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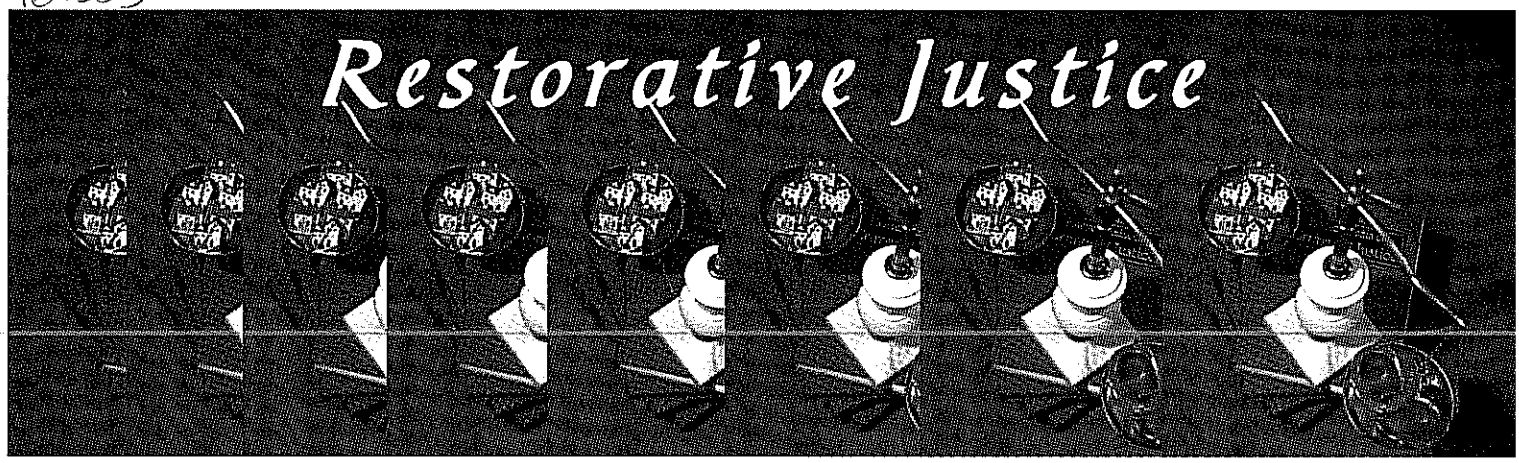

The NIC on Restorative Justice

A Brief History of the NIC's Involvement in Community Justice

By Mike Dooley

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has long been a supporter of restorative and community justice initiatives. As far back as 1993, NIC's community corrections division began studying community-oriented work practices.

More specific initiatives began with the designation of Madison, Wis., and Boston as unofficial host sites for NIC-funded collaborative programs between community corrections and police. The project became so popular that President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno visited the Boston site during the spring of 1997. And soon after, Reno directed the Department of Justice to press forward with plans for various national demonstration sites.

Soon to follow was the recognition of a concurrent, national trend toward community-oriented policing and restorative justice. A meeting between NIC and the Washington, D.C.-based Communitarian Network brought together criminal justice professionals, academicians, crime victims and others to discuss the implications for a community-oriented justice system. According to Ed Barajas, corrections program specialist at NIC, it was at this meeting that the notion of "community justice" truly evolved. The NIC Advisory Board decided to host its July 1997 meeting in Vermont, where the principles and concepts of restorative justice were being practiced. And it furthered its commitment to this new paradigm in justice during national hearings in the fall (1996) and winter (1997).

Outlined below are a few of the restorative justice initiatives sponsored or funded by NIC.

Demonstration Programs

Early in 1997, the NIC Community Corrections Division selected Deschutes County, Ore., as a development site for community justice. The goal of this project is to help the county develop a justice system that is more focused on crime prevention, promoting safety and security, and repairing the harm caused to victims and the community.

