

THE TALKING PIECE

THE AVONDALE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE COMMUNITY COURT NEWSLETTER

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE -A HOLISTIC APPROACH

By Honorable Beatriz Santiago, RJCC Judge

It is an honor and privilege for me to preside over the Restorative Justice Community Court located in Avondale. Our court is designed for participants between the ages of 18 to 26 who are charged with a misdemeanor or non-violent felony. Typically, it is a first felony charge for many of our participants.

Science has shown that young adults still have adolescent tendencies, including preferring short-term rewards and responding to peer pressure and approval. This often leads to poor decision-making resulting in the participant's arrest for a crime. The beauty of this court is that rather than label the participant a criminal, a felon, the court gives the participant an opportunity to make amends to the victim and community for the harm caused and gives the participant a second chance. This is important because once a person is labeled as a convicted felon, their prospects to secure a good job and better himself or herself becomes increasingly difficult.

Society as a whole benefits when we all help ensure that young adults transition into independent and healthy adults, with good jobs and being productive members of the community. Restorative Justice Community Court gives community members as well as our participants the power to accomplish that goal. Community members and participants work together to determine what resources and support a participant needs. If the crime involves a victim, the victim is also a part of that collaboration and what the victim needs to heal from the crime is included in discussions. After several meaningful conversations, recommendations are made to the Court. The participant is assigned a case manager who helps the participant receive the help and support needed to accomplish those goals. In exchange for achieving the recommended goals, the criminal charges before the court are dismissed. It's a holistic approach designed to get to the root of the problem and address it rather than just punish the individuals.

**Restorative
Justice
Community
Courts**

President Abraham Lincoln said " I have always found that mercy bears richer fruits than strict justice." By forgiving participants and giving them a second chance, by giving them support to ensure that participants do not fall into educational, economical and emotional gaps, we all help to eradicate racial, social and economic disparities and improve society. A participant should not have to pay for a mistake for the rest of their lives. A participant can and should be allowed to learn from their actions and most importantly move on from it and live productive, successful and healthy live

WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE DO?

- The Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC) is the first court of its kind in Cook County to adopt peace circles as the resolution process for criminal cases for adults. Avondale is the second location.
- Restorative justice empowers the community to create solutions to repair the harm caused by crime and conflict.
- For every case, the RJCC brings together the person charged, the person harmed, and the community members into a confidential conversation in a peace circle.
- We currently work with participants from Avondale, Logan Square, Portage Park, Hermosa and Belmont Cragin.

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- Partner with us by being a community resource that can provide services and support our participants as they repair the harm.
- Come observe the court proceedings.
 - Join a peace circle as a community representative.
- Donate snacks or supplies for our court participants.
- Offer community engagement hours and supervision to our participants.

WHERE DO WE MEET?

The RJCC in Avondale meets at St. Hyacinth Basilica Resurrection Hall. (3636 W. Wolfram St. Chicago)
Court takes place every Friday at 11:00am and is open to the public



NACRJ
WWW.NACRJ.ORG

Restorative Justice Conference

The National Association of Community and Restorative Justice Conference took place in Chicago this year. We were very fortunate to be able to participate in the conference. Our Avondale RJCC team members listened and learned from the practitioners from all over the world.

The city of Chicago and the state of Illinois continue to be leaders in Restorative Justice. Because of this, there are several strong coalitions, numerous organizations, schools, institutions and community leaders committed to implementing RJ across the city and state.

Two panels during the conference were dedicated to the restorative justice community court model and featured RJCC judges.

We also learned more about trauma, restorative approach and movement, legal system reform, and the role of restorative justice in violence prevention.

It was a great event that embraced all of the aspects, avenues and approaches of restorative justice.



Participants of our program have many different talents including art, music, sports and culinary skills. The below design was made by one of our recent graduates

