

## **Building support for community justice: Principles and strategies**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the United States the criminal justice system is in a state of crisis. The public is fearful and angry. Practitioners are weary and frustrated. Criminal justice policy is driven more by anecdote than systematic information. Costs of current policies are not sustainable over long periods. Victims are often re-victimized in the process. This widespread sense of dissatisfaction has caused a fundamental rethinking of our criminal justice system and the formulation of an alternate approach to criminal justice called restorative justice.

For over a decade concerned individuals have been working to develop the theory and practice of restorative justice, but despite the obvious shortcomings of the current system, these efforts have left the mainstream of criminal justice practice largely unaffected. The potential of restorative practices to transform criminal justice can only be realized if those practices move from the periphery to the mainstream. To accomplish this, it is necessary to build a broad base of support for restorative justice principles and practices. Because restorative justice is grounded in community involvement, it is not possible to implement a comprehensive restorative system without community ownership and support.

Efforts to promote and assist implementation of restorative justice have no explicit model to guide their development. Though there is no single blueprint to describe the path for building community support, these efforts nevertheless need to be guided by a clear set of principles and informed through the identification of effective strategies. The purpose of this paper is to specify some guiding principles for building community support for restorative values, to identify some promising strategies, and to describe some actual experiences where these approaches were employed.

Restorative justice is defined by several key principles around which community support can be built. Restorative justice is not a specific program or set of programs; it is a way of thinking about responding to the problem of crime, a set of values that guides decisions on policy, programs and practice. Restorative justice is based on the redefinition of crime as injury to the victim and community, rather than as effrontery to the power of the state. The primary purpose of justice in the restorative model is to repair the harm of the crime to whatever degree possible.

Victims' involvement and perspective are essential to the processes of defining the harm of each crime and identifying how that harm might be repaired. A comprehensive restorative response to crime engages the community as a resource for reconciliation of victims and offenders and as a resource for monitoring and enforcing community standards of behavior. Restorative justice defies traditional 'liberal' and/or 'conservative' labels, and embraces values found in both perspectives.

A restorative response to crime is a community-building response.

### **CHANGING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CORRECTIONS SYSTEM AND THE COMMUNITY**

Efforts by a corrections agency to stimulate change toward the restorative paradigm must of necessity present particular challenges. The restorative justice framework calls for the inclusion of all stakeholders, especially victims and community members, in designing and implementing local justice practices. It is an empowerment model that must clearly be grounded in grass-roots commitment at the local level. However, corrections agencies are not typically oriented toward grass-roots participation and are generally very hierarchical organizations. Restorative justice, on the other hand, is based upon highly participatory decision making, from individual cases to system design. Thus the corrections agency promoting changes toward the restorative justice model is challenged to provide leadership while not usurping the power of other participants.

Any agency promoting change must model the values of restorative justice in its process by providing vision and encouragement to all stakeholders while avoiding specific directives. There is an inherent tension between the desire by traditional stakeholders for details of implementation in order to understand the functional framework, and the need for the leading agency to leave the details of implementation to the participatory process. At early stages of discussion participants may become impatient with philosophy and just want to be told what to do. The question of 'how to' can be turned back to the participants asking them to apply the principles and identify practices which fit the principles. Over a period of time the responses from participants can become the basis for providing multiple examples of restorative practice to bring life to the concepts. However, at all times the leading agency should resist the urge to develop detailed plans unilaterally because that might supplant the development of plans based on the participation of all the stakeholders.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER SOCIAL CHANGE

The shift represented by restorative justice is part of a larger shift in our social institutions from power-based structures and practices to relationship-based structures and practices. On one level it appears that this movement is toward greater centralization of authority and greater use of retributive approaches, but at another level there are powerful forces moving in the opposite direction. This shift is evident in several fields:

- Community based policing is based on building community relationships and using proactive problem solving instead of brute force responses designed to demonstrate power over others.
- The field of social services is struggling to shift from a deficit model, in which a beneficent outside power rescues an individual or community from weaknesses, to a capacity building model, in which individuals or communities rescue themselves based on their own strengths and relationships in the community.
- In the field of education, a new approach to discipline called judicious discipline involves students in setting standards and maintaining them.
- The total quality management (TQM) transformation in business and industry is fundamentally a shift from motivating workers based on fear and power over them to motivating workers based on relationships and an opportunity to shape their own work lives.
- In the legal field the movement toward greater use of alternative dispute resolution processes rather than court processes represents a similar shift from reliance upon the power and authority of the abstract law to reliance upon human relationships and interaction to reach agreement.

