

RESTITUTION IMPLEMENTED IN SAANICH S.D. #63

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In September 2002, a pilot project to implement Restitution in a Saanich Middle School finally began. After months of planning, Community Support Volunteers were overjoyed to hear this enthusiastic response by one of their first referred students: “Wow! This Restitution is a lot better than punishment!”

The movement away from the traditional use of punishment to a more restorative approach did not occur overnight, and is in fact still in the beginning stages. But the grassroots movement to reform the way we view and practice behaviour management in our schools has begun. As Cameron and Thorsborne suggest in their guidelines, this “grassroots reform... require(s) some visionary leadership from a principal or energetic other who has influence in the school community”¹, and the Saanich community has visionary leadership and energetic others in spades! From the School Board Chair, to the teachers, from the Police Chief to the dedicated community justice volunteers, there have been many enthusiastic participants in the process.

1. History of the partnership between Saanich S.D. # 63 and Peninsula Cross Roads Community Justice Program

Saanich School District #63 (S.D. #63) stretches in rural-urban bands the length of the Saanich Peninsula (20 km/50,000 population), and includes the Town of Sidney, two rural municipalities and a corner of a fourth, all part of the Region of Greater Victoria. The School District serves members of four First Nations reserves, three large middle schools, thirteen elementary, three secondary, and two Storefront schools.

In 1999, communities on the Saanich Peninsula saw the beginning of an important shift toward implementing restorative justice in the schools. Citizens in the neighbourhood of Bayside Middle School met together to set up a community justice program, with the support of the Principal and a school counselor. Principal Hunter (who was also mayor of the Central Saanich municipality, and Chair of the police board at the time) was open to more community involvement, including mentoring, at the school.

Members of the newly formed Peninsula Cross Roads Community Justice Program (PCRCJP) and S.D. #63 personnel held the first of several public forums at Bayside Middle School. A panel of speakers included members of other Vancouver Island community justice programs and the local Police Chief, who had arrived recently from Alberta with experience in and commitment to community based justice. A Crown Counsel spoke about moving away from punishment towards a process that restores harmony in the community; the School District representative pledged support of restorative programs in the schools

¹ Cameron, L. and Thorsborne, M., “Restorative Justice and School Discipline: Mutually Exclusive?”, In: Strang, H., Braithwaite, J., eds. *Restorative Justice and Civil Society*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.189.

In the following months, the partnership between Saanich School District and PCRCJP continued to develop. Peninsula News Review editor, Judy Reimche, an experienced community justice volunteer, lent excellent support to Public Forums at Bayside School. In April 2000, the school district presented a forum, “School Communities Adopt Restorative Justice”. Etta Connor, PCRCJP volunteer leader, noted that the District invited representatives from Arrowsmith (Parksville Qualicum) to hear firsthand how their community justice program had been developed. Their program coordinator, RCMP officer, and two school principals explained how they had gained support for Restorative Justice (RJ)² from their communities and school administration.

In November 2000, editor Reimche reported on another successful forum at Bayside which attracted over 150 people: “With the help of PCRCJP, the school district introduced some of the means to deal with conflict resolution to the audience, which included teachers, administrators and parents from the Peninsula. . . , police officers from Sidney, Central Saanich, Saanich and Victoria, native leaders, civic leaders. . . Church affiliated members, and many others.”³ Participants had a chance not only to hear how the philosophy could work, but also to take part in discussions and to role-play family group conferencing. The stage was set for grassroots reform in the school community.

2. Adoption of the Diane Gossen model of Restitution by Saanich School District

While PCRCJP volunteers were working with the RCMP and Central Saanich Police to provide a restorative process for dealing with at-risk youth, School District personnel were also moving away from traditional forms of discipline in the schools. As a parent, Saanich School Board trustee Hanne Kohout had been involved in the review of her local secondary school’s Code of Conduct, which she felt was too prescriptive. “Punishment didn’t really change behaviour to the more desired” outcome, says Kohout. “It was decided to focus on students’ rights and responsibilities, and what would be the consequences if the responsibilities weren’t met.”

