]taff wanted another option for resolving workplace conflicts. There was a desire to develop a process that focuses on finding common ground and building relationships, rather than finding fault. Traditional options - such as filing a grievance or making a complaint that could result in an investigation - are viewed as valid processes, but they do not meet everyone's needs. Any alternative process must be inclusive and empowering. It should provide individuals with the capability to appropriately respond to workplace conflicts. Sustained improvement to the workplace culture is also a desired outcome. (DOC, 2003)

Restorative justice became the framework for creating new ways to address conflict and harm among staff. They found the following principles of restorative justice (Zehr, 2002; Pranis, 2007) to be supportive of their goals for change in the workplace culture:

- All humans have value and deserve to be treated with respect.
- We are all interconnected and therefore our fates are intertwined.
- We are mutually accountable and responsible to one another.
- The response to harm should focus on healing.
- Healing when you have caused harm requires acknowledging the harm and the choice of that action and then making amends.
- Making things right requires understanding what those who have been victimized feel and what they need.
- Those closest to the event/situation know most about what is needed and what can be done to make it right.

The following needs and interests of victims identified by restorative justice (Mackey, 1990) were a helpful framework for addressing the widespread sense of victimization among staff:

- Need to be heard
- Sense of control/choice/personal power
- Acknowledgement of pain and suffering
- Safety
- Changes to ensure it won't happen again or at least to reduce the likelihood
- Reconnection to the community

The values all applied and the needs of victims made sense in the context of the workplace. The philosophy of restorative justice seemed a good fit for what the group wanted to achieve. The group decided that the availability of restorative processes to work through experiences of conflict or perceived harm had the potential to transform the culture of the prison as a workplace.

CRI STRUCTURE

Within CRI, three face-to-face processes are available for staff who desire an alternative to a grievance or formal complaint leading to an investigation. These processes are modeled on the most common restorative justice processes for face-to-face dialog. Those are:

- One to one facilitation - basically a mediation process that is strongly transformative in nature, not transactional (Baruch Bush and Folger, 1994).
- Workplace conferencing - adapted from the family group conferencing model introduced in the U.S. by Australian Terry O'Connell in 1995.
- Workplace circle - adapted from peacemaking circles introduced initially as sentencing circles in the U.S. in 1996.

These processes are facilitated by peers who have volunteered to provide this service. Facilitators are trained and work in pairs. Participation is always voluntary and the choice of facilitators is a consensus decision among those who will participate in the process. Anyone may request a process.

Contact is made with the facility CRI coordinator. The requestor fills out a form identifying the reason for the process, the names of people who need to be involved, the type of process requested, and the names of facilitators. All information is confidential unless it reveals a violation of core safety requirements or is a violation of legal constraints such as sexual harassment.

The CRI effort began at Moose Lake prison and grew very slowly at first. MCF Moose Lake has 362 staff responsible for the custody and care of 1000 adult male offenders in a medium-custody setting. Most staff initially were wary and often dismissive about these processes, characterizing them as “touchy-feely.” A few opportunities arose where people were willing to take risks or were at their “wits’ end” trying to make something better. The Health Services Unit had very serious problems between the supervisor and staff. The staff requested the circle process. The staff met once a month in circle for several times without the supervisor. At that point they decided that they could not make further progress without direct dialog with their supervisor so she joined the circle. They successfully worked through the issues and by the end of that year the unit had experienced a complete turnaround in the workplace climate.

Though specific information from circles was not shared, staff throughout the prison began to see new attitudes or hear expressions of satisfaction from those who participated in processes. Consequently, acceptance of CRI grew. Still, it was uncommon for corrections officers to request or participate in processes. Then an issue arose which affected corrections officers. There was intense conflict among corrections officers about the way that mopheads were left from one shift to another. Numerous complaints had come to one particular supervisor. At some point he became frustrated with the constant complaints and requested a circle to deal with the issue. All those named as involved in the issue were corrections officers. To the surprise of the coordinator they all agreed to participate when they were contacted - including one corrections officer who had regularly teased the coordinator claiming, “You’ll never catch me in one of those.”