All these processes give more power for finding solutions to those most directly involved (rather than a distant authority), and decrease reliance on fear of consequences as the primary mechanism of achieving desired behavior.

Efforts to expand the use of restorative practice in the criminal justice system and build community support for those practices will be more effective if they are understood in the context of this substantial social change that is reshaping many of our institutions. Drawing parallels between those changes and the restorative framework gives legitimacy and viability to restorative justice, and places restorative justice at the center of some the most hopeful (encouraging) changes occurring in our nation. It also assists those not in the criminal justice system in relating these changes to something familiar in their lives.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide efforts to gain greater commitment to restorative justice values in the community:

- Restorative justice should not be mandated in a top-down authoritarian process. The work of implementing the principles of restorative justice must be done at the local level and must involve all stakeholders.
- There is no single road map or blueprint for building a restorative system; nor do we have answers to all the questions raised by the principles of restorative justice. The process of searching for answers should involve dialog with all who have an interest in the question.
- The appropriate role of state, national or regional leadership is to articulate the vision, disseminate information, and provide support and technical assistance to jurisdictions attempting to evolve to a more restorative approach. State and national agencies can also carry out pilot programs to demonstrate application of the principles. State and national governments are responsible for monitoring outcomes to insure fairness, equity and effectiveness of processes designed at the local level.
- Special outreach efforts to victims groups are important because victims have historically been left out of the criminal justice process. Victims' groups have had to fight the system for nearly every gain they have achieved. Consequently, many are skeptical that an initiative of an agency serving offenders can genuinely have victim interests at its center. An unwavering commitment to involve victims despite obstacles that may be encountered is critical to insure that the outcomes are genuinely restorative.
- A clear understanding by practitioners and stakeholders, including the community, of the philosophical underpinnings of the approach is essential to ensure that changes are substantive and not merely cosmetic. Program implementation without an explicit understanding of underlying values often leads to undesirable results.
- The process of implementing restorative approaches must model the principles themselves, e.g.,: victims must have a voice, the community must be involved. In fact, every citizen should be given opportunities to contribute to their community's vision of restorative justice.
- The community contains natural allies in fields outside criminal justice who can bring depth and credibility to the advocacy of a restorative approach.
- Energy is most effectively expended working with those who are actively interested in trying restorative approaches. Seeds sown in fertile soil produce the most impressive results which, by example, will convince skeptics more readily than direct persuasion.
- A feedback loop between stakeholders and leadership is very important.
- All persons involved must be prepared to make mistakes.

Thus the work of promoting and supporting the use of restorative practices in criminal justice must be carried out across multiple organizational systems and levels. In particular, since the lead agency in change efforts will have direct authority over only a small percentage of those who shape criminal justice practice, progress toward a restorative approach requires engaging voluntary participation and interest. Beyond the traditional 'players' (corrections, police, judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers), efforts to promote restorative justice should involve all levels of government (state, county, city) and multiple sectors of the community (schools, social services, civic organizations, faith communities). Moreover, besides those community entities whose missions and interests are logically part of, or related to, the justice process, it is also essential to involve a diverse variety of other organizations from all cultural perspectives, with the objective of achieving proportional representation from cultural subgroups and ethnic communities.

## STRATEGIES

Education about restorative justice is the primary strategy. Building community support requires building the capacity among all peoples at all levels to think about criminal justice issues from a restorative perspective. Public speaking and distribution of written materials are key elements for this public education. Succinct one-page informational pieces are essential, with more lengthy written materials available for those interested in more detail. Radio interviews are an effective way to reach a broad audience and are fairly accessible in most communities. Local cable access TV shows can provide opportunities to reach some people. Contacts with local press can sometimes result in coverage of a major public speaking event, thus reaching a much broader audience.

