

# EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

WE COVER WHAT MATTERS...EVANSTON

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

## **Just Restoration for Evanston Youth, Harmony for Community**

**By Mary Helt Gavin, Meredith Newman, Anna Sanders and Kira Stiers**

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*Several organizations that deal with youth have implemented restorative justice as part of their program. The concept of restorative justice is both new and old; it has its philosophical roots in the ancient concept of redemption – not "buying back" something, as the notion of vengeance might seem to entail, but restoring the balance of the community. In restorative justice, the talking piece has replaced the scapegoat; and the pursuit of harmony, the quest for revenge. RoundTable staff interviewed several groups and individuals that seek to implement restorative justice in the Evanston community, to help youth be accountable for their offenses and learn from the choices they have made, and to help them make more positive decisions in the future. Restorative Justice Evanston, the Community Accountability Board of School Districts 65 and 202, peer juries at Evanston Township High School and elsewhere and the Social Services Bureau of the Evanston Police Department each lend a hand in implementing restorative justice.*

### **Restorative Justice Evanston: Accountability and a Way to Learn to Make Better Choices**

By Mary Helt Gavin

While punishment and revenge appear to be the anchors of the mainstream criminal justice system, an alternative philosophy is encircling its edges, particularly in regard to youthful offenders – restorative justice.

Restorative justice is "basically a departure from the more traditional responses to offenses that separate the offender from the victim and the community," says Sol Anderson, youth coordinator for the City of Evanston. The philosophy of restorative justice, he says, is that when an offense is committed, the community as well as the "victim" must be repaired.

The central tenet of restorative justice is that the victim, the community and the offender must work together to address the harm and restore harmony, says Susan Garcia Triesmann of Restorative Justice Evanston. The community and the victim hold the offender accountable for his or her actions, and the offender must accept that he or she caused harm, take action to repair the harm done and learn how to make better choices,

she adds.

"There's a 2 percent failure rate in restorative justice," Ms. Trieschmann says, "but with traditional forms of punishment the failure rate is about 52 percent. "Take a youth who has been caught tagging or spray-painting graffiti," she says. In a restorative justice situation, he would sit in a circle with people committed to the process, she says. They would talk to him about the harm he had done – defacing a building and making the community less attractive. They would listen as he described why he made the choice to deface a building. Through the talking-and-listening process, the two sides would address the issues of harm, accountability and choices. "He might be asked to remove the graffiti," she says, but further, "the group would try to find a way for him to use his art in a positive way – making sets for a local theatre group that could use the help." Restorative Justice in Evanston.

When Frank Kaminski was chief of police in Evanston he heard about restorative justice, says Ms. Treishmann. At the same time, she was studying the concept at DePaul University. Mr. Kaminski allowed four police department personnel to be trained in restorative justice, she says, and, "From that, we all started meeting to see what we could do with our collective knowledge."

What they did through their meetings was form Restorative Justice Evanston (RJE), a community group of professionals and volunteers that "spreads the word about restorative justice and builds restorative-justice capacity in other organizations," Mr. Anderson says. "Some of us are here because it's our job to work with youth and we really believe in restorative justice, and others are volunteers equally committed to it," he adds. Ms. Trieschmann is one of those committed volunteers. She spends much of her time volunteering for RJE. The RJE group – Ms. Trieschmann, Mr. Anderson, community members Lorha Vogel and Father Robert Oldershaw, Michelle Williams of Family Focus, Arica Barton of the Evanston Police Department and representatives of School Districts 65 and 202 meet regularly to discuss policy, problems and practice.

But it may be in the community that their services are most valuable: Both school districts, as well as the police department have created their own forms of restorative justice: At the schools, a Community Accountability Board has been formed to address chronic truancy. Peer juries at Evanston Township High School and Haven Middle School and peacemaking circles at several schools help to channel negative energy and behavior into more positive actions. Social workers and others at the police department work with victims and offenders to address antisocial and harmful behavior, including chronic truancy. At Family Focus, there are drumming/dialogue circles to help kids open up.