When the group met in circle they spent one round talking about the mopheads. The dialog then moved to an incident that occurred between two of the officers. The remainder of the time was spent working through the impact of that incident and issues of how they treat each other. The circle

ended without returning to the issue of the mopheads and consequently without resolving the mophead issue. The following morning the mophead issue came up again and two people got together and worked it out. As is often the case, the disputed issue was not the most critical issue. When their relationships were in order they could take care of the mophead conflict. In the paradoxical nature of this work, they needed the circle to get their relationships in order - but they needed the mophead issue to get into a circle. It is very unlikely that they would have come to a circle to discuss their relationships. The officer who had told the coordinator, "You'll never catch me in one of those" later declared, "We should have been doing this years ago, and you can use my name."

After five years the use of CRI processes appears to be normalized in the institution. It is no longer considered weird to request or participate in a CRI process. When asked about the situation at Moose Lake after four years under the CRI regime, some replies from the staff included:

- "It's making whole workplace better ... don't think twice about asking hard questions ... people involved, talking to each other, lines of communication open to executive team ..."
- "It feels different ... walk through these doors today - it is markedly different than 5 years ago ... it was a far darker place before ..."
- "Just the atmosphere - I can just feel it - atmosphere of team work that just continues to grow ... I've worked a lot of different places. I'm amazed at how well things run here. I think it's related to the willingness to sit together and talk about things. We are willing to make admissions of something wrong and grow from them."
- "Sure is a night and day difference between Moose Lake and the other facility where I worked. People here are kind, there is communication, they want to talk - also, they get the job done ... The atmosphere here resulted in not taking a major, major pay raise in the Twin Cities. I'm not going to give up that atmosphere."
- "I've seen those seasoned in CRI more comfortable raising uncomfortable issues."

- “On the night shift we are a totally different creature - isolated - slower to come around. I'm noticing there is a sway. I'm seeing less negative reaction to the concept of sitting down and talking things out. Eight years ago people tried to engage the whole facility in their issues. Now people are more willing to deal with it at the lowest level. It's often done on the phone. I see it affecting the entire institution.”
- “It's a different beast than what it was five or six years ago... This feels lots better than what it did.”

For the first few years the CRI effort was localized to the Moose Lake facility. I considered it extremely fragile - an empowering process that allows everyone voice and honors each person as an equal in the process operating within an extremely hierarchal environment is a delicate dance. There were lots of bumps to work through. That facility had an exceptional warden who was willing to take those risks and staff willing to put in the extra work and passion required for a start-up initiative.

In 2004 the CRI process was introduced to all the other MN DOC correctional facilities. Each prison was encouraged to create a steering committee to replicate the work at Moose Lake. Over the next two years each institution established a steering committee, trained facilitators and has begun offering CRI processes to staff. An officer at one of the other prisons says about CRI, “I see it getting better for the first time in twenty-three years.”

The initiative has evolved over time. CRI which originally meant Conflict Resolution Initiative now means Conflict Response Initiative and is part of a larger scheme called the Integrated Conflict Management System ("ICMS"). The mission of the ICMS is to promote a culture of conflict competency and provide quality conflict response options for all staff. The larger scheme includes weaving conflict competency into all aspects of organizational management - including job descriptions, hiring, supervision and training. ICMS assumes that conflict is not just the result of individual behavior but is also influenced by institutional structures - developing conflict competency in staff depends upon supporting conflict competency through all organizational policies.

IMPACT BEYOND THE WORKPLACE

The impact of the CRI work has trickled out into the homes of prison staff. Laraine Lekander, who coordinated the department wide implementation of CRI said, "Wherever I go, I find that this goes home with people. Participants describe responding differently, and more constructively, with their families in moments of anger or frustration." In my trainings it is not uncommon for a corrections officer to say, "This will help me personally." In one situation, a participant said, "If not for the skills I learned at CRI my child, who was hell-bent on destruction, would not be part of my family."

The home environment and the work environment are inextricably intertwined. We cannot leave home at home and work at work and remain fully integrated individuals. In order to have healthy homes, we need to have healthy workplaces.

CHALLENGES

The first challenge in offering a vision of a positive work climate in a prison is the cynicism of staff who have given up and are resigned to things as they are. They are often reluctant to hope that it can be better, because to hope is to set yourself up for possible disappointment. Undertaking this kind of change requires risk-taking and a lot of extra work beyond regular job functions. The energy to take risks and work harder comes from hope. A small group of committed people had to foster hope in each other in the face of widespread cynicism around them. The presence of an outside consultant who was not conditioned by the prison environment played an important role in nurturing hope among the core group through the early, uncertain stages of the initiative.