It is very important to talk about the conceptual framework, but stories of real experiences are also vital to the process of education. Look for stories that relate to local personalities or local conditions. Especially effective are stories that show (more than the retributive system would have) a restorative resolution that involved the community and victims. It is also useful to have stories that prove the failure of the retributive system. With small audiences contrasting stories can be presented, with the audience asked to identify the differences in the two cases. Having victims tell their own stories can be very powerful in communicating key messages about dissatisfaction with the current system or satisfaction with a restorative process. Opportunities to speak about restorative justice in the community may come from churches, civic groups, college or high school classes, violence prevention groups or policy makers.

Secondary strategies include linking people with common interests and complementary strengths and engaging community leaders in discussions about creating safe communities. Once the community's interest in the conceptual framework is engaged, it becomes very important to be prepared to provide technical support for developing restorative practices within the community. Strategies for technical support include providing responses to proposals, identifying expert resources for additional opinions, providing forums for collegial interaction and maintenance of a resource library. It is also important to be an enthusiastic 'cheerleader' for the process to maintain volunteers' enthusiasm and energy.

Leadership toward a restorative vision in response to crime can come from a variety of directions. In Polk County (Des Moines), Iowa, and Travis County (Austin), Texas, the prosecutor's office is providing key leadership. At the national level the National Organization for Victim Assistance has produced a paper describing a comprehensive restorative system. In Minnesota and Vermont the State Department of Corrections has initiated movement toward a restorative system. In Oregon, Florida and Pennsylvania some county corrections units have started the process. In other communities around the nation private community groups have been working for years to create a more restorative process through programs like victim offender mediation.

Putting the principles and strategies to work to build community support requires several basic community organizing skills:

- Finding your natural allies in the community: Listen to peoples' interests, and find out how restorative justice fits with their interests. Using language that 'connects' with your audiences, talk to people who are interested in violence prevention, underlying causes of crime, social justice, building stronger neighborhoods, regaining a sense of community, children's issues, etc. Among them you are likely to find some who 'resonate' with restorative justice values and see in restorative justice some potential for addressing their interests. Educators will care about the connections between restorative justice and school discipline problems. Law enforcement officials will care about the natural fit between community based policing and restorative justice. Business people will understand restorative justice in the language of total quality management or of effective government and fiscal issues. Engage people in a discussion of their own worries, fears and concerns, and identify (where possible) how a restorative approach provides a potential solution to their problems.

For example, the Minnesota League of Women Voters, in conducting a study on violence, identified the restorative justice approach as part of the solution to the problem of violence. City

planners involved in a major effort by the City of St. Paul to develop a long range plan for public safety found restorative justice to be a useful framework. Educators have identified the framework as useful in approaching school discipline procedures.

- Avoiding becoming identified with a particular political label: Find community allies on both ends of the political spectrum. Some conservative Christian groups actively work for restorative justice. Restorative justice is consistent with fiscal conservatism, the call for a reduced role for government and an emphasis on personal accountability. On the other hand restorative justice's reduced emphasis on physical punishment and call for community accountability are consistent with traditional liberal values. Seek out respected leaders from divergent points of view as key supporters of restorative justice.
- Listening to those who disagree: The entire community is a stakeholder in the issue of community safety so everyone deserves to be respectfully heard while deciding the direction of the system. Listen carefully so that you can understand the objections. Develop an explanation responding to the objection to use when speaking to other groups. Acknowledge the need to have dialog and explore further on issues for which you don't have answers. Be prepared to learn from the objections raised. This is a model in formation and should be responsive to valid objections. Probe beneath surface objections to identify underlying issues that may be more readily resolved than is initially apparent.

For example, what may seem a desire for retribution is often actually a concern for public safety. A restorative approach cannot deliver retribution but can potentially deliver at least as much public safety as the current system.