Kohout, now Chair of the Saanich School Board, saw the change from punishment to restitution evolve over a few years. As well as the focus on Students and Learning, the Districts’ goals also emphasized Relationships as a priority: “Healthy school culture is enhanced by respecting roles, rights and responsibilities, effective communication, and working collaboratively”. This philosophy parallels the focus on repairing harm and strengthening relationships in the Restorative Justice approach. Indeed, the current focus in the District is on developing social responsibility.

John Martin, Student Support Services, recalls how District personnel discovered the work of Diane Gossen as they looked for alternatives to traditional behaviour management techniques. He and other personnel were working on establishing values and beliefs as a focus, and found Gossen’s approach a fit philosophically. Martin and other teachers, including Tom

² Zehr, Howard, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding*. Good Books, PA, 2002.

³ Reimche, Judy, “Nipping the problems in the bud could save ruined lives later”. Peninsula News Review, Nov. 29, 2000.

Vickers who would spearhead the program at Bayside, participated in Gossen workshops provided by the district and became certified trainers. District-wide training was provided in 2002, and training plans continue with Gossen returning in 2003.

Gossen's Restitution model, which she developed from Glasser's *Control Theory*⁴, is based on the principle of intrinsic motivation. Martin agreed with Gossen that traditional discipline focused on the misdemeanor rather than helping the child learn a better way to behave. Gossen describes Restitution as the creative part of self-discipline. Children can learn from their mistakes; rather than focus on the fault or mistake, adults can help children "make things right".

Using Gossen's approach when working with children, adults shift from a negative focus on the mistake to helping the child fix the problem. Phrases such as these are utilized:

"It's OK to make a mistake; You're not the only one;
I'm not interested in your mistake, I'm interested in what you're going to do about it."⁵

Influenced by Glaser's theory of basic human needs, Gossen helps children explore the reasons for their behaviour. They make choices throughout the day to satisfy their basic needs for survival, power, freedom, fun, or belonging. Children learn that they can choose to meet their needs negatively, in ways that can harm others; or they can meet their needs positively, without hurting others' needs, and fix their mistakes when they make them.

When students are guided through the Restitution process, they are helped to seek the value or belief that is significant to their social group, and is part of their picture of the person they want to be. Questions such as, "What is the kind of person you want to be? What do we believe?"⁶ appeal to the students' intrinsic motivation to do the right thing. For example, many incidents of harm done in the school environment may involve respect for others; school beliefs usually include Respect as an important part of relationships, and students understand the importance of "making it right" when someone has been treated disrespectfully.

Restitution, like restorative justice, creates conditions for students to fix their mistakes for themselves, and to return to the group strengthened. Adults encourage students to make their own plan for restitution, and to become self-directed learners. However, Middle School students, who may expect adults to prescribe a consequence, often need prompting to create a plan for restitution that is related to the situation, and that makes it right for both the offended and the offender. If the student is stalled, the adult can ask, "Do you need some help? Can I help you with your plan?"⁷

Students often suggest an apology, which assisting adults call "a good start". The wrongdoer needs to spend some time and energy on the restitution, according to Gossen.

⁴ Glasser, William. *Control Theory: A New Explanation of How We Control Our Lives*. New York: HarperCollins, 1984.

⁵ Gossen, Diane C., *Restitution: Restructuring School Discipline*, 2nd Revised Edition. Chapel Hill, N.C.: New View Publications, 2001, p.48.

⁶ Ibid, p. 44.

⁷ Ibid, p. 87.

“Forgiveness... can offer relief to the wronged party, but it does not set the stage for the repair of self-esteem by an act of compensation. It is all right to say you’re sorry. Now what are you going to do to fix it?”⁸

A good restitution restores relationships and offers something to the group. Assisting adults ensure that the plan is in the child’s own best interests, that it restores the dignity of the doer, and where possible, compensates the one done to. Martin, in his dialogue with students, asks, “What does that say about the person you’ve become?” The child is strengthened, having learned new skills and restored relationships.

Martin and Vickers see Restitution as an important process in the teaching of life long skills of problem solving and self-discipline. It ties in with the District’s focus on social responsibility, encouraging students to be accountable for their own behaviour, to build and sustain relationships in their school community, and to become the people they are capable of being.

