

NORTH SHORE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SOCIETY – DEEP ROOTS, MANY LIMBS

by Alana Abramson, Executive Director, North Shore Restorative Justice Society

The North Vancouver Restorative Justice Society was formed in response to the community recognizing the need to approach justice, particularly regarding youth, in a different way than it had in the past. As a result of a town meeting held in November, 1997, The North Vancouver Restorative Justice Society was incorporated to develop a community-based program for dealing with the impacts of crime in the community which follow the guiding principles of restorative justice. Stella Jo Dean, city councillor (retired), the North Vancouver RCMP and Executive Director (retired), Jacque Stevulak, were instrumental in laying a solid foundation for the Society. The Society applied to the Ministry of the Attorney General, under its Community Accountability Program, for start-up funding which it received in February, 1998. The Program has been core funded jointly by the City and the District of North Vancouver since 1998 and in 2007 the District of West Vancouver became the third municipality to fund the work of the Society.

Since expanding into West Vancouver, the Society changed its name to The North Shore Restorative Justice Society (NSRJS). After 12 years, NSRJS remains a well-developed, grassroots restorative justice initiative with over 25 committed volunteers and two part-time staff people. NSRJS enjoys strong partnerships with other community agencies, the RCMP, and the West Vancouver Police Department. The Society's ability to serve the citizens of the North Shore has been made possible through the commitment of Volunteer Facilitators and Board as well as the caring staff people and community partners.

Our mission statement:

Connecting, caring and repairing to

- › promote shared accountability for conflict
- › heal and reunite those impacted by the conflict
- › build the desire and capacity of community members to resolve conflict and repair harm
- › nurture the growth of an increasingly connected community.

Our vision statement:

Creating a more compassionate community by

- › increasing capacity in the community for resolving conflict
- › modelling skills and alternatives for resolving conflict
- › providing community-based alternatives to the justice system
- › fostering a shift in community attitudes towards conflict:
- › community members taking responsibility for resolving conflict instead of deferring to justice system professionals
- › breaking down of victim and offender stereotypes
- › sharing responsibility for conflict and outcomes
- › recognising that restorative justice is a set of attitudes, values and approaches; not just a program or programs
- › impacting and changing the Justice system to reflect the changing needs of the community
- › engaging in a dialogue with justice system professionals (relies on shifting community attitudes)

When the Society was first formed, one program was offered to deal with cases diverted from the criminal justice system. Over the last decade, three other initiatives have been developed to respond to the needs of the North Shore community. The original program, known as the **Restorative Response Program**, is an extra judicial measure that deals with both crime and community conflict. Common referrals include mischief, assault, weapons and drug possession, break and enter, fraud, theft, and neighbourhood disputes. After a referral has been made, two highly trained facilitators work with all parties involved to come to a positive resolution. Extensive, individual preparation is involved prior to holding a restorative process such as a mediation, conference, circle, or shuttle mediation.

The **Restorative Awareness Dialogue** program, or 'RAD' for short, is a preventative approach that works towards expanding and strengthening the relationships in the community in order to build a stronger sense of responsibility to each other. Facilitators trained by NSRJS will visit community organizations and offer stories, information and opportunities for dialogue with respect to the philosophy and practice of Restorative Justice. It is the hope of the Society that through these sessions, participants will learn to appreciate a different and more peaceful approach to dealing with conflict and reflect on the powerful notions of empathy, respect, forgiveness and communication.

The third program that NSRJS offers is the **Restorative Responses to Adults at Risk of Abuse and Neglect**. Beginning in 2003, community dialogue was held to discover whether or not restorative justice approaches were desired as an option to dealing with family conflict including emotional, financial and physical abuse and neglect of older adults. After extensive conversation and building partnerships, it was found that restorative justice could be one approach to these sensitive matters. Today, NSRJS works collaboratively with the Adults at Risk of Abuse and Neglect Network, Police Victim Services, Vancouver Coastal Health and other helping agencies to find meaningful and healing approaches to these complex referrals.

Since 2005, NSRJ has partnered with various elementary and secondary schools around the North Shore to support them in exploring how restorative justice might look in their individual settings. Training and support is offered to students, staff, administration and parents in order to move towards a whole-school approach to restorative justice.

The North Shore Restorative Justice Society has deep roots in the community and the restorative justice field more broadly. The staff, board of directors and volunteers continue to be dedicated to a values-based approach to restorative justice and the Society enjoys a high level of support from municipal government, the police, local agencies, and community members. Future activities of the Society will include working with other Restorative Justice advocates to create a vision statement for restorative justice in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley. 🐎



Stella Jo Dean, retired City of North Vancouver Councillor and one of the founding members of the North Vancouver Restorative Justice Society, shares anecdotes with Alana Abramson, Executive Director of North Shore Restorative Justice Society while standing in "Stella Jo Dean Plaza" in front of the North Vancouver Detachment.