

Enhancing the Capacity of the Longmont Community Justice Partnership **Prepared by Dr. Beverly Title and Chief Michael Butler**

The Vision

In an era too often marked by disregard for rules of civil conduct, imagine a place where citizens band together with a dedication to promoting standards of accountability that are based in compassion, to mend the wrong, to ease the hurt, to listen and respond to how lives have been affected by crime and wrongdoing. The Longmont Community Justice Partnership is made up of five organizations and a growing group of dedicated citizens who believe that we might, indeed, enhance our part of the world by bringing the principles of values of restorative justice deep into the fabric of our community.

We have seen restorative practices bring the deepest level of accountability to offenders, the kind where they recognize how they have hurt others around them, their families, their neighbors, their community members. This harm to others has been internalized in a way that they deeply want to repair that hurt and never again do such a thing. We have seen victims start to heal from having their stories fully heard by those who hurt them and by members of their community, by reparations being made to make right the wrongs they have suffered. We have seen community members empowered to set expectations for conduct and to help offenders appreciate how the community has been impacted by their wrongdoing. Very often, the individual members of families of offenders are in great pain for the harm they have experienced as well as the family, as an entity, is injured. Over and over again, we have seen remorse and healing replace anger and suffering.

We recognize that restorative approaches offer great benefits to our community.

- A sense of security in our town.
- A way for our children and youth to learn that there are standards of right and wrong that are expected in our community, that our community has expectations that they will treat other persons and their property with respect.
- A setting of appropriate consequences for crime and wrongdoing.
- An appreciation of each child and youth for his or her value to our future and our well-being.

Recently a group of restorative justice practitioners and other citizens gathered for a day-long retreat and developed a long-range strategic plan for using restorative justice in Longmont. This plan is being finalized and will be available in the next two months.

The Track Record

LCJP is no longer a pilot program; it has proven itself. LCJP began late in 1996 recruiting and training volunteer facilitators and conferenced one case that year. In 1997 funding was secured from the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) with 25% matching funds coming from the City of Longmont Police Department and other Boulder County law enforcement entities. The DCJ grant sunset in 2001, and the City of Longmont began contributing major funding to the program in 2002. Since LCJP began offering restorative justice services in 1996, 590 offenders, mostly juveniles, have participated in community group conferences for crimes such as theft, vandalism, assault, criminal mischief, substance possession, arson. Another 305 more have completed the Restorative Decision-making classes offered by LCJP in partnership with the Longmont Municipal Courts. An additional 42 have attended peacemaking circles with the Skyline project, a

gang prevention and intervention project with Latina students. 29 have attended Shoplifting Solutions Workshops. This totals 966 who have been impacted by restorative justice in Longmont.

Through these efforts, LCJP has developed a strong record of performance. The most recent data analysis for the conferencing program shows outcomes that speak clearly to its demonstrated strength. The overall results are based on data from 2001 to the present.

- 95% have completed their agreements to make reparations to victims and the community or their agreements are still in the process of completion.
- 94 % of those who complete their agreements had no re-arrest by Longmont Police within a one-year period.
- 99% of victims, 97% of offenders and 100% of community participants report satisfaction with the process.
- \$ 35,649 has been collected in restitution to crime victims.
- 500 citizens have participated in conferences to represent the harm done to our community.
- 3,296 hours of service work has been performed by offenders wishing to repair the harm of their crime to our community.
- 35% of the offenders in 2003 were served on a sliding-scale basis for economic disadvantaged.
- LCJP currently has 44 trained facilitators who volunteer to conduct conferences. 17 are male, 27 are females and 7 are Spanish speaking.

The Current Status

Restorative justice is being implemented in communities across the country and throughout the world. In the United States, programs are implemented in various ways. Some programs are within divisions of the criminal justice system, such as courts, probation, district attorney, or police. Many programs are community based, not-for-profit organizations that are comprised of a diverse group of community members. LCJP is this type of organization, a community based, not-for-profit organization made up of citizens, and it has the distinct feature of having been formed as a partnership with other stakeholders, the police, municipal probation, and schools, including Clearview Educational Center.

Below is a listing of the percent of all cases by referring agency. This reveals patterns of utilization of LCJP by the various agencies that make referrals.

- 53 % Longmont Police Department
- 32% Longmont Municipal Court Mandated Classes
- 4 % Lafayette Police Department 2001-2 partnership
- 4 % Boulder District Attorney's Office
- 3 % St. Vrain Valley School District
- 2 % Longmont Municipal Prosecutor / Probation
- 1 % 20th Judicial District Court / Probation
- 1 % Boulder County Sheriff's Office

Currently, the LCJP staff is operating at maximum capacity, often spilling into overload. We have 2.75 staff who are being used to the greatest extent possible. As the community becomes more acquainted, as the criminal justice system becomes more

aware and trusting of restorative justice, as people become more confident of the process and its expected outcomes, the case load and seriousness of cases increases. When LCJP began in 1996, the only offenders served were first-time, juvenile offenders who had committed low level crimes. Now LCJP continues to serve those as well as persons of all ages who have committed more serious crimes, including felonies and cases involving fatalities.

