

Restorative Action Schools Initiative



"Because of our class circles, students accepted more responsibility for their roles in both creating and solving the problems. It became much easier to encourage students to solve their problems themselves; in part because I gained more confidence that students had the skills to do so, but also in part because of how the project shifted the way I communicate with my students."

--Fourth Grade Teacher

Introduction

The Nelson Police Department Restorative Justice Program was fortunate to receive grants from the Government of British Columbia, Civil Forfeiture in 2019 and Columbia Basin Trust in 2018 to conduct a pilot project with Nelson area schools. The goal of the pilot is to capture, deepen and learn from the impact that restorative practice can have in schools.

History of the Nelson Police Department Restorative Justice Program

Housed within the Nelson Department, the Nelson Police Department Restorative Justice (NPDRJ) program began in 2014. The program is designed to assist youth and adults alike to achieve responsible solutions to the problems created by crime and other types of harmful behaviors. Our volunteers are involved in facilitating constructive, meaningful dialogue between community members through education, role-modeling and consensus building.

What is Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a term used to describe an approach to justice with deep roots in many traditional Indigenous practices, faith communities and other cultural traditions.

The values and principles of restorative justice provide a constructive and meaningful response to suspension, crime and conflict by creating opportunities for full participation, accountability, responsibility, understanding, repairing harm, reintegration, and strengthening communities. A restorative process provides the affected person(s) with an



opportunity to share how the incident affected them, and to play a central role in the justice process.

Restorative justice also empowers and supports youth to take responsibility for their actions and to repair the harm they have caused.

What is Restorative Practice?

The underlying premise of restorative practice is that people are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them rather than to them or for them.

Restorative practices help to prevent harm and conflict by helping to build a sense of belonging, safety, and social responsibility in the community. Circle practice is often a cornerstone of restorative schools.

Increasingly, restorative practice is being implemented in school settings. There is a growing body of evidence, and many leading initiatives in British Columbia demonstrating the positive impact of restorative practice in schools.

Restorative Action Initiative Pilot

- **Pilot Site Selection:** A survey was conducted in July 2019, it was forwarded to Nelson and area school Principals by the Superintendent. The survey inquired into current restorative practices and served as an assessment tool for each school's readiness and willingness to work in partnership with the NPDRJ. Seven schools expressed interest. NPDRJ has the capacity to work more intensively with one school at this time. One site was selected.

Blewett School: Restorative Action Schools Initiative Pilot Site

Each week over the course of 8-12 weeks from October - December 2019 Lisa Heisler met in the classroom (grade 2-3 and 4-5) for 30 minutes to one hour to facilitate conversations and exercises with the class related to social-emotional learning, communication, understanding conflict and developing empathy. Circles build community, teach restorative concepts and skills, and set things right if there is conflict.

Our circle curriculum has been developed from best practice in child psychosocial development, attachment, and restorative practice. It complements other tools used by schools, such as MindUP, Zones of Regulation, and Safe Schools.

There is a growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of restorative practices in schools. Restorative practices can result in:

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- A safer, more caring environment.
 - A more effective teaching and learning environment.
 - A greater commitment by everyone to taking the time to listen to one another
 - A reduction in bullying and other interpersonal conflicts.
 - A greater awareness of the importance of connectedness to young people. The need to belong and feel valued by peers and significant adults.
 - Greater emphasis on responses to inappropriate behavior that seek to reconnect, and not further disconnect young people.
 - Reductions in fixed term and permanent suspensions and expulsions.
 - A greater confidence in the staff team to deal with challenging situations.

Outcome Measurement

A pre and post-survey was provided to the teaching staff, and the students.

The grade 7's appreciated.....

"That I got to listen to everyone"

"Talking about the bad things"

" Getting the feelings out"

The grade 7's appreciated:

"Feeling more confident that I know what to do when something happens"

"that you could get your feelings out"

"talking about real-life problems"

Evaluations Summary:

Overall, the evaluations were positive from students and teachers. Both the pre and post-survey indicated that students feel safe and valued in their classrooms. Qualitative statements in the post-survey demonstrated that students appreciated having these types of conversations, that they felt heard, and more confident with what to do when harm happens. The evaluations also indicated some areas for improvement and growth.

""To belong, one has to be seen. To be significant one has to contribute. In its profound simplicity and deep complexity, the Circle provides the means for everyone to belong and to be significant." *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community.*

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