Time and scheduling became a major challenge once actual processes started. Many of the conflicts that come to CRI involve more than two people, often whole units. Coordinating schedules of multiple parties is complicated. In a twenty-four-hour-a-day custody operation that is minimally staffed because of budget cuts, it is extremely difficult to free up corrections officers to participate in the process as facilitators or as affected staff. MCF Moose Lake administration made the commitment to support CRI by providing overtime for a CRI process. Even with that support the CRI coordinator says that the biggest frustration with CRI is the time it takes between the request for a process and the actual process beginning.

The initiative started with passion and energy among a core group of people who became close to one another during the intense trainings and were instilled with a powerful sense of mission. There was a great upsurge of energy, hope and confidence among this small group. Inevitably conflict arose among those pioneers which, at points, threatened to tear the group apart. "Walking the talk" of the values of restorative justice as practitioners is difficult (Dyck, 2004). On several occasions they turned to outside help to facilitate their internal process and help them repair relationships. They had to apply all they learned about responding to conflict within the group and they found themselves unable to do that at times. The initiative survived, but not all the harm done to the relationship was able to be repaired.

A pervasive and ongoing challenge is the fear-based culture of the Department of Corrections. It is perceived by staff as an unforgiving climate regarding error. Staff are extremely fearful of punishment if something goes wrong, and retaliation if they say something that someone with power does not like. The level of this fear surprised me because it is a union environment where most workers are protected in terms of job retention. But a sense of victimization often undermines a rational analysis of power and there are ways to make the job difficult even when you cannot terminate someone. This fear has impact on two levels, for facilitators and for participants in a process. In one circle facilitator training staff were preoccupied with the question of whether they could be punished if something went wrong in a process despite their best efforts and intentions. They were stepping forward to volunteer time and energy on behalf of the workplace, and yet feared it was very possible that it could result in messing up their career if they did not always get it perfect. Many staff are wary about participating in a process if a supervisor will also be in that process. Frankness is not characteristic within fear-based, hierarchal structures. Yet, these restorative processes depend upon truth-telling to get to constructive resolutions. Breaking through this fear requires patience and persistence and some specific policy. First, confidentiality is a protection. No information learned in a process can be used for discipline unless it meets one of the special criteria mentioned earlier - impact on institution safety or legal issues. Second, facilitators cannot be asked by supervisors or administration to share any information from a process. The organizers at Moose Lake also discovered that training for supervisors was critical to clarify

that within a process, supervisors have no authority over anyone; they have the same voice as anyone else in the process. Management commitment to honoring these principles is essential to safety in the process. Ultimately, the goal of CRI is to transform the fear-based culture; but the processes must to start where the organization is.

Within the restorative justice movement, generally, there is great concern about the challenge of staying true to the vision (Zehr and Toews, 2004). This concern is multiplied many times in a prison environment. The non-restorative habits of hierarchies are very strong. Voluntariness, empowerment, recognition and equal voice are not norms in a hierarchy. Habits operate without conscious choice. Everything about an application of restorative principles in a prison environment needs to be conscious and intentional. It requires close attention to how the individual processes are conducted and close attention to how the larger goals of the initiative are served. It takes a lot of energy to maintain that kind of vigilance. If too narrowly focused, CRI could become conflict resolution of individual incidents without transforming the culture. The philosophy and values need to be constantly reinforced and held in balance with work on technique. Accountability for the quality of the workplace climate has to work in all directions - supervisee to supervisor, supervisor to supervisee, colleague to colleague.

SURPRISES AND LESSONS

There were many surprises along the path of this effort. An early and ongoing one was the depth of the pain and anger expressed by corrections officers. Because the prison environment discourages expression of feelings, particularly feelings associated with pain, hurt or vulnerability, those feelings are normally masked. Circle trainings created safe space for the expression of those feelings, and they poured out.

At times, we were surprised by how quickly serious conflict was resolved, resulting in rapid improvement in the work environment. One of the early experiences using the circle process to address workplace conflict occurred at Thistledeew, a MN DOC wilderness program for juveniles in northern Minnesota. In 2001 a state workers' strike caused havoc in relationships among workers at that program. People who had eaten lunch together for twenty years were not speaking to one another when workers returned after the strike.

It was not possible for the facility to serve juveniles properly with the level of hostility that existed among staff after the strike. The facility administrators decided to use the circle process to work through the issues. Nearly all the staff, about fifty people, gathered for a four hour session one afternoon and then gathered again a week later for a day long session. In the initial planning, the facilitators assumed they would need to continue the process over a several month period, but that turned out to be unnecessary. After the two sessions staff were ready to go back to work together on behalf of the young people they served.

