

# THE TALKING PIECE

## THE AVONDALE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COMMUNITY COURT NEWSLETTER



### A NOT SO NEW APPROACH...

by Margaret Kulujian, RJCC Court Coordinator

Restorative Justice is not new. The concept of restoring community trust, repairing harm, and keeping the wrongdoer accountable for their actions has its roots in indigenous tradition. Restorative Justice has existed for a long time and has been implemented in schools and in courts. It is not a fixed “method” but a set of meaningful practices like peace circles, sharing stories, empathic conversation, and listening that are designed to bring new beginnings, hope, healing, forgiving and understanding of self and others.

In 2017 Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County Timothy Evans started the Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC) initiative in the Chicago’s neighborhoods opening the first RJ court in September 2017 in North Lawndale. In October Chief Judge visited Avondale neighborhood and had a community meeting and lecture at Northeastern Illinois University El Centro organized by the Greater Avondale Chamber of Commerce and the Portage Park Chamber of Commerce. Over 100 community members and students participated in that event. After many months of preparation, meetings, training, location search and community organizing the Restorative Justice Community Court in Avondale was opened in August 3rd, 2020. The opening ceremony was hosted outside the Resurrection Hall in St. Hyacinth Basilica and was attended by all local and state elected officials, community members and representatives from local social service agencies, churches, neighborhood organizations and media. RJCC Avondale is a criminal court, however unlike most criminal courts, it practices restorative justice, which means it empowers the community to create solutions to repair the harm caused by crime and conflict. The first case held before the court was in October 2020. Since then every month new participants are joining the RJCC with a goal to change their behavior and find the new path of life. The idea for the program is to bring together victims, wrongdoers and community members for dialog to bring back peace and justice, allow victims and offenders to speak and be heard, repair the harm caused by the crime, and challenge the division between “good” and “bad” people in the community. Restorative justice is about transformation for everyone involved: the wrongdoer, the victim/survivor, and the community.

*“Welcome to the Restorative Justice Community Court, where healing is the goal rather than punishment, and the quest for justice becomes a collective effort.”*

*Honorable Timothy C. Evans, Chief Judge*

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# CREATING A BRAND NEW CULTURE- THE RJCC PROCESS

The RJCC court resolves conflict through restorative conferences and peace circles involving defendants, victims, family members, friends, others affected by the crime, and members of the community. At the conclusion of the Circles a Repair of Harm Agreement (ROHA) is developed and mutually agreed upon by participant and Circle members.

Criteria to participate in the RJ Court:

- Be 18-26 years old
- Have been charged with a non-violent felony or misdemeanor
- Live in the neighborhood assigned to the court
- Have a non-violent criminal history

Accept the responsibility for the harm caused

## PEACE CIRCLES

The person charged agrees to participate in the Peace Circle process. Through confidential and meaningful conversations the peace circle is an opportunity to bring together the participant, the person harmed, and community members to be heard & to create the steps necessary for the ROHA. Peace Circles are led by trained facilitators and are meant to empower community to create their own solutions to conflict and crime. The circle process keeps in mind the four values of Restorative Justice; encounter, accountability, inclusion, and reintegration with its questions and story sharing. A Circle keeper will do a pre-circle interview with the participant once they agree to participate and Circles will continue until the Circle process is complete, sometimes 4-5 weeks. A Talking piece is used to guide the conversation and build relationship through sharing and personal stories. A strong ROHA can be created that best fits the needs of the court participant.



*Thank You  
Avondale Community!!*



## MEET THE RJCC TEAM

**Presiding Judge:** Talks with participants on assigned court days and presides over the court

**Assistant State's Attorney (ASA):** Prosecutor

**Public Defender (PD):** Lawyer assigned to represent court participants

**Court Coordinator:** Manages court staff and proceedings

**Social Services:** Conduct risk assessment and provide support

**Peace Circle Keepers (CK):** Facilitate peace circle process and create Repair of Harm Agreement (ROHA) with participants

**Case Managers:** Assist and support participants to complete ROHA

## PLEASE JOIN US!

EVERY FRIDAY STARTING AT 10:00AM WE WELCOME COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO OBSERVE THE COURT AND SEE HOW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IS CHANGING LIVES AND THE AVONDALE COMMUNITY. FIND US AT RESURRECTION HALL, ST. HYACINTH BASILICA 3636 W. WOLFRAM CHICAGO, IL.

WWW.COOKCOUNTYCOURT.ORG