The “LCJP Fact Sheet” attachment displays how requests for restorative services by the community have increased over the years. In addition to increased numbers of offenders being served in community group conferences, now LCJP is delivering Restorative Decision-Making classes for the Municipal Court, Shoplifting Solutions Workshops for the Restorative Justice Coalition for Boulder County, and Peacemaking Circles at Skyline High School. On top of that, the numbers of offenders served in community group conferences has risen 82% between 2001 and 2003. More and more restorative justice is being seen as a viable alternative. Because of the track record, because of community response, the annual workload has grown to the point we can do no more with the existing resource allocation. We have streamlined service delivery and increased utilization of volunteers to the extent possible with the current staffing allocation.

Future Possibilities

Having repeatedly witnessed the power of restorative practices, we want to increase our capacity to bring restorative processes to Longmont. We envision a community with the moral and emotional resources to stay the course and redirect those who have done harm, while responding to those who have experienced harm. Data show that the majority of youth who enter the criminal justice system do so for low-level offenses; there is a need for accountability but of another kind, a kind that leads them to choose accountability rather than one that attempts to force accountability. Ultimately, we envision a restorative option being offered for all juvenile arrests in Longmont. We believe that we can realize this goal by increasing the capacity of LCJP to serve significantly larger numbers of offenders as we design more efficient referral mechanisms to increase access to cases.

Increasing restorative responses will also be achieved by enhancing partnerships with schools, courts, probation, faith communities, and other community groups. There are many ways that restorative services may be delivered as long as they adhere to the basic restorative principles: acceptance of accountability for wrongdoing; balanced participation of victims, community, and offenders; repair of harm to victims, to community and to offenders to assist them in making better future choices; enhanced empathy for offenders; and attention to repair of human relationships.

We believe in the importance of maintaining a strong prevention component to this work to contribute to increased community safety. Restorative practices, such as peacemaking circles, can prevent crime as well as respond to it. Some schools have experienced positive outcomes in using restorative practices, and we see great benefit to enhancing our partnership with local schools. We see schools as fertile ground for implementation of restorative approaches. We all know that incidences of incivility and disruption are plaguing schools everywhere and restorative approaches can make a viable contribution to the solution.

We believe that restorative conferences held in neighborhoods could contribute a prevention function for gang activity and to help resolve racial tensions. By developing strong partnerships with Neighborhood Resources and Community Relations, restorative processes can strengthen the capacity to address these complex social issues. We also see great possibilities for restorative conferences to assist with the reintegration of persons coming back to our community from incarceration settings. Often there are residual issues that were left behind which prevent that person from being able to reintegrate effectively. Recently LCJP received a grant to explore ways that restorative justice might be used to address domestic violence which is a significant public safety concern in our community. In Longmont and other communities restorative justice has demonstrated success in addressing vandalism and related issues such as graffiti.

Restorative justice needs to have a stronger, more visible community presence and enhanced public awareness campaign so community members know where to turn for help before their conflicts become police matters. To enlarge the restorative processes in Longmont, additional resources will be necessary to coordinate conferences, and to recruit, train, and support a broader base of community volunteers to carry out this work. While we continue to monitor and refine our processes to become more efficient in service delivery, we feel we can stretch no more without jeopardizing results.

It is also clear that restorative justice has great appeal to volunteers. We began with a volunteer team of 8 and there are now 44 volunteer facilitators. We have minimized recruitment at this time to balance the workload. It is easy to foresee a significant increase in trained volunteers in the future. This is especially true for Spanish speaking volunteers as there are increasing numbers of referrals of monolingual Spanish speaking families. Currently, LCJP is the only restorative justice program in the area to conduct bilingual and monolingual Spanish language conferences.

In Closing,

Our youth live in a world that is different from the one many of us grew up in. There is a new paradigm for values of power and authority that does not always respect traditional authority. The ways of exercising shame, guilt and punishment to accomplish positive behavior still works for some, but many of the “x” and “y” generations require a deeper understanding and connection before they internalize the need to respect our laws. Through processes like restorative justice, they can come to internalize a code of behavior that considers the wider impact of their actions.

LCJP staff and volunteers appreciate the opportunity to live in a community with leaders who are dedicated to finding ways to deal effectively with crime and conflict. We are glad to serve and are especially pleased to be able to partner with our city officials in this endeavor. Together, we look forward to even greater successes in the future.

Discussion Questions

1. Should staff explore ways to fund ongoing additional resources for LCJP?
2. What are the next steps for LCJP?

3. What are possibilities / priority areas for restorative justice to address?
4. Is Council interested in exploring expanded restorative justice services?

Attachments:

- LCJP Fact Sheet
- Kim Miller, Boulder County Intervention Specialist, letter about peacemaking circles @ Skyline High School
- Shoplifting Solutions Workshop article from Longmont *Daily Times Call*
- Toni's article from *Colorado Municipalities*
- Basic RJ. info packet (for the benefit of new council members)