

Restorative Justice at the Center

The Center for Court Innovation learned about restorative approaches to crime and conflict from Native American practitioners in whose communities peacemaking has been practiced for generations. We are deeply grateful to our many Native mentors, especially from the Navajo Nation, who taught us about kinship in this work. We are also grateful to our trainers from across the country who taught us the foundations of circle practice and who walked us through the real-life challenges of implementation. These teachings have allowed us to pilot restorative justice programs in different arenas and study how centering relationships restores communities.

Red Hook Peacemaking Program and Syracuse Peacemaking Project

The Center hosts two peacemaking programs. The first was launched in 2013 in Red Hook, Brooklyn and the second in 2014 in Syracuse, New York. Peacemaking is a traditional, non-adversarial form of justice practiced by many Native American tribes. It is designed to heal damaged relationships and restore harmony to the community. Peacemaking not only seeks to resolve a specific conflict but to foster healing and understanding to prevent the conflict from reoccurring. Both programs provide

free training to community residents, which includes learning directly from Native American mentors. The program in Syracuse operates out of a Peacemaking Center designed by Deanna Van Buren.

Project Reset

Bronx Community Solutions, a Center program, hosts Project Reset, which offers a constructive approach to minor crime, expanding the array of options available to law enforcement. Traditionally, police and prosecutors have had only two responses to choose from: either prosecution—and, in some cases, jail—or releasing people without a meaningful response from the justice system. Project Reset offers a third option, giving participants the possibility to avoid court and a criminal record by completing community-based programming rooted in restorative justice principles. The program uses a restorative justice circle wherein participants, along with community residents from the Bronx who have been trained in restorative justice, collectively process the experience of being arrested and its collateral consequences on themselves and their families.



Restorative Justice Alternative to Incarceration at Manhattan Justice Opportunities

The Center's Manhattan Justice Opportunities provides alternative-to-incarceration programming to reduce the use of incarceration and criminal convictions for people charged with misdemeanors and felonies, including an option for a restorative justice process in instances of interpersonal harm. The primary persons who have caused and have been impacted by harm, along with supporters from their communities, engage in a facilitated conversation about what happened and how to move forward in a positive way. Consensus decisions are made by those who have to live with the outcome and can include a range of agreements aimed at repairing harm. Upon successful completion of the process, the case is closed through the court.

Restorative Justice in Schools

In partnership with New York City's Department of Education and funded by the National Institute for Justice, the Center operated restorative justice programming in five Brooklyn high schools with elevated suspension rates whose students overwhelmingly come from communities of color. During the three-year grant period, from 2017 to 2020, restorative justice coordinators worked with school staff and students to build relationships, address conflicts, and reduce exclusionary discipline using restorative justice principles. The project included a randomized controlled trial, comparing data from our participating schools to five "control" schools in the district, and

five comparison schools outside the district. The program was featured by PBSNewsHour. Researchers from the Center are currently analyzing the initiative's effectiveness, assessing whether it improved overall school climate and culture and reduces racial inequities. The report will be released in 2021.

Intimate Partner Violence

In 2015, the Center convened a national roundtable on whether restorative practices could offer a safe and effective response with a variety of practitioners. Then, the Center embarked on a national study, which surveyed practitioners using restorative, transformative, and culturally-based processes to address intimate partner violence. Building on the national study, the Center shifted its focus to New York City, hosting several conversations with local practitioners, resulting in a citywide blueprint, published by the New York City Mayor's Office to End Gender-Based Violence, which recommends supporting community-based interventions outside of the criminal legal system. As an initial step in expanding these interventions, the blueprint recommended funding a community-based collaborative of practitioners working at this intersection, which is currently underway.

For More Information

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