3. Preparation for Middle School Start-Up

In the spring of 2001, the plan to implement a restorative approach in Saanich Middle Schools began to take shape. Community Justice advocate, Etta Connor, met with teacher-innovator Tom Vickers, who was beginning advanced studies in how the philosophy and practice of RJ can be applied in reaching key educational goals of social responsibility and leadership development.

Vickers was especially keen on helping students to develop problem solving and creative thinking skills after his own first hand experience of meting out traditional consequences left him dissatisfied. He recalls that on a busy day as Teacher-in-charge, replacing the Vice Principal, he was surprised by a young student returning a full garbage bag to the Office. Vickers had been so busy dealing with various issues that he had momentarily forgotten about that particular student, and felt that there must be more positive ways of dealing with individual students when mistakes are made. He proposed to implement change, based on Gossen’s Restitution, through a pilot project at his Middle School, using the assistance of community volunteers.

Peninsula Cross Roads Community Justice Program (PCRCJP) agreed to help recruit and train “mentors” from the community for student support. One-on-one communication with students during the lunch hour would assist staff, and give students time to sort out how to solve interpersonal and other behavioural problems.

Over the following months, recruiting began. Facilitator training⁹ was provided by Etta Connor to increase public awareness and understanding of restorative justice, and to invite participation in the school mentor program. Vickers and Connor, working with School

⁸ Ibid, pp. 45-46.

⁹ O’Connell, T., Wachtel, B., and Wachtel, T. Conferencing Handbook, A New REAL Justice Training Manual, PA : Piper’s Press, 1999.

Coordinator, Pat Macgregor, decided that training in restorative justice family group conferencing as well as Gossen's Restitution would be a prerequisite for all volunteers.

The vision and drive to realize their goal continued to inspire key participants to work steadily toward implementation. Assistant Superintendent Janis Johnson welcomed PCRCJP volunteers to meet with school principals; training of small groups of individuals in the philosophy and practices of RJ and Restitution was provided by PCRCJP and District personnel, and School Board Chair Hanne Kohout contributed to an important planning meeting held in November 2001.

Kohout, who believes that "restoring rather than punishing teaches social responsibility", had a longstanding interest in seeing mentors work with at-risk students at the middle school level. She was keen to see a continuation of the learning provided by such excellent school programs as the "Ambassador" program offered at Brentwood Elementary School.

Several important topics were discussed at this November planning meeting, including protocol for volunteers working in the school, documentation for recording each conference and resolution (i.e. Communication Sheet), procedures for introducing volunteers to parents, orientation with principal and staff, and the need to develop evaluation methods.

As well, the following criteria was established for volunteers to be selected: training in both restorative justice and restitution and the ability to apply this training, proven competence in interpersonal problem solving, commitment for one noon hour per week for the school year, and knowledge of documentation and follow-up procedures. The Coordinator's role included liaising with Administration and sponsor teacher, Vickers, ensuring that volunteers have proper training and orientation to do their job, as well as supervising and providing support/feedback to volunteers.

Early in 2002, Vickers introduced the volunteers to the administrator of the middle school where the team was eager to begin. Difficulties in the educational system in B.C., unfortunately, directly affected the initiation of the community volunteer program. Teachers were impacted by the current political situation, and the District was also in the process of changing Administration assignments. The "bad news", according to Vickers, was that the start up date would be delayed until September 2002. The "good news" was that additional training for all volunteers, as well as recruitment of new trainees, was scheduled to proceed.

Several training sessions were offered from April to September of 2002. Gossen's Restitution approach was provided by Tom Vickers, who combined teaching theory with enthusiastic descriptions of practical application in his classroom. New recruits joined the original team for five training sessions, and volunteers practiced their skills with actual role-playing middle school students just before the September start-up.