And then there are the restorative justice circles themselves, drawn to action when asked to help address troubles within a school community or another local group. Staff from PEER Services, a substance-abuse counseling agency; Youth Organizations Umbrella, which provides a range of support services for youth and teens; social workers from ETHS and community volunteers – perhaps Mr. Anderson, Ms. Trieschmann and others – meet with an offender who has been referred to the program.

"We sit in a circle with nothing, not even a table, in front of us and begin with a ceremony" that is designed to take them from the distractions of the day into the immediacy of the moment. "We have a talking piece," Ms. Trieschmann says. Only the person who holds the talking piece is allowed to speak. "It's not so much that the talking piece gives power to the speaker; the piece assures all the people in the circle that they will have a time to speak – and that allows them to listen," says Ms. Trieschmann. "And when people speak, they speak from the heart," she says.

For the participants, Ms. Trieschmann says, "It's liberating, because they feel they are back in a community

where everyone participates in helping kids make better choices."

She describes a recent conversation with a circle member. "When she saw some kids passing by and spitting on her lawn, she felt confident enough to call them on it. When she got closer, she saw that one of the spitters was a youth who had been in a circle with her. When he saw her, he apologized and said, 'I didn't know it was you.' And she said to him, 'It's [The victim is] always me.'"

### **Assessing and Moving Forward**

Ms. Trieshmann says the restorative justice concept can be used even for violent crimes, though in Evanston it is applied only to non-violent ones.

Mr. Anderson says some of the high points he has seen with the restorative justice concept "have been with the development of Restorative Justice Evanston and the buy-in we've been able to get from both School Districts. We have community support for keeping kids in school. And the people who have been interested in this concept – it's been really great to see that."

Ms. Trieshmann says she sees things through a somewhat less optimistic lens. "People understand the concept of restorative justice. We've never had a failure to communicate the concept. And, although I was very skeptical at first about this, I have never seen it fail. But some have said they do not believe there is a problem here; others have decried this as a throwback to the hippie movement; still others have said 'It's not my problem.'"

But Ms. Trieshmann and others say they see a culture of violence here in Evanston. As she sees it, she says, adults can help the kids address this, but the answer must come from them. "I believe our kids have the answer to all the violence and all the anger. We have to listen to them. ... As adults, we can't fix [their] things. This is their problem; they can fix it."

### **ETHS Peer Jury: Putting a Spin on Peer Pressure**

By Meredith Newman

At Evanston Township High School, peer pressure influences more than the sales of Camel cigarettes and teen drinking. ETHS's Peer Jury, a student-run organization, uses the powerful force of peer pressure (for good) by helping students in trouble repair and resolve school related conflicts.

As part of Restorative Justice Evanston, a social-justice movement seeking to end the conflicts in the Evanston community by using constructive solutions, Peer Jurors hope to transform the referred students' "negative behavior into a positive goal" by creating acceptable resolutions and agreements.

"Peer Jury is discipline with dignity," says ETHS Superintendant Eric Witherspoon, with his usual bright smile. "It was created at ETHS to minimize the amount of students suspended each year. Kicking the students out of school just makes the situation worse; Peer Jury creates a conflict resolution."

Referred students are allowed to make the final decision of going before Peer Jury, but only if they are first

given the option by their dean. Instead of suspensions or detentions, Peer Jurors create constructive solutions that benefit the student and the ETHS community.

"The issues that are discussed are usually fighting conflicts and discipline issues," says Supt. Witherspoon. "The Peer Jurors have the responsibility of answering the question, 'How do you correct the situation and make amends?'"

Susan Trieschmann, leader of Evanston's Restorative Justice, explains that her niece, ETHS alum Rose Sharp, was the first student to focus her senior studies project on Restorative Justice. Senior Studies is a unique class in which ETHS seniors develop an in-depth project that is focused on a specific topic or issue. Ms. Trieschmann adds that Rose's presentation paved the way for Peer Jury and other Restorative Justice outlets.