- Putting victims first: If those raising objections are victims' groups or advocates, then do all of the above repeatedly. Be willing to travel to engage them in dialog on their own home territory ... make a point of offering to come to hear their concerns. In order to be sure you understand them, ask them to listen as you re-articulate their concerns in your own words. Ask a sympathetic victim supporter to help you understand the issues being raised. Seek victim ideas for any proposed change. Learn about victims issues and the experience of victimization. Listen to victim stories. Use victim stories in your public speaking. In written materials, overheads, etc. list items related to victims before those related to offenders.
- Balancing focus with flexibility: It is critical to be clear and consistent about the values and vision but there are multiples ways to achieve the vision. Be prepared to modify your approach if it is not working and other more promising avenues appear. Success may be more dependent on responses to opportunity than on detailed long range action plans.
- Monitoring your own assumptions and stereotypes: Promoting a new paradigm requires breaking out of your own paradigms in many ways. Unexpected sources of support and opportunities may be missed if you don't become aware of your own assumptions about others and consciously put those aside.

## PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES IN PRACTICE

The case examples presented below describe specific activities used to build community support. These examples are intended to illustrate how the leading agency can work with multiple partners based upon their expressed needs or interests.

A detailed case example from Ramsey County, Minnesota:

One of the most extensive efforts at building community support for restorative justice has occurred in Ramsey County, Minnesota. Ramsey County is an urban county that includes the city of St. Paul and the surrounding suburbs. Local correctional services are delivered under the Community Corrections Act, and are largely independent of the State Department of Corrections. The area has experienced dramatic

demographic shifts in the past ten years with the growth of the Southeast Asian population. Crime rates are relatively low but there are increasing levels of firearms violence and gang related activity and, consequently, increasing public anxiety. The leading agency in this case has been the Minnesota State Department of Corrections Restorative Justice Initiative.

Building a foundation of community support for restorative justice in Ramsey has involved concurrent activities in several arenas. One of the first steps in the process was a meeting with the Director of Community Corrections to share information about restorative justice and offer assistance. At that meeting an opportunity surfaced to provide the director with written material on related issues (violence prevention) to use at a County Board meeting within a few days. Gathering and copying the material on short notice took a significant effort, but presented an immediate chance to be of service around the Director's needs. Another early step in the process was the appointment of a St. Paul police officer to the Statewide Restorative Justice Advisory Board. This officer is knowledgeable about and committed to community based policing and could immediately identify the common links between restorative justice and community based policing. The restorative justice philosophy serves his interest in promoting community based policing.

Common links were also identified with other existing efforts. The City of St. Paul recently launched an initiative called Safe City that is promoting long term solutions to public safety which are oriented to the underlying causes of crime. A meeting was held with the coordinator of Safe City to explain restorative justice and seek ways to strengthen the work of each effort through collaboration. Contact was also made with the coordinator of the Ramsey County Initiative for Violence Free Families and Communities which has been very successful at engaging broad participation in activities related to violence prevention. It was important not to compete with or duplicate the efforts of other groups whose goals are consistent with restorative justice.

A neighborhood crime prevention specialist and a neighborhood beat officer from a high crime inner city neighborhood of St. Paul contacted the DOC to learn about restorative justice and became part of the network of community people exploring ways to implement the ideas. The crime prevention coordinator has requested that the county diversion program assign offenders from the community to local block clubs to do their community service. She hopes to provide a process for reintegration into the community and accountability through community service. She is also exploring ways for the community to keep track of the court process for crimes that affect the community.

Early in the process a staff member from Hmong American Partnership, a private organization that has programs for at risk youth in the Hmong community, contacted the DOC for information about restorative justice. This approach is consistent with cultural values of the Hmong and the agency is exploring applications to their programming.

When a police officer from Australia visited Minnesota in July, 1994, the Department of Corrections arranged information seminars on Family Group Conferencing, a police agency program used in Australia and New Zealand that fits restorative principles. Two members of the St. Paul Police Department were recruited to attend the seminars. The DOC also arranged a meeting between the Australian officer and a St. Paul police officer in charge of one of the city's community policing units. The DOC also recruited several local people to attend a training session on Conferencing in Pennsylvania, including a St. Paul Police school liaison officer, and board and staff members of the Hmong American Partnership.