During the summer training sessions, the volunteers discussed and created their belief statement: "We believe that people are inherently good, but make mistakes. When rules are broken, we will foster the development of self-discipline and social responsibility." The title,

Community Mentors, was changed to Community Support Volunteers, as the focus would be on helping students and staff with emergent problems, rather than establishing long term relationships with individual youth. (Note: PCRCJP is developing a Mentor program that will expand the role of the restitution volunteers presently working in the middle schools.)

4. Implementation of Restitution Community Support Program

In September 2002, the Community Support Volunteers were eager to begin working with students at Bayside Middle School. A new Principal and Vice Principal joined a returning VP to welcome the 830 students, including students enrolled in French Immersion, and students from four First Nations on the Saanich Peninsula: Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Twawout, and Tseycum. Due to changes in the administration and teaching staff, it was decided to begin lunch hour sessions in late September after staff and students had “settled in”.

A well-trained but small group of three volunteers began working Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday lunch hours. The administration referred cases that had been brought to their attention by classroom teachers and duty supervisors. Although a referral form was sometimes used, the volunteers were usually given a brief introduction to the students before proceeding to nearby conferences rooms. Because the Restitution program was new to the school, team members quickly realized that they needed to give students an explanation of who they were, and the purpose of the discussion, that is: not to punish, but to find out what happened, who was affected, and how to fix the problem.

Volunteers had anticipated that, given their lunch time presence at the school, they would be dealing mainly with problems that arose outside on the playground. Although there were a few infractions of playground rules, such as going out of bounds, the majority of referrals in the first weeks were for Disruptive behaviour in the classroom and halls. While teachers dealt with classroom issues during the day, they often found they did not have time to talk with individual students when interpersonal conflicts arose. Busy staff and administrators were pleased that volunteers could take the time needed to listen to students, and to help them reflect on their behaviour.

During the first months of the program, the most common reason for referrals continued to be **Disruptive Behaviour** (ranging from running/rough horse play in classroom or halls, to continual late arrival in class). Communication sheets show the second most common reason, often cited in conjunction with other reasons, was **Aggressive Behaviour**, followed closely by **Bullying/Harassment**. (Severe cases of Bullying/Harassment were usually dealt with by the Administration, while initially Community Volunteers handled less severe cases where students could often resolve issues or misunderstandings in the informal noon hour sessions.) After the three major reasons for referral, **Uncooperative/Lack of Respect**, and **Unacceptable Language** were also noted; “**Other**” reasons included incidents on the playground.

Documentation showed that the vast majority of students referred to the Restitution team were male (77% of the first 50 cases). Grade level did not seem to be a factor, although it

appeared that incidents involving the Grade 6 students (in their first year at the school) increased as the months progressed.

After the first month of working in the school, the team met with their sponsor teacher for a “how’s it going so far” discussion. The strengths of the program noted by Administration, staff and volunteers were: time was made available to help students resolve problems; students were made accountable for their behaviour; restitution was seen as a meaningful approach to discipline. Volunteers were encouraged by the supportive atmosphere in the school (especially administration and office staff); administrators were enthusiastic about the calm support provided by the volunteers, and found the careful documentation valuable, especially when reporting to parents.

Concerns expressed by Volunteers were: the need for more trained volunteers; the need for more training re bullying and working with First Nations students; improved communications with teachers, especially feedback re program; and communications with parents. Administrators agreed that parents needed more information about the program, but otherwise expressed few concerns, and indicated an interest in having volunteers assist five days per week instead of three.

As confidence in the support provided by the community volunteers grew, they were asked by administration to facilitate conferences for more serious matters, such as **bullying**. In addition to the lunch hour Restitution sessions with students, family group conferences were held at the school with parents, students, and administration. Teachers also requested mediation with individual students, as well as conferences with larger groups of students who needed assistance working peacefully together in the classroom. The fact that the volunteers were all trained in restorative justice principles and practices, especially conference facilitation, as well as trained in Gossen’s Restitution approach, allowed them to assist the school community in a variety of ways.

One of the most experienced members of the team reported that he had been privileged to facilitate a large group conference that included First Nations elders. Volunteers expressed satisfaction at being able to use their valuable training and life experience in a variety of creative ways. The joys and rewards of working with young students at school were felt by everyone.