Currently, 23 jurors representing all grades and backgrounds comprise Peer Jury. Cristina Cortesi, Peer Jury coordinator and ETHS social worker, explains that there are no requirements to be a part of peer jury. "Anyone and everyone can join. We don't care if you've been in trouble 600 times or not at all, we want all students to participate."

Senior Colleen Creevy joined Peer Jury as way of giving back to her community. "I really think it's a positive and progressive alternative to the usual detention, suspension and expulsion pattern."

Colleen adds that the process of Peer Jury is a simple one. "In a typical meeting, the jurors sit down with a referred student and discuss why he or she is there. We ask what the student thinks went wrong and what could have been a better way to handle the situation," says Colleen. "We then talk about what he or she can do in the future to avoid this happening again, and what he or she can do to restore any harm that has been caused."

Similarly, senior Paula Trautvetter joined Peer Jury because of its proactive effect on ETHS students. "[Peer Jury allows] me to interact with people that I may not otherwise have ever met. I also enjoy all the opportunities that peer jury has to talk to other schools and spreading the word of peer jury."

Peer Jury is not about finding the best suited punishment, but restoring justice to the conflict. The Peer Jury meetings usually result in the referred student's giving a formal apology to whoever first issued the referral and then completing an act of community service.

At the beginning of each school year, the jurors are trained by a Restorative Justice representative. Jurors learn Restorative Justice's philosophies, different listening strategies and go in-depth on the importance of confidentiality.

"Jurors are trained to be highly confidential. Peer Jury is a very respectful process and collegial. The [referred student] might not appreciate the punishment at first, but their peers really do expect good behavior," says Supt. Witherspoon.

Many times the Peer Jurors face the issues of objectivity and bias. If this situation does occur, the jurors are specifically trained to handle it in a professional and respectful way.

"If the jurors know the referred student, then it is the referred student's decision whether or not they would like the jurors to still be involved in [the mediation]. The jurors are very professional; they know when it is

appropriate to bow out," says Ms. Cortesi.

In the 2009-2010 school year, Peer Jury helped 186 students avoid suspensions. According to Supt. Witherspoon, the question of effectiveness has been answered in the students' feedback. "The feedback from the [referred] students is excellent. The students who go before the jury never face their peers again. It helps them rectify the situation and move on."

With the motto of having ETHS's "loudest voice," Peer Jury is organized, run and coordinated by ETHS students, not the administrators. "I work for the kids. In this situation they are my boss. The great thing about this process is that it is by the kids and for the kids," says Ms. Cortesi.

### **The Community Accountability Board: Putting Muscle Into Addressing Chronic Truancy**

By Kira Stiers

Under a proposed City of Evanston ordinance, chronically truant students may soon be ticketed and fined by the City. Students who miss more than ten percent of a school year without cause are defined by the Illinois State Board of Education as chronically truant. There exists a state law against truancy, but with the ordinance, the City would be able to address the problem one last time before the state is involved.

A Community Accountability Board (CAB) has been formed by Restorative Justice Evanston (RJE), in collaboration with the Youth Engagement Initiative, the Evanston Police Department, Family Focus, PEER Services, Y.O.U. and School Districts 202 and 65, says Sol Anderson, youth coordinator for the City.

The CAB uses the restorative justice philosophy in which any crime or offense committed in the community affects the whole community, and it becomes the responsibility of the offender as well as the victim and the community as a whole to help repair the damage. Restorative Justice Evanston gives the definition as "a philosophy of justice that recognizes the purposes of misbehavior, addresses the needs of those who carried the harm and works to heal everyone involved."

The drafters of the ordinance include Sol Anderson, Patrice Quehl, a member of the Evanston Police Youth Services Bureau, and Cristina Cortesi, a social worker at ETHS and a member of RJE.

"The last report of chronic truants [in District 202] numbered about 150," Ms. Cortesi said. She also said this number did not take into account reasons for truancy, including people who moved away or students with disabilities.

At School District 65, the number of chronically truant students last year was 119, according to an Aug. 16, 2009 memo from Superintendent Hardy Murphy.

