

Special Meeting of the Town of Richmond Selectboard

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

Members Present: Bard Hill, David Sander, Jay Furr, Jeff Forward, June Heston

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Duncan Wardwell, Assistant to the Town Manager

Others Present: Meeting was recorded by MMCTV, Cristalee McSweeney, Brenna Deavitt, Connie Van Eeghen, Derek Miodownik, Gretchen Paulsen, Ian Bender, Rebecca Starks

Call to Order: 7:30pm

Welcome:

Heston: Welcome to the public and Cristalee McSweeney who is here to help us tonight.

Public Comment: None

Additions or Deletions to Agenda: None

Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

Williston Community Justice Training

McSweeney: My assistant Brenna Deavitt & I will help make this presentation interactive to help clarify our information. It is important to know that the Chief and two officers trained with CJT. Chief Kapitanski & I met recently for our quarterly review where we cross check our information and increase our communication and partnership. I am the Executive Director of Williston Community Justice Center (WCJC) who started out as a volunteer. I don't have a job, I have a gift

Deavitt: Hi, I am restorative justice specialist for WCJC for three years. I have been a volunteer at South Burlington Community Justice Center. I will be running the PowerPoint and providing some information as well.

McSweeney:

*The WCJC: Made up of 10 youth volunteer opportunities with 2 staff and 37 adult volunteers. We work with schools across many towns and districts. We serve Williston, Richmond, Huntington, Hinesburg, St. George, Bolton and other areas determined by the schools like CVU and MMU districts.

*Who are our partners?: We are funded by a grant through the Vermont Department of Corrections as well as support from Williston Police and Town of Willison. We provide an element of structure to help our partners. We work closely with Williston, Richmond, and Hinesburg Police Departments. We are willing to work with anyone with a need.

*Crimes and Infractions Suitable for Restorative Justice Vermont: We want to provide services that address conflict resolution. It is important to provide services to build a community. We provided training for local schools and with any infractions that happen at school. We also work on diversity and inclusion. We work with many other State

agencies. What crimes are suitable for Restorative Justice? There is a direct referral list according to States Attorney Sarah George and VT Statue that define what cases we are able to deal with certain infractions. Restorative justice is an answer to many issues on how a case might get handled. We look at everyone impacted in the larger community to work with a restorative fashion. Does anyone have any questions at this point?

Forward: I am curious about Domestic Assault and Protesting referrals.

McSweeney: A Domestic Assault case will be vetted through the court system before we get involved. We will do a screening with our partners. Protesting cases sometime provide challenges but we have been successful in working through those referrals. We are not punitive. We use it as an educational opportunity for planning. We see a lot of Protesting cases but work at a Restorative level to acknowledged rights and advocacy.

*Additional Restorative Services: We deal with issues of housing, poverty, resources, or social justice referrals. We coordinate training with school staff and classroom restorative responses. We deal with property management and senior housing. We worked with a Richmond group that created amazing results from our resources and supports. There is a lot of services associated with New American housing, shared living spaces, and emergency housing.

*What does the Williston Community Justice Center Offer?:

- <https://willistonjustice.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/what-does-the-cjc-offer-infographic-1.pdf>

-The Restorative Justice Panel Process which allows the victim, responsible party, and the community to have a voice

-Education, Trainings and Classes

-Working in the Community

-Youth Leadership

- Other conflict resolution, conferencing, restorative circles

Van Eeghen: Thanks for this great overview. I have a question about what does racial equity mean? Is it important to match people to those in your staff based on background, life experience, race, or ethnicity?

McSweeney: It is important. We look at equity very seriously and meet those needs. We listen to the needs of the responsible party. We have partnerships with other Chittenden County organizations to help provide safety.

Van Eeghen: How do you measure success when there isn't a match?

McSweeney: A missed opportunity is not a failure but a steppingstone. Folks who realized they are not ready is not a failure. We can use at as opportunity to figure out what might help make a connection. Sometimes Restorative Justice isn't the right fit for an individual.

Deavitt:

*Differences between Restorative and Criminal Justice:

-Restorative Justice is the effort to repair the harm and "get things right." The victim's needs must be met and it's the offender's responsibility for repairing harm.

-Criminal Justice Criminal is where violations create guilt. Justice requires the State to determine blame/guilt and assign punishment. What laws have been broken and what do they deserve?

Forward: For a Police Officer to make a referral does there need to be a law broken? Or can they provide options around Restorative Justice.

Deavitt: There are examples of both cases. We showed the list of referral infractions. Or officers might make a referral to us for resource navigation. No laws have been broken but there might be a need at a house, business, or school.

McSweeney: Offices might make a phone call to us and suggest that we step in. We might work with the Howard Center, or we might just make a contact to have a restorative conversation or highlight other resources to initiate a community connection.

Hill: I often hear Law Enforcement ask how will this person be punished? Can you outline the differences between punishment and restoration?

Deavitt: A lot of people talk about Restorative Justice not having enough teeth. The work is much more impactful for developing accountability and responsibility. Helping people recognize the ripple effect of actions. We will spend a lot more time making amends. The work that we have done shows the benefits of a Restorative Justice process. You will not convince everyone of that but by having Officers observe the process they are much more able to buy in.

