



ANNUAL REPORT - 2007

The Montpelier Community Justice Center (MCJC) is now in its fifth year of operation. In our quest to promote and provide restorative responses to conflict and crime in our community, we offer a variety of services made possible by various grants, municipal support, and the generous giving of time by many good people. This year our volunteer force grew to 57 community members, who provided more than 1500 hours of service. The MCJC Reparative Boards handled 64 cases, which resulted in probationers performing more than 350 hours of community service. And the Restorative Reentry Program created Circles of Support and Accountability to work with six people transitioning from prison to supervised life in the community, helping the reentry participants become self-sufficient, law-abiding citizens and decreasing the likelihood of new victims.

“The Montpelier Community Justice Center truly embodies the restorative spirit and serves as an admirable example for others of how a community can form collaborative partnerships to successfully address crime and conflict.” – Hans Johnson, Vermont Department of Corrections

Services provided by the Justice Center during the past year include:

Mediation of neighborhood disputes – MCJC staff helped groups of neighbors communicate and work out solutions to thorny problems that resulted from conflicting interests. Typical issues that result in complaints to the police or City officials include noise, encroachment, hostility, dogs, etc. Whether the case is self-referred or comes to us from the police or departments within City government, mediation brings parties together and structures communication so that people talk more productively and figure out for themselves the adjustments needed to become more harmonious neighbors.

“[The meetings] provided a professional third party who was objective and not motivated by personal interests. The Community Justice Center ... balances the problems that can result from the domination of issues by ‘the strong versus the weak’.” – Participant in a series of Community Mediations

Conflict management services to area schools – MCJC staff works with administrators at several schools helping them develop healthier school climates. Staff is available for consultation on questions of restorative responses to wrongdoing.

The Restorative Justice Alternative – The MCJC combined several of its initiatives into this new program. This program keeps young people out of the criminal justice system, helps reduce court caseloads and offers a truly restorative response to crime as a benefit to victims and those who offend. Referrals are made by the police or the State’s Attorney’s office as an alternative to prosecution; fines and other imposed consequences; and/or supervision by the Department of Corrections. People who are affected by an offense have a chance to participate directly in its resolution. People who commit offenses have a chance to learn about the harm related to their actions and to make amends through restitution, apology, and other deeds.

“The best thing about this conference – finally coming to terms with the victims made me feel really good.” – Young offender who participated in a Restorative Conference

Circles for Success – The MCJC piloted this program intended to help young people at risk avoid the downward spiral that can accompany academic struggles and/or entry into the criminal justice system. Three or four volunteers are recruited for each person referred by the school, police, court, etc and they provide group mentoring on a weekly basis. The goal is to help those referred find their better selves by becoming mindful of their actions and being involved in community.

Reparative Boards – The MCJC expanded its capacity to deliver this program in January, 2007. Each of the three Reparative Boards is made up of four to six trained volunteers who meet with people who have committed crimes such as DUI, theft, and vandalism to look at the harm done to individuals and the community. Most referrals come from court as part of a sentence that includes reparative probation. The Board invites those who have been affected by the offense to participate in the process at whatever level of comfort they choose and then facilitates a conversation and the development of a plan for the person who offended to deepen the understanding of the harm, make amends, and not repeat the offensive behavior. Many people make amends by performing volunteer work in the community. A recent academic study repeats the finding of earlier studies that the reparative probation program “significantly reduces the likelihood of subsequent criminal offending compared to more traditional standard probations practices.”

“[The Reparative Board] taught me how to be accountable for my actions... this was a great chance for me to make amends! I hope that more people have the chance to use the rep board to make amends for their actions.” – Probationer sentenced to Reparative Board

“The victim impact [panel] made me think a lot how I affected everyone and not just the one person I took from!” – Probationer sentenced to Reparative Board and contracted to attend Property Crime Victim Impact Panel

Restorative Reentry Program – This was the first year this program was able to provide services to the full number the MCJC is capable of serving. The Restorative Reentry Program is designed to increase community safety as people transition from prison to supervised life in the community. Citizen volunteers serve on Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs), forming relationships with the reentry participant to help him or her make the choices necessary to become self-sufficient, law-abiding citizens and decreasing the likelihood of new victims. The MCJC helped all participants find housing and employment and connected them with the mental health, education and training, and substance abuse services they needed. The MCJC also provided direct victim services in the form of support and mediation services to three victims.

