

Creating a Continuum of Care: National Models & Promising Practices

Focus Area: Working with youth with high/multiple needs in community-based settings

Model: Restorative Community Conferencing

Modeled after the New Zealand Family Group Conferencing model, Restorative Community Conferencing (RCC) involves an organized, facilitated dialogue in which young people, with the support of family, community, and law enforcement, meet with their crime victims to create a plan to repair the harm done. It is most effective with serious crimes in which there is an identifiable victim, such as in the case of robbery, burglary, car theft, assault/battery, arson, and teen relationship violence.

Eligibility criteria for enrollment in a restorative justice process vary among programs. Some jurisdictions interested in reducing racial and ethnic disparities may target crimes that young people of color are most often incarcerated for, such as robbery, larceny, and assault, whereas others make eligible any offense that could otherwise result in incarceration. Ultimately, the eligibility criteria for a particular program will depend on the agreement between the applicable jurisdiction's district attorney and probation offices and the organization carrying out the restorative process.

Example: Community Works, Alameda County, CA

Community Works operates RCC as a pre-charge model (i.e., youth are referred to the program before a prosecutor files criminal charges). This approach allows for the individual accused of a crime and the respective victims and community members to reap the benefits of the restorative process without the collateral consequences associated with judicial system involvement. This pre-charge restorative program also allows the County to keep costs as low as possible by avoiding the use of court time, probation time, and other resources.

The district attorney has complete discretion to determine which cases to refer to Community Works' RCC process. Community Works then focuses on accepting cases involving serious crimes in which there is an identifiable victim (e.g., robbery, burglary, car theft, assault/battery, arson, and teen dating

violence) and the responsible youth would otherwise be exposed to significant contact with the juvenile legal system. By working with youth charged with more serious crimes, Alameda County was explicitly seeking to use RCC as a response to youth crime that had the shared goal of reducing racial and ethnic disparities. Through years of outreach and trust building, Community Works now receives referrals from schools, the probation department, multiple police departments, and the managing district attorney who heads the County's Juvenile Division.

Outcomes: An analysis of available data from January 2012 through December 2014 found:

- **Reduced Criminalization:** During the first two years of the program, Community Works West's RCC program diverted 102 youth for crimes who would have otherwise been addressed through the juvenile justice system.
- **Lower Recidivism Rates:** Participating youth were 44 percent less likely to recidivate, compared to similarly situated probation youth.
- **Victim Satisfaction:** Ninety-one percent of victim participants reported they would participate in another conference, and an equal number (91 percent) stated they would recommend the process to a friend.
- **Family Connectedness:** Seventy-five percent of participating youth indicated the process had either a "good" or "big positive" impact on their relationship with their family; 80 percent of participating parents/guardians reported that their child talked with them more after having completed the RCC process.
- **Cost Savings:** RCC carries a one-time cost of \$4,500 per case, while probation in Alameda County costs \$23,000 per year.
- **Reducing Racial & Ethnic Disparities:** Of the 102 participants in this study, majority were youth of color; 45 percent were Black and 33 percent were Latinx.

See more at: *Restorative Community Conferencing: A study of Community Works West's restorative justice youth diversion program in Alameda County*, Impact Justice and Community Works, Summer 2017.

https://impactjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/CWW_RJreport.pdf