McSweeney: I always like to push back on this. I ask what do you hope this person learns or gains through punishment? How does punishment help improve public safety? We call people responsible parties and hold them accountable. If we just punish someone then we never give the opportunity to understand why it happened in the first place. I think it is important for Offices in Academy to be provided that Restorative Justice training. Here is an opportunity to understand why it works. We have to have strong and healthy partners to have strong and healthy communities. Restorative justice is necessary in some cases but not all. It depends on public safety and current relationships.

Deavitt:

*Restorative Justice...What it is vs. what it's not

- It is Connections/Relationships not Isolation/Removal
- It is Responsibility & Accountability and not Blame, Shame, Guilty
- It is Contribution not Act
- It is Needs not Wants
- It is With not To/For
- It is Curiosity not Assumption
- It is Resolution & Agreement Focused not Punishment or Consequence
- It Promotes responsibility, accountability, and obligation not Soft on crime

*WCJC Restorative Responses

- Community Conversations
- Peace Circles
- Healing Circles
- Restorative Panels
- Restorative Conferences
- Family Group Conferences

Forward: I noticed on the Hinesburg Front Porch Forum, and I noticed a tension about the Police budget. Do you help facilitate conversations that mediate around Police budgets?

McSweeney: Is the community open to that assistance and conversations? The service is available, and we need to look at the dynamics at play. Is there need for mediation? Or, the larger community might benefit from conversations in smaller circles. Are you willing and ready to step back for facilitated dialogue so greater harm does not ensue? It is a service we can provide.

Forward: It can be very emotional to deal with juggling these issues.

Deavitt: The Goals of the Panel Process are to make sure the impacted parties voices are heard, for the responsible party to take accountability for actions, to acknowledge the harm/impacts, for the responsible parties to make meaningful repair.

*The Panel Process: (1) Intake Meeting, (2) Panel Meeting, (3) Completion Meeting

McSweeney: Anyone we are working with we want to find out how we are more alike than not. We want to make sure we see people for more than the crime or infraction committed. Meeting in person helps us building that trusting relationship. It is hard to tell your story, so we want to create a space for those truths to be a part of the process. Change takes time. Restorative Justice helps for people who are habitual offenders as they need that time and process for change. It often takes more than one try. How would you like to be treated if you did something wrong? We try to humanize the process.

Deavitt:

*Sample Contract: The contract is separated into Impacted Party Repair, Personal Wellness, Community Engagement, and Referrals for Classes/Other

No two contracts are ever the same. No contract is prescriptive.

*Restorative Justice and Community Conversations:

-Promotes responsibility, accountability, ownership, growth, respect, critical thinking, decision-making, healthy relationships, curiosity, meaningful participation, engagement, safety

-Provides voice to “all”, opportunity, perspective taking, understanding, “agency”, options for responsible party, Voice/Choice for those harmed

-Outcomes are stronger and healthier relationships, positive/increases self-esteem, builds connections, repairs harm, healthy ways of living, increased communication and relationship building

*Benefits to Impacted Parties

*Benefits to the Community

*Benefits to Responsible Parties

*How do I become a volunteer: Visit <https://willistonjustice.org/about/joining-the-board/>

Heston: If we did this with kids at every level starting in elementary school then we would create this culture. Would an officer be judged for bias by referring someone for Restorative Justice?

McSweeney: It is a concern of Law Enforcement. We need a couple set of eyes on the cases and occasions. For instance, Chief Kapitanski and I look at our records together to observe the activity and determine if we missed any possible referrals. We help review with the Police Department so there is process of review and training to help eliminate bias.

Forward: I am impressed with having this type of service available to our community. How many typical cases per year do you handle?

McSweeney: We handle about 200 cases per year. It is a testament to our volunteers.

Deavitt: Our volunteers performed over 1000 hours of service.

McSweeney: We have 4 volunteers from Richmond and looking to encourage more. There are many ways to volunteer it doesn't mean you are always serving on a panel.

Heston: The Restorative process and circles are very valuable for the staff and campers at Camp Ta-Kum-Ta.

Forward: It is valuable to know that you meet with Chief Kapitanski and collaborate on your lists.

McSweeney: The Chief and I have a plan to meet every 3 months and we do a phone check-in every month. You should all be excited about his willingness to participate in such a positive way.

Arneson: I am curious about the statistics re-offenders that have went through Restorative Justice vs. Criminal Justice.

McSweeney: There are many statistics, and I can get them to you. We looked at the success rate of our center and we found that we had a 92% success rate of not seeing people more than two times (pre-COVID). Since COVID, it is not as strong as it has changed people's needs, tolerance, and social pressures. The court system has also changed. The Restorative and Community Justice Executive, Derek Miodownik, might have some other stats that are up to date.

Miodownik: About 20% of the population from probation went down within a 3-year period. There are reports on Community Justice and Reparative versus Standard Probation:

<http://doc.vermont.gov/content/restorative-justice>

[http://doc.vermont.gov/sites/correct/files/documents/Restorative Justice/CJC/Reparative %20vs.%20Standard%20Probation.pdf](http://doc.vermont.gov/sites/correct/files/documents/Restorative_Justice/CJC/Reparative%20vs.%20Standard%20Probation.pdf)

Great job everyone!

Adjournment

Furr moved to adjourn. Hill seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Forward, Furr, Heston, Hill, Sander in favor. Motion approved

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm

Chat file from Zoom:

01:50:38 Jeff Forward: That is a lovely story. Thanks for sharing.