



NELSON POLICE BOARD

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Board of Directors
School District #8 Kootenay Lake
c/o Dr. Christine Perkins, Chair
811 Stanley Street
Nelson, BC V1L 1N8

Ruth Krulitsky
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Dear Directors:

This letter is in support of the presentation of Anita Werner, Coordinator, and Lisa Heisler, School Liaison, regarding support for Restorative Justice within the SD8 system.

As you know, a pilot project was delivered to 2 classes at the Blewett School last fall, funded by grants from the Government of British Columbia, Civil Forfeiture and the Columbia Basin Trust, with very positive results. Qualitative statements in the post-survey demonstrated that students valued restorative practice, that they felt heard, respected and more confident in what to do when harm happens.

The fundamental objective of Restorative Justice in schools is to improve the learning environment by teaching conflict resolution skills, creating a safer environment, developing greater connections with youth, increasing social competency and reducing social anxiety. The results from Blewett School all support this objective. We see an important benefit to the community in introducing Restorative Justice principles at an early age, and support program expansion in SD8.

You may not be aware of how unique the Nelson Police Restorative Justice program is. It enjoys strong police board and City of Nelson support, as you will see by the brief description of the program and its funding, below.

We, the Board of Directors of the Nelson Police Department, strongly support the expansion of Restorative Justice programs within the school system.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nelson Police Board of Directors

Chair John Dooley
Director Jane Byers
Director Lena Horswill

Director Sue Adam
Director Liz Edwards
Director Am Naqvi

Briefing on the Nelson Police Restorative Justice Program

May 2019

The Nelson Police Board approved the recommendation from Nelson Police management to operate a restorative justice (RJ) program out of the Nelson Police Department (NPD).

Gerry Sobie, who ran the Cranbrook RJ program for eight years, moved to Nelson and was recruited by NPD to train volunteers and organize a local program in 2013. Gerry, with assistance from a provincial crown prosecutor (now a provincial court judge), the manager of the local Ministry of Children and Families, and a number of police officers, including the chief and deputy chief, provided training to our first group of seventeen community volunteers.

In June of 2015, the Nelson Police Board hired a part-time coordinator, Anita Werner, to further organize the program. Anita worked with our volunteers to provide restorative justice services to our community. Most referrals came from the Nelson Police members, who have regularly been part of the restorative justice circles, a fundamental element of the RJ process. Subsequently, referrals continue to come from police, but have also come from schools, community, and community corrections, dealing with offences including assault, assault of a police officer, break and enter, distribution of intimate images without consent (ex-girlfriend/ex-boyfriend), mischief, theft, fraud and other criminal and non-criminal matters.

In addition to administering the RJ program, Anita organizes and provides monthly training and specialized training to our volunteers. She also travels to other areas of the province to attend advanced training and to participate as sole director from the Kootenays for the Restorative Justice Association of BC. Anita has facilitated many community events, including community and school presentations by bestselling author Katie Hutchison, whose husband was murdered, and Yves Côte, who was incarcerated for over 32 years and now speaks publicly on the topic of the Alternatives to Violence Project. These events were organized in partnership with Selkirk College and the MIR Centre for Peace. Anita has also supervised two Selkirk College Restorative Justice students through their practicums.

Nelson Police Department Restorative Justice has graduated three classes of volunteers through fifty hours of basic training. At present we have twenty-three active volunteers. The program also has a volunteer advisory committee made up of senior volunteers, a police board member and Nelson Police Department Victim Service workers.

The program has applied a civil forfeiture and a CBT grant to hire a coordinator for our Restorative Action Schools Initiative. This temporary, part-time employee has piloted a restorative school project in two classes at Blewett School, which will foster healthy communication and positive conflict resolution skills. The grant for this initiative, which funds six hours per week, will end in early 2020; and we are actively seeking funding to continue our work in this area.

The Board will continue to advocate for provincial funding, which is currently less than 10% of the cost of the program, to supplement funding from grants, the City of Nelson and the Nelson Police Department. There is certainly community benefit in having offenders taking responsibility for their actions, while providing opportunities for victims to play active, important roles in community justice processes. However, financially, it is the provincial government that benefits the most from restorative justice, as restorative justice reduces the impact on crown prosecutors, courts, community corrections and our jails, while reducing recidivism and the repeat use of these services. Annual long-term funding for the operations of restorative justice programs such as ours, is needed to make these programs sustainable and more effective. The Board of the NPD, along with the British Columbia Association of Police Boards, continues to actively engage with government to ensure better and longer-term funding.

If you have any questions about this program, do not hesitate to contact Chief Constable Paul Burkart at the Nelson Police Department.