“The CJC is the best thing Corrections has had in my 25 years.” – Cindy Nichols, Probation Officer

“[T]he Reentry Program of the Montpelier Community Justice Center has a proven track record of helping people leave and stay out of prison. It has achieved significant savings—both in dollars and in human suffering.” – COSA Volunteer, in a letter to the editor of the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus

Education and training – The MCJC sponsored six “Difficult Conversations” workshops attended by more than 95 people. These workshops were created by staff and professional mediators and were provided free of charge to the community through the generous assistance of community partners: The Kellogg Hubbard Library, the Central Vermont Council on Aging, the Montpelier Police Department, the Vermont State Employees Association, and Woodbury College. These partnerships have been instrumental in helping the MCJC expand its reach to provide more services to the community.

“I learned more in two hours than in the preceding 51 years.” – Participant in “Difficult Conversations” Workshop

At the end of the year, the MCJC sponsored a workshop entitled “Stone Age Wisdom in the 21st Century,” led by an Inuit shaman and mediator who combined traditional healing methods with modern mediation skills to “melt the ice in the heart of man.” Participants responded with an outpouring of thanks and commitment to working with youth and the elderly in our community in new ways.

“I learned ... I should continue to work with young people.”

“I learned to open my heart to a cross-section of Montpelier.”

“I want to continue to help young people to have the strength to grow and find inner peace for themselves.”

“I want more wisdom of our elders shared with our community.”

--Participants in “Stone Age Wisdom in the 21st Century Workshop

Staff and Volunteers

The MCJC currently has a staff of two – Yvonne Byrd, Executive Director and Judy Gibson, Programs Coordinator. However, volunteers are key to our ability to deliver all of the MCJC’s services. Volunteers contribute in a myriad of ways. Some offer regular service on a Citizen Advisory Board, a Reentry Advisory Panel, Reparative Boards, and Circles of Support and Accountability while others have helped on an occasional or ongoing basis with special projects. The MCJC has also benefited from the pro bono work of professional mediators and facilitators in certain cases.

Active volunteers and community partners who generously gave of their time and talents during 2007 include: Kit Andrews, Vanessa Astacio, Marina Back, Michelle Barber, June Bascom, Jim Bellino, Michael Blair, Sarah Blakely, Betty Blouin, Tovar Cerulli, Art Chickering, Jo Chickering, Paul Coates, Sheila Coniff, Rebecca Cook, Don Dickey, Nicole DiDomenico, Strat Douthat, Jane Edwards, Alice Estey, Tony Facos, Allie Frances, Bobbi Gagne, Paul Goldstein, John Gorczyk, Gisa Green, Eva Gumprecht, Brooke Hadwen, Aaron Hartman, Mary Hooper, Doug Hoyt, Sarah Jarvis, Dick Jenney, Amybeth Kessinger, Renee Kievit-Kylar, Rachel Lawler, Evan Meenan, Alfred Mills, Kathleen Moore, Alaya Morning, Joanne Pereira, Kristin Prior, Kim Raine, Steve Reynes, Britt Richardson, Dee Rollins, Ginny Sassaman, Franklin Shiner, Glenn Sturgis, Shellie Swan, Peter Thoms, Lars Torres, Dan Towner, Connie Weems, Jody Whitaker, Elizabeth Wigren, and John Wires.

The MCJC continuously recruits and trains new volunteers for its reparative and restorative reentry programs. Training workshops are offered on a continuing and rotating basis on restorative justice, the experience of victims and offenders in the criminal justice system, the Reparative Board process, the operation of Circles of Support and Accountability, domestic violence, substance abuse, and honoring the victim in a restorative process.

We hold a vision for the future of the MCJC that includes continuing and expanding the programs we have while creating a restorative community service program that enhances the value of community service performed as a part of making amends. However, our main goal is to be responsive to the priorities of our community in delivering our services and we welcome suggestions, questions, feedback, and volunteers. We are located in City Hall and can be reached at 223-9606, or by email at mcjc@montpelier-vt.org.

Yvonne Byrd
Executive Director