To augment the small team of volunteers, recruiting and training continued. Facilitator training (Real Justice) and additional training in Restitution were offered in the fall of 2002. In January 2003, four new volunteers joined the original three at Bayside, allowing more flexibility in scheduling. With the addition of more recruits, the possibility of expanding the program to a second middle school became a reachable goal.

In the spring of 2003, PCRCJP volunteers met with administrators at Royal Oak Middle School, and made plans for the start-up of a noon hour Restitution program there. Four new volunteers joined experienced team members to work two noon hours per week, thus bringing to eleven the total number of fully trained volunteers in the two Middle Schools.

5. Evaluation

After the first four months of assisting in Bayside Middle School, the community support volunteers met with their PCRCJP advisor, Connor, and sponsor teacher, Vickers, to evaluate their progress. Administrators, staff, and volunteers were asked to comment re **Strengths, Concerns, and Ways to Improve.**

Strengths: Once again, Administrators and staff had many positive comments. Volunteers were perceived as calm and supportive, demonstrating genuine concern for the school, students, and staff. Time was again an important factor, in the sense that students were given the time they deserve to resolve conflicts and to change their behaviour; Volunteers were described as good role models, well qualified to help staff and students to increase their understanding of restitution, and to assist in working toward the goal of Social Responsibility. Volunteers enjoyed working in the friendly, enthusiastic school environment, and found working with students especially rewarding.

Concerns: Administrators, staff, and volunteers had varying concerns about communication. All felt that the parents needed more information about Restitution and the volunteers who were working with their children in the school. Staff and volunteers saw the need to improve communications about issues and their resolution with the teaching staff. Volunteers felt the need for more information about students prior to their conferences, increased communication re follow up of cases with staff and administrators, and more communications with duty supervisors. Volunteers requested more training in dealing with bullying and harassment issues, as well as additional information to assist them in working effectively with First Nations students.

Ways to Improve: many ideas were generated, particularly by the Volunteers, to address the concerns mentioned. Communications were discussed, and the following improvements were planned and achieved: articles about Restitution were distributed to parents via the school newsletter, as well as printed information at Parent Advisory (PAC) meetings; a presentation was made at a PAC meeting by teacher Vickers and volunteers; and a brochure for orientation of new students and their parents was planned. In addition to the availability to teachers of documentation (i.e. Communication sheets) re conferences with students during lunch hour sessions, volunteers developed a shortened form that would alert teachers on a daily basis if their students were involved in a Restitution conference.

Volunteers attended a workshop on Bullying provided by an experienced District teacher, and joined teachers in a First Nations Education workshop at the University of Victoria.

6. Conclusion

The pilot project to introduce Restitution in Saanich S.D. #63 Middle Schools resulted from the visionary leadership and energetic commitment of many members of the community. A partnership between PCRCJP and Saanich SD#63 was the beginning of a grassroots movement away from traditional punitive methods to a restorative approach for working with youth in the schools and larger community. Volunteers dedicated to restorative justice met with enthusiastic District personnel to implement Gossen's Restitution model in two middle schools.

In September 2002, volunteers began assisting administrators at Bayside Middle School with students referred to the office. Community Support Volunteers talked with students about what happened, who was affected, and how to fix the problem. Using the methods outlined by Gossen, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, discuss more appropriate ways of meeting their needs, relate the incident to a school belief or rule, and create their own plan for "making it right". Because volunteers are trained in family group conferencing as well as Restitution methods, their skills have been utilized for a range of problems from minor classroom disruptions to more serious bullying incidents.

On-going evaluation indicates a very positive response from Administrators, teaching staff, and volunteers. Community Support Volunteers, their PCRCJP leaders, and Saanich School District personnel continue to work on improving communications within the school community, especially with parents. Public education as well as training for new recruits has continued in both Restorative Justice and Restitution, increasing the number of volunteers for school programs.

The favourable response to PCRCJP volunteers assisting in the pilot project at Bayside Middle School and an increase in volunteers has allowed the expansion of the Community Support program to a second Middle School during this first year of implementation. Future plans include providing a mentoring program for individual students, as well an additional program in the District's third Middle School.

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