In the fall of 1994 the Ramsey County Community Corrections Department included a session on restorative justice at their annual staff meeting which provided a basic introduction to the entire staff. In late winter and spring of 1995 the DOC restorative justice planner conducted staff training sessions for a private corrections agency in St. Paul which operates half way houses, electronic monitoring and community service programs, and for another private agency which provides pretrial services and diversion for Ramsey County. The restorative justice language and core concepts have become common currency in the corrections field.

A critical factor in the success of the Ramsey County effort has been the interest of the St. Paul Area Council of Churches which sponsors a chaplaincy program in the Ramsey County detention facilities. The chaplain requested the help of the Department of Corrections Restorative Justice Initiative in organizing a Ramsey County conference on restorative justice. Working together the DOC restorative justice planner and the chaplain recruited representatives of all parts of the community to participate in the planning process for the conference. Participants included clergy from a variety of faith communities, corrections professionals, victims, members of communities of color, police officers and a public defender.

The group organized a one day conference whose goals were to educate diverse religious, citizen and professional community members about the concept of restorative justice and identify the prospective roles of various community members in a restorative response to crime, and to enlist interested participants in follow-up planning to expand the use of restorative approaches in Ramsey County. A very focused recruitment effort attempted to get key leaders from all parts of the community to attend. Specific invitations were sent to a list of people identified by the planning group. The invitation list included judges, corrections leaders, prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement, lay and clergy church leaders, mayors, county commissioners, legislators, school principals and key staff, victims service providers and victims groups such as MADD, neighborhood community organizers, culturally specific organizations, the Chamber of Commerce and civic groups such as the League of Women Voters.

The agenda for the conference was designed to engage the audience through a very short theater piece that captured the frustrations with the current system, and to provide basic information to educate people about the restorative justice framework through a traditional lecture format and then use storytelling to bring the concepts to life. The participants then 'processed' the information thus imparted through a series of small group discussions whose results they then reported back to the entire group.

The conference attracted 150 participants, approximately one third of whom were from the criminal justice system. The remainder of the participants were from schools, local government (including a few county commissioners and city council members), crime victim service organizations, faith communities, and community groups. The energy level of the conference was very high, and the participants found themselves seriously engaged in identifying a more restorative response to crime, especially at the community level. Most participants asked for a process for continuation of the discussion begun at the conference. A call for volunteers to coordinate the continuing process added several new members to the original planning group.

The planning group decided that while a broad discussion of restorative justice was appropriate as the first step, there was need for the next step to narrow the focus in order to begin to move toward action. Follow-up 'round tables' were organized for four focus areas: youth issues, criminal justice, faith communities and community groups. A mailing was sent to all conference participants. It included a summary of information generated from the small group discussions, a list of positive developments since the conference and an invitation to attend one of the 'round tables'. For perspective, some organizers also recruited new participants who had not attended the conference. Small, committed groups of people attended these sessions. Because the restorative framework centers on repairing the harm of crime, it was presumed that each of these groups needed a victim perspective in the deliberations. In those groups where victims or victim advocates were not present, there were specific recruitment efforts designed to bring that perspective to the table.

As an additional outcome of the conference, the DOC restorative justice planner was invited to make a presentation on restorative justice to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners Criminal Justice Committee. Additional public education opportunities came through interviews on two local access cable TV shows. Another presentation was made to a group of agency representatives who provide community service sites for the St. Paul Youth Services Bureau.

One of the striking characteristics of the experience in Ramsey County is the combination of planned, initiated activities and opportunistic responses to the initiative of others. Both outreach to key 'players'

who might not otherwise develop this interest on their own and the nurturing of natural allies and those who express interest of their own accord are critical. Organization of the conference was an intentional, planned process with clear goals and discrete steps designed to engage the interest of key leaders in the community. However, significant parts of the total effort in Ramsey have been 'ad hoc', guided by perceived opportunities to advance the restorative justice agenda. Several active participants first made contact on their own after hearing about restorative justice in their own networks. This combination of planned activities and opportunistic responses to unplanned events is a core element of community organizing. It requires a careful balance of leadership and following which encourages people to pursue change toward a described vision, but insures that the change will be locally directed.