Assisting Deschutes County as a demonstration site is a multi-year effort and will continue through 1998. A second phase of the project will help the county agency develop a community justice vision, a mission and strategies intended to transform the agency into an integrated service delivery system based on the principles and values of community and

Current Levels of Agency Involvement

Currently Exploring Community Restorative Justice (CRJ) Concepts Respondents could choose more than one option.	54 Total Respondents
Unfamiliar with CRJ concepts	74%
Familiar with CRJ concepts, but no interest in adopting them	27%
Participating in an operating CRJ system	26%
Considering participating in CRJ	26%
Currently developing a CRJ system	24%
Have decided to participate in CRJ	17%

restorative justice. This transformative process will be documented and the implementation and outcomes evaluated. The Deschutes experience will serve as an example for other justice agencies and systems wishing to move into the arena of community and restorative justice.

Under the leadership of Corrections Director Dennis Maloney, the Deschutes County correctional system already has adopted a new name — the Department of Community Justice — and on June 25, 1997, the Deschutes Board of County Commissioners and Presiding Circuit Court Judge Stephen Tiktin presented former juvenile probation officers with their new commissions as community justice officers. Community justice officers now are expected to take a more active role within central Oregon to assist victims, offenders and the community in dealing with issues of crime and public safety. No longer will the focus and efforts of staff be exclusively on the supervision and treatment of offenders. "Nothing grows from the top down — things grow from the bottom up, and our role as government is to help communities develop the capacity to resolve their own conflicts, including crime," Maloney says. He adds that NIC has been invaluable to his efforts in Deschutes, and as a federal agency, should be commended for assisting in an initiative that "lets the community determine its destiny, and meets the needs of the community rather than some government trend."

Needs Assessment

A national training needs assessment on community restorative justice was completed in August 1997 by the NIC Information Center in cooperation with the NIC Academy. The survey was distributed to 300 agencies around the country representing community corrections; state departments of corrections (DOCs) without a community corrections component; jails; and various agencies with a victim orientation or interest. One hundred fifty-eight agencies responded. The survey was designed to assess the training and technical assistance needs of agencies interested in community restorative justice approaches, and to support the development of NIC training to be provided in FY'98 (see chart, page 110).

Among the 21 topics presented, the following five areas were identified as those in which assistance would be most helpful:

- Establishing and maintaining community involvement and partnerships (82 percent)
- Identifying funding and resources (68 percent)
- Defining and implementing community and restorative justice processes (65 percent)
- Involving offenders in the sanctioning process (62 percent)
- Developing strategies for working with victims (60 percent)

Training needs were fairly consistent across the three categories of corrections agencies surveyed, but were different for the victim services agencies. Community corrections

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respondents ranked community involvement and partnerships first, followed by funding, and strategies for working with victims. State DOC respondents gave equal ranking to community involvement, funding, and defining and implementing community and restorative justice processes. Jail-based respondents ranked community involvement and partnerships first, followed by equally ranked funding, and defining and implementing community and restorative justice processes. Those agencies with a victim focus emphasized funding, defining and expanding restorative sentencing and activity options, and community involvement and partnerships.

Survey respondents also were asked to identify one critical area of need. Several main themes emerged:

- program design: mission, models, pilot programs, best practices;
- general training about community and restorative justice philosophy, goals and approaches;
- funding;
- education for the community, justice system agencies, the media; and
- marketing assistance.

Videoconference

On Dec. 12, 1996, NIC sponsored the first mass dissemination of information and concepts on restorative justice through a live, national satellite videoconference from Ft. Lee, Va. The two-hour videoconference was downlinked by 350 sites from all 50 states and Canada. Several products also were developed for and as a result of the videoconference — an extensive bibliography identifying literature, publications, information and other resources related to restorative justice; and a videotape of the videoconference. Both, along with other materials and resources, can be obtained through the NIC Information Center. Most importantly, though, those who participated in the conference developed a core set of restorative justice principles and values. Those values and principles continue to be used by many who are exploring and developing restorative justice applications.