The proposed ordinance is not the first measure in dealing with truants. ETHS takes a number of steps to find out the reasons for student truancy. The school sets up a conference with the student, the parent or guardian and a school counselor or other staff to discuss why they have been missing school. If these measures fail, the student is referred to the CAB. Ms. Cortesi said, "Each school has their own process for what they do. If they feel like they don't know what else to do, they can make a referral [to the CAB]."

Ultimately the family has to volunteer [to participate]."

Ms. Cortesi says, "A truancy officer would make a home visit to speak to the family of the student. The officer would have them sign a release if they would consent to meeting with the CAB." If the parents give consent, representatives from the CAB would meet with the student and their family and "sit in a circle to hear the family out," she said. "The family should come up with an agreement with what they will do to help." The agencies involved with the CAB tailor a plan for each student depending upon the reasons for being truant. The CAB also follows up with the family to assure that the initiative is working.

These measures are meant to prevent more serious things from happening on a state level. If the student does not participate in the process outlined by the CAB, an ordinance violation ticket can be issued and a \$100 fine imposed. "Our goal is never to actually write the ticket," Ms. Cortesi said. "The ordinance is more of a pressure point," she added.

District 65 attempts to deal with chronic truancy through its Response To Intervention process.

The ordinance, first drawn up a year and a half ago, has been approved by District 202. At its Aug. 16 meeting, the District 65 School Board endorsed the intergovernmental agreement, which is contemplated by the ordinance.

### **EPD's Social Services Bureau: Aiding Youth and Victims**

By Anna Sanders

Life for impressionable youth and victims of crime can be wrought with fear, intimidation and regret. Thanks to the work of the Social Services Bureau (SSB) of the Evanston Police Department, led by Commander Aretha Hartley and Sergeant Brian Henry, Evanston youth and victims may also find help, restoration and hope in their futures.

"There are quite a variety of services," says Comdr. Hartley. The SSB encompasses both the Youth Services, which includes the police department's Youth Outreach, and Victim Service Program. Each program is designed to build a strong and safe community, restore youth at risk and give young Evanstonians and victims a place to turn.

### **Youth Services**

Headed by Patrice Quehl and Arica Barton, Youth Services attempts to curb recidivism by school-age offenders. As part of Restorative Justice Evanston, Youth Services provides support and intervention for offenders and their families, as well as closure for victims.

The program forces offenders to feel the full effect of their crime, says Ms. Barton. It gives them a chance to change their future and see how their crime has affected not just the victim, but the community as well. "Everyone gets together, and everyone is given a chance to speak about the incident," Ms. Quehl adds.

After the police are informed of a youth-related crime, they will refer the case to the State's Attorney Office, which then determines if the case is appropriate for conferencing, based on the crime, case and the history of the youth involved. Not all youth-committed crimes are given the opportunity for a conference through Youth Services, and victims can choose not to participate in conferencing. Conferencing allows victims and the community to speak about their experience, which would not generally occur in court.

During a successful conference, the offender and his or her family, the victim or a representative for the victim, circle facilitators, a law enforcement representative – usually the arresting officer – and concerned community members discuss the incident. Ms. Barton says these "peace circles" usually include a talking piece (an object that designates its possessor as the person allowed to speak) to keep everything organized. "Whoever has a talking piece, it's their turn to speak," says Ms. Quehl. "The piece goes around the circle as many times as needed."

The victim and community members then discuss "what will make it right," says Ms. Quehl. Their opinions help Youth Services determine the obligations or punishment for the offender. Common obligations include community service, repair or restoration for damaged property or further counseling. "The whole group might also decide that the discussion is enough," says Ms. Quehl. Participants then sign an agreement detailing their commitments and expectations.

"What really helps in facilitating that discussion is that our office talks to individuals ahead of time, so everyone is given support prior to the meeting," adds Ms. Quehl.