Remarkably, confidentiality in these restorative workplace processes has largely been honored - in an environment where little seems to remain confidential. Staff were initially skeptical about confidentiality because they have so much experience with lack of confidentiality. One of the most common procedures used in the prisons to deal with problems is the much-feared and loathed "investigation." Investigations are always by policy strictly confidential, but in reality are widely known. The experience so far indicates that staff honor the confidentiality of the CRI processes much more than investigations. A recent group of circle trainees suggested the following reasons why confidentiality would be more honored in a circle process than in an investigation:

- Being ordered to keep information confidential versus voluntarily committing to keeping it confidential
- Direct face-to-face relationship in a circle - the commitment is made directly to others
- Values emphasis in the circle process
- Personal responsibility engaged by circle process
- Personal connections made in the circle
- Less threatening outcomes from a circle
- Strength in numbers in a circle
- Ownership - personal power - having voice in a circle

One of the most encouraging lessons learned in this work is that under the right circumstances, employees will step up and take on additional responsibility even in a context of increasingly heavy workloads. Throughout the years that the CRI effort was growing at MCF Moose Lake prison, budgets were being cut. Year after year there were more cuts resulting in significantly fewer staff and more work for the remaining staff. In spite of

those pressures, the core group voluntarily took on more work because they believed it was possible to create a better workplace. That willingness to take on extra work has also been evident in the other facilities as the CRI effort has expanded to all MN DOC prisons.

Based on the vision and wisdom of Maria Cuzzo, the outside consultant working with the core group, that group had substantial training (nine days) before beginning to implement the conflict resolution processes for staff. This training focused on building a strong foundation of understanding of conflict and responses to conflict. Significant time was spent in that training helping the core group work through assumptions and frameworks that would block success of the initiative. The shift from the usual prison culture to a restorative-values based culture is so great that deep foundation work is necessary to support that cultural transformation.

Ownership by all levels of staff strengthened the initiative. By good fortune the Conflict Resolution Initiative started among mid level and front line staff. It did not begin with the Moose Lake administration or with the Central Office. This was a very important component of the success of the initiative in the early stages. However, its long term success depended on the support of Terry Carlson, the warden at Moose Lake. She understood the philosophy and she made space for their efforts without directing them or taking ownership away from the staff. The core group was deliberate in encouraging involvement by staff from all aspects of the prison operation - including all shifts.

And finally we have learned that these processes - often dismissed as “touchy-feely” - can work in a prison workplace environment.

CLOSING

Throughout this journey, the guiding principles and understandings of restorative justice have been the roadmap. Inclusion, respect, shared leadership and continual learning have characterized this experience. The restorative justice framework has proven to be an extremely effective template for changing workplace culture. And the processes used in restorative work were easily adapted to the workplace context.

One of the original pioneers of CRI says, “The original goal [for MCF Moose Lake] was to become the restorative justice facility in the department. We went down a different

path - working with the staff first. Now, we have come full circle. The administration is now interested in the victim/offender/community stuff.”

Last May, a group of staff who were trained to facilitate circles for staff conflict became involved in a project to use circles with inmates and families in preparation for returning to the community. And so the work begun with staff - to improve workplace climate and staff relationships - now benefits the inmates of the facility.

I began with a reference to interconnectedness and suggested later that one of the value statements of restorative justice asserts: We are all interconnected and therefore our fates are intertwined. I return now to the opening quote from a staff member at one of the prisons, “The more we didn’t care about them (inmates), the more we didn't care about each other.” This corrections officer’s observation suggests that good relationships among staff were connected to good relationships with inmates. Our interconnectedness means that what happens to others matters to our well being. We ignore the well being of others at our own peril. This restorative approach to staff relationships provides a way to work with that interconnectedness on all levels.

It is radical work that these folks are doing on a daily basis - infusing a fear-based, authoritarian, rigid structure with a process that honors each individual, assumes that everyone involved has wisdom, respects all voices, allows for full expression of feelings, recognizes the importance of relationships and provides opportunity for growth out of mistakes or conflict. Having hope and compassion in the environment of the prison workplace takes courage and strength. I wish to honor the heroes of this work - mid-level and front line staff who decided they could make a difference and who were willing to brave the ridicule of colleagues to open doors to a new way to relate with each other. If they can do this in a prison, I think each of us can do it in the places we work and in our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this story with you.

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