Though there is a great deal of interest among various groups in Ramsey County, no single organization is yet able to provide the leadership to organize a systematic process to move toward a more restorative response to crime across multiple systems. The role of the State Department of Corrections in providing that leadership has been crucial. Though housed in the Department of Corrections, the restorative justice planner position has been guided from its inception by a vision far beyond corrections; a vision that allows the resources of that office to be used for any interested organization.

#### OTHER CASE EXAMPLES

In a variety of other communities similar efforts at engaging community support have effectively raised awareness and interest among broad groups of people. In two of these examples the local corrections staff played a lead role in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

In the spring of 1994, corrections staff in the Bemidji office began a broad community education effort about restorative justice and arranged for the restorative justice planner to speak to the advisory board of the Sentencing to Service (supervised community work service) program and to the Beltrami County anti-violence committee (which included representatives from schools, human services, victim services, clergy, the courts and local policy makers). In another public education effort, the restorative justice planner spoke at the annual campus community breakfast at Bemidji State University. An article in „the local newspaper extended this address' impact beyond the breakfast's attendees. In these and other efforts, the restorative justice planner was able to provide legitimacy and broad context for new initiatives and help build local support. Other staff met with key community leaders representing different parts of the community to explain a new program based on restorative values. This new program involves the use of community intervention teams that meet with offenders, providing an immediate role for the community in this new approach. Linking the ideas of restorative justice to community processes, information was provided to Bemidji State University staff concerning local and national resources for the creation of a campus/community mediation program.

Court services in Carver County and Scott County in Minnesota are under the leadership of one director who has organized advisory groups with broad community and system representation. In the first step of the process of moving toward a restorative approach, the director of court services arranged for the restorative justice planner to provide a presentation to each advisory group. Then, under the sponsorship of the advisory groups, a three-hour seminar for 125 key community leaders and criminal justice system professionals was held. The DOC restorative justice planner provided assistance in planning the seminar, recruiting a national keynote speaker and coordinating the program. Local corrections staff identified the key players and conducted a very focused recruitment effort that resulted in attendance by leaders from all parts of the community. The seminar provided basic education about restorative justice and enlisted support among key community leaders. Coverage by local newspapers delivered the message to a wide audience beyond the seminar. A church pastor who attended the community seminar requested assistance in organizing a training for clergy of the area. The restorative justice planner provided a program format, speakers, a video and handouts for that training.

The restorative justice planner contacted the school liaison officer at the Carver County Sheriff's Department and the director of the Carver Scott Coop Center, an alternative education institution, to

encourage the development of a pilot project using family group conferencing, a process that incorporates multiple restorative dimensions. Subsequently, the school liaison officer and a probation agent from court services attended a three-day training on conferencing. Building on the success of an existing joint program of the Carver Scott Coop Center and DOC Sentencing to Service, the restorative justice initiative is working with staff from the Coop Center and the State Department of Education to explore further ways to integrate service learning and community service as a part of community accountability for juvenile offenders.

Links with law enforcement have been forged through collaboration with the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, a division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. There are clear parallels between the philosophy of community oriented policing and the restorative justice framework. One of the responsibilities of the BCA is statewide training for police. The restorative justice planner first networked with one staff member of BCA Training who is a member of a victims' advisory council, sharing materials about restorative justice and discussing common agendas. That staff member then shared the information with another who was assigned to organize a training on school violence for law enforcement and school personnel. With the assistance of the restorative justice planner, she designed the training around the restorative justice framework. Besides incorporating a presentation on restorative justice, she encouraged speakers on other topics to read background material and make connections to restorative justice in their presentations. The director of the training unit at BCA attended the training and became familiar with the restorative justice framework.

Information was shared with the training staff about family group conferencing, a restorative program model that is used by law enforcement in parts of Australia. The training unit staff members were linked with others in the field who are interested in exploring this model. BCA staff are involved in continuing efforts to develop possible modifications of the model, seek implementation opportunities, support training opportunities and address quality control concerns and training requirements.