Ms. Quehl and Ms. Barton are confident in the success of Youth Services. "Absolutely it's successful," Ms. Barton says. "We have at least a 90 percent success rate, maybe more." She adds that Youth Services will check on their participants six months and one year after the mediated conference or court date. Most of the offenders who partake in a conference, she says, do not relapse into committing another crime.

## **Youth Outreach**

As part of Youth Services, Neighborhood Youth Outreach is determined to prevent youth – aged 12 to 21 – from succumbing to a life of crime or other high-risk behavior. Monday through Friday, except Wednesdays, from 3 to 9 p.m., Holly Lytle and Tamara Swoope from Youth Outreach are out on the streets, hoping to engage high-risk youth – or as Ms. Swoope puts it, "kids that have socio-emotional behaviors."

"What Holly and myself do, we provide info and counseling, mentoring opportunities," Ms. Swoope says. "We provide recreational activities for them, youth disturbance intervention – that goes along with Restorative Justice – academic advocacy, life skills development and employee assistance."

Ms. Swoope explains that she and Ms. Lytle drive around Evanston in a white van and communicate directly with Evanston youth. "We're out in the streets. So we would go to them," she says. Though Ms. Swoope says the kids they work with were wary of their presence at first, most have learned to trust her and Ms. Lytle.

## **Victim Services**

Along with providing social services for victims and witnesses of crime, Victim Services gives victims assistance and counseling during cases of domestic violence and other non-crime situations. Beckie Fischer and Sara Gliemann of Victim Services, whose positions are funded by grants, are advocates for victims of

any age or any crime.

The program describes its mission as to ensure that victims and witnesses are "treated with fairness, compassion and dignity." In order to do so, in-person crisis intervention and counseling are available 24 hours, seven days a week. In order to ensure round-the-clock availability, Ms. Quehl, Ms. Fischer and Ms. Gliemann rotate on-call shifts every third week.

"When an incident occurs, the supervisory staff determines if they need Social Service assistance," says Ms. Quehl. She adds the number of times the bureau is needed during an on-call shift can "really vary, from no calls at all...to one or several calls. It just really depends on what happens in a community."

In cases of domestic violence, Ms. Fischer says, victims will normally endure seven offenses before they leave their abuser. Victim Services is called for cases where supervisors feel advocacy and crisis intervention are needed, she says, adding, "We also go through all police reports every day and assign all domestic cases (both crime and non-crime), or a citizen may contact us without a report seeking our assistance."

Through the program, residents can be educated on the warning signs of domestic violence and can develop safety strategies. Referrals for shelters and legal resources in domestic violence and custody cases are also provided. "An advocate will also be present at domestic violence court to advocate on the victim's behalf, explain possible court outcomes, and assist in obtaining orders of protection," Ms. Fischer says.

In addition to helping those victims of domestic violence, Victim Services also provides referrals and medical advocacy for the victims of sexual attacks and physical abuse cases.

"Advocates are typically called to the hospital following a sexual assault or abuse case to meet with the victim," says Ms. Fischer. "The advocate will explain the investigative process and sit in on interviews with detectives as a support to the victim."

When needed, Victim Services advocates for both victims and witnesses by interceding with employers and appearing in person at court appearances for support. Eligible victims will also be given assistance with filing for monetary reimbursement under the Illinois Crime Victims Compensation Act. "[The act] can provide up to \$27,000 in reimbursement to an eligible victim of a violent crime for any out-of-pocket expenses incurred due to the crime, including medical treatment and counseling," Ms. Fischer says.

Victim Services also provides assistance during a criminal trial. "Victim Services primarily provides court advocacy services for felony cases and domestic violence cases," Ms. Fischer says.

While Comdr. Hartley jokes that the bureau will not be hiring anyone else "anytime soon," she is convinced they are making a difference. Ms. Quehl says the SSB allows families to connect with the police and get further support. Many times, she adds, families ask for help from the bureau without being referred to them. "Parents and families want to come in and ask to come back. ... They find it helpful," Ms. Quehl says.

Through hard work and determination, the women in the SSB advocate for youth and victims who would otherwise have no voice.

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