

# Restorative Justice (RJ) Fact Sheet

## What is RJ?

When there is a crime (harm), what follows is often a deep wound (trauma) for the parties involved, their communities, and society overall. When the responsible party does not accept accountability, there needs to be a system that protects the victim and the community. The criminal legal system does this. However, when there is acceptance of accountability and responsibility as well as consent from the impacted party, there is a more effective approach that leads to reduced crime rates and greater healing for the victim and community. That approach is Restorative Justice.

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a voluntary process that gives impacted parties a voice while promoting healing and accountability. The RJ process includes a facilitated conversation amongst the remorseful person responsible for the harm and the impacted parties.

**RJ asks:** 1) What happened? 2) What are the root causes? 3) Who has been impacted and how? 4) What can be done to repair the harm?

## **How RJ fosters healing:**

- Considers and responds to the needs of the impacted parties
- Allows the responsible person to be reconnected to the community

## **How RJ fosters accountability:**

- The responsible person faces and hears how the impacted parties were affected
- Individuals co-create RJ agreements to repair the harm

## Evidence for RJ

### **1. Impacted parties express high levels of satisfaction and healing through RJ** (Strang et al., 2013; Fulham, 2018).

In particular, impacted parties appreciate pre-conferencing, agency in developing a restitution agreement, and the opportunity to share their experience of the harm (Umbreit et al. 2004). Furthermore, Wagland et al. (2013) found that 90% of victims who participate in RJ recommend it over the criminal legal procedures. Lloyd and Borrill (2020) examined seven studies and found restorative justice helped victims decrease post-traumatic symptoms of avoidance and intrusion compared to traditional justice procedures. Angel et al. (2014) found similar results that impacted parties assigned to RJ conferences scored 49% lower ( $t(190)=2.163$ ;  $p=.03$ ) for clinical levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms compared to victims who went through traditional justice procedures.

### **2. RJ lowers recidivism and reduces crime rates.** Innovative communities across the nation are adopting Restorative Justice Practices and making real change in their communities. Recidivism is lower when the person meets and speaks with the person they harmed (Maryfield et al. 2020). For example, St. Croix Valley Wisconsin RJ Program reports a low recidivism rate of 7.3% for driving while intoxicated related offenses (Miner, K. 2014), and Vermont Community Justice Center reports a low, 8.9% recidivism rate (Wicklund, P. & Halvorsen, T. 2014). Furthermore, the Longmont Community Justice Partnership in Colorado reports a low 10% recidivism after one year; in comparison, Colorado's state-wide recidivism after one year is 32% (Amour 2018). A systematic review of 10 experimental studies of RJ programs found that the programs reduce recidivism two years after random assignment into the program by 7% to 45% (Strang et al., 2013). Kennedy et al. (2019) followed probationers over a 2-to-6-year period and found the group who participated in a brief restorative justice intervention had lower recidivism of 35.3% ( $n=127$ , 33.16%; $z=7.04$ , $p<.001$ ) than those who did not participate in the program ( $n=89$ , 68.46%). Those who do reoffend do so at a lower severity Fulham (2018). Offenders who participate in RJ are also more likely to complete restitution obligations (Latimer et al., 2005).

Locally, Tallahassee has a juvenile diversion program called Community Connections that teaches juveniles Nonviolent Communication. This program has a recidivism rate of less than 7%. The most telling metrics of their success is that this program has been running for more than a decade and has had NO fights in that time. This is a remarkable feat given that many of the kids are recommended to the program for fighting. Furthermore, more than 30% of these teens return to volunteer.

### **3. RJ reduces costs.** Research supports the cost-effectiveness of restorative justice conferencing. Strang et al. (2013), found RJ programs provided up to 14 times as much benefit in costs by crime prevention. Another study shows that every one dollar spent on RJ saves the community eight dollars in preventing crime (Sherman et al., 2015).

## Restorative Principles

- 1. Crime is impactful and harmful to individuals and the community.** While a law may have been broken, the harm is centered around relationships and people rather than a violation of the law and the state.
- 2. Those most impacted are meaningfully involved and empowered.** The restorative approach is collaborative and rooted in dialogue and consensus on the restorative agreements to repair harm, centering the needs of the impacted parties. Giving impacted parties a voice in the process is an empowering hallmark of RJ, and something that does not typically happen in the criminal legal system.
- 3. Crime creates harm, needs, and obligations.** The responsible person takes accountability for what happened and both the impacted and responsible parties, along with community members, are engaged in the entirety of the process to address the harm, needs, and obligations.

## Citations

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