The BCA training unit staff members were also identified as key people in advancing restorative justice and were invited to participate in a 'think tank' originally convened by the Wilder Foundation, a nonprofit group providing a wide array of human services in the St. Paul area. The BCA hosted the second meeting of that group. The staff from BCA involved the restorative justice initiative in the co- sponsorship and planning of the annual conference of the Minnesota Association of Women Police. The first day of that conference focused on restorative justice, including a keynote speaker, workshop presentations and a theater presentation followed by an animated discussion with the audience.

It is clear from the case examples that most of the activities of building community support fall in the arena of community organizing, i.e. identifying the most likely allies, providing them with information, linking interested persons with one another, maintaining a high level of enthusiasm, and providing support and encouragement for taking risks with new ideas. That process leaves plenty of room for individual professionals and community members to exercise their own creativity and power in working for change. Many practitioners and many community members want to act in a more restorative way, but have lacked a clearly articulated vision and permission to pursue that vision.

## CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO RESTORATIVE REFORM

Though the restorative justice movement has recently experienced remarkable growth of awareness and interest, there are very serious problems ahead. Even where there is a high level support for the restorative philosophy in the criminal justice system or community, the broader public policy trend around the nation is in the opposite direction. Prison populations are growing rapidly and the cost of that expansion threatens the availability of resources to work with victims and offenders in the community. Increasing dependence on incarceration may further paralyze the system making change much more difficult. Practitioners are frequently so overloaded that it is very difficult for them to think about questions of underlying values or philosophy.

There is also great risk that the existing system, with its overwhelming orientation to offenders, will be unable to shift to a truly victim centered approach to resolving crime. The habits of the system are strong. Even in jurisdictions committed to shifting to restorative justice, corrections practitioners frequently forget to involve victim representatives in their planning at the beginning.

It will take great vigilance to insure that victims issues are given proper consideration. Victims groups vary in their reaction to restorative justice. Some see potential for a much better system for victims; some are watching and withholding judgment; some are adamantly opposed, believing that in the process of implementation distortions of the philosophy will result in practices which are harmful to victims. They fear that the system will use victims to rehabilitate offenders or that the court will order 'restorative' activities without asking victims what they want. Even if asked, they fear victims may not feel free to express their real feelings. These fears are grounded in previous experience with a system that regularly re-victimizes and disempowers victims and doesn't even know it.

There is also the risk that a restorative approach might be unevenly applied, benefiting certain racial or ethnic groups but not others. Such an outcome would be exactly the opposite of the intention of the restorative justice initiative. Oversight by the state remains very important to minimize the likelihood of biased results. The greatest risks identified by most critics involve implementation which fails to be true to the values underlying restorative justice. It is crucial that the values be clearly understood and frequently articulated to guard against the dangers of straying from them in practice.

Research is needed to identify ways for the community to be more involved both in system decision making and working with victims and offenders. Engagement of the community in affirming and maintaining community standards is central to the success of a more restorative approach within the criminal justice system.

## CONCLUSION

Crime → fear → withdrawal → isolation → weakened community bonds → more crime. All of us, victims, offenders and community members, are caught in a downward spiral where crime leads to greater fear and increased isolation and distrust among community members, which in turn leads to even more crime. As community bonds are weakened by fear and isolation, the power of community disapproval is reduced and crime increases. Community safety comes to depend primarily upon voluntary individual restraint on harmful behavior.

Greater community involvement in a restorative justice process is a powerful way to break this destructive cycle and increase the connections among community members. The more connected with each other community members are, the more likely they will be to restrain impulses which would be disapproved by the community. Professionals within the system can facilitate the process of engaging the community to become a primary resource in responding to crime in a restorative framework. Expanded community involvement and opportunities for constructive collective action will result in less fear and isolation and a stronger sense of community.

Building community support includes gaining community approval of new approaches within the criminal justice system and engaging the community as a key actor in the process of responding to crime. The success of a restorative approach is dependent upon community support and involvement and requires specific attention and resources allocated to those efforts.