Curriculum Development

In 1998, the NIC Academy will sponsor two seminars on restorative justice in Longmont, Colo. The 36-hour program, titled "Restorative Justice: Principles, Practices and Implementation," will target 30 participants in three-person teams from correctional and criminal justice jurisdictions who plan

to implement restorative justice concepts and practices. Participants in the seminar will explore the principles, concepts and practices within a restorative justice construct. The seminar is intended to help participants refocus justice processes and practices to be responsive to victims and communities, and to repair the harmed relationship between victims, communities and offenders. Traditional criminal justice processes will be compared and contrasted with emerging restorative justice models. Restorative justice practices that require offenders to take responsibility and be accountable for repairing harm and understanding the impact of their crimes on others will be explained and demonstrated. Participants involved in the program will learn the importance of victim and community involvement and how to engage victims and community interest. Participants also will see how a system can develop, and how to implement restorative justice programs and practices. Finally, participant teams will leave the program with a strategic plan of action for the design, development and implementation of restorative justice.

A curriculum development package for the two seminars — including lesson plans, participant materials and other training-related resources and materials — is currently under development. The seminars are scheduled for April and June 1998; the curriculum package will be available for use by the field in July 1998.

DACUM

The NIC's DACUM initiative — Developing a Curriculum — is intended to address the field's need for job specifications, particularly as they relate to community and restorative justice. Since this is a new area for most correctional agencies, substantive job descriptions and specifications are few, leaving many agencies in the dark on who and how to hire; what kind of direction to provide; how to train; and how to evaluate performance.

Two distinct job areas — victim assistance within a correctional context and community resource coordination — have been identified for the development of specific standards to include the responsibilities, duties and tasks associated with them. The DACUM job task analysis process will be used to develop these products. For this initiative, NIC will identify and bring together persons from around the country who are performing these roles and functions to participate in the two-day process. The DACUM profiles on these jobs are expected to be available in the spring of 1998.

Research Update

As restorative justice gains popularity and momentum, it competes for attention and resources in traditional justice and corrections agencies. A natural and expected tension has developed between some advocates of restorative justice and some who have focused on evidence-based interventions for offenders that show a great deal of promise for a reduction

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of recidivism — and reduced victimization. In July 1997, NIC sponsored a meeting with a group of well-known restorative justice leaders and those who advocate a more offender-based focus. The meeting, hosted in Kentucky by the American Probation and Parole Association, was intended to explore the issues and opportunities within both areas of focus. The group met for an intense day and a half and batted around a variety of issues, including evaluation, clarity of purpose, principles and concepts, the advantages and dangers of victim involvement and the creation of a practical definition of "community." The participants realized that viewing justice through a restorative lens provided an excellent "human service" context within which to carry out promising interventions with offenders, and that this relationship bolstered the argument of doing effective treatment with offenders in what seems to be a never-ending argument of treatment versus punishment.

The group wrapped up the final hours of the meeting by creating and constructing systemic applications of combined evidence-based offender interventions with restorative-driven practices or within a restorative framework. Overall, the meeting was a great success. Greater clarity between the two approaches was obtained, and a variety of integrated applications were explored with a great deal of enthusiasm.

A written document of the proceedings is available from the NIC Information Center.

Regional Symposia

Led by the National Institute of Justice, five regional symposia on restorative justice also have been planned or held in various locations around the country. NIC is a co-sponsor of the symposium series, as are the Office for Victims of Crime, the Office for Justice Programs and the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The symposia target approximately 100 participants, in teams of three to five, from various criminal justice jurisdictions within a region, to include community members and victim representatives. The regional seminars are intended to be grounded in restorative justice practices and philosophies operating in, or potentially appropriate for, jurisdictions within a particular region. Planning and development exercises emphasize the incorporation of restorative philosophies and practices into criminal justice operations. Additionally, these events are expected to be useful formats for the sharing of information given the variation among jurisdictions and regions regarding restorative practices in criminal justice.

The first symposium, intended as a pilot, was held in June 1997 in Burlington, Vt. Others were held in Milwaukee (September 1997) and Albuquerque (October 1997). The final two are scheduled for Portland, Ore. (Dec. 11-12) and Austin, Texas (Jan. 11-13, 1998).

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