

# Restorative Arlington

Building community and effective responses to conflict and harm

## Update to the County Board

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### INTRODUCTION: CREATING A RESTORATIVE ARLINGTON

When conflict happens, or when someone does the wrong thing, often the best way to make things right is to fix it *together*. In other words, to prepare and bring together everyone who is affected by a situation to collaborate respectfully on creating a solution. That's the heart of the restorative approach. It is grounded in our common humanity and the understanding that we are all connected and have value, even when we have caused harm.

The restorative approach has ancient roots in indigenous communities. It is as old as conversations around a community fire. Restorative practices are now being applied successfully to contemporary situations all over the world — and around the greater Washington region. People are using restorative practices to strengthen their ties to each other and to resolve conflicts and incidents of harm or crime. Schools, justice systems, workplaces, and community- and faith-based organizations use this effective approach because it meets people's needs for connection, healing, and resolution.

In cases of harm, including crimes, restorative justice processes help meet the needs of people who have been harmed and create pathways for people who cause harm to take responsibility for their actions and make amends. Research has shown that restorative justice has effectively reduced reoffending and provides increased satisfaction for people harmed by crime, whose needs often cannot be met through current court procedures.<sup>1</sup>

In schools, as in communities, restorative practices help build better relationships, preventing conflict and increasing understanding across differences. Whole-school restorative approaches increase school connection, reduce the use of suspension and expulsion, and create a climate of strong relationships that support student achievement, leadership, health and development.<sup>2</sup>

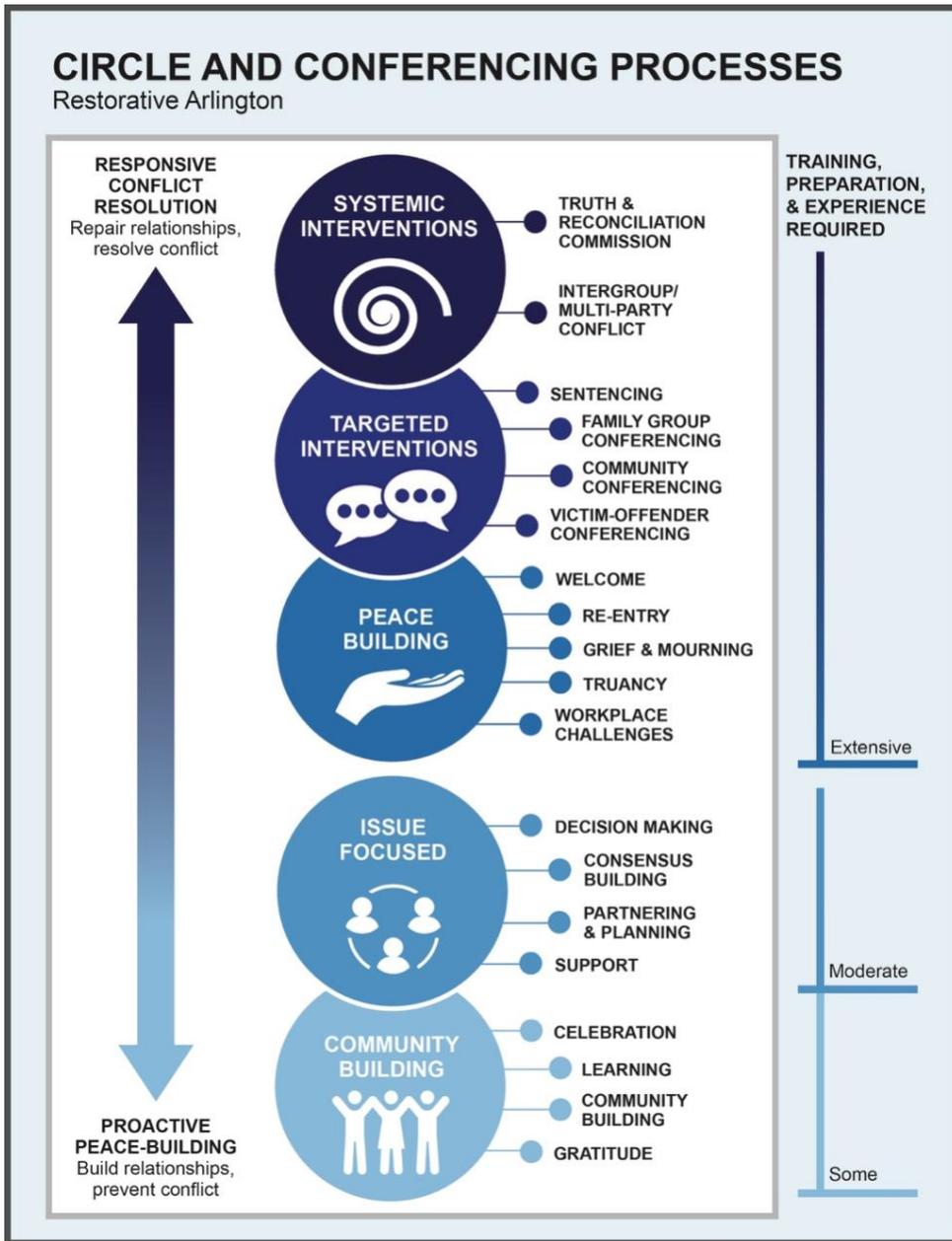
In keeping with Arlington's commitment to equity, restorative practices offer another way we can put our values into action: by adopting effective restorative practices in our legal system, schools, and community settings.

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<sup>1</sup> [Campbell Collaboration summary on face-to-face RJ conferences](#) (for a deep dive: [full report](#))

<sup>2</sup> [Health Equity, School Discipline Reform, and Restorative Justice](#), Thalia González, Alexis Etow, and Cesar De La Vega, 2019. [Restorative Justice in Oakland Schools Implementation and Impacts: An Effective Strategy to Reduce Racially Disproportionate Discipline, Suspensions and Improve Academic Outcomes](#), Sonia Jain, et al. (2014) [Increasing School Connectedness for Girls: Restorative Justice as a Health Equity Resource](#), Thalia González and Rebecca Epstein

## RESTORATIVE CIRCLE AND CONFERENCING PROCESSES



This infographic shows a spectrum of types of restorative circle and conferencing processes on a continuum from proactive to responsive. A restorative community will use a mix of these processes.

At the base, we see Community Building circles, a very proactive approach that helps prevent conflict and strengthen relationships.

Schools, community groups, businesses, faith-based groups and youth and family serving organizations may take on this type of process readily for their own use, since they require relatively little training and experience.

For conflicts and incidents of harm or crime, restorative practitioners use more complex processes and targeted interventions to respond to the situation.

These processes can be used in schools for disciplinary matters, in organizations to address conflict, and in our legal system to respond when someone commits an offense.

## THE RESTORATIVE ARLINGTON INITIATIVE

In December 2019, the Arlington County Board took the first step toward creating a Restorative Arlington by approving a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for a one-year employee loan from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to the Arlington County Manager's Office. Liane Rozzell, a Senior Associate at the Foundation and an Arlington resident for 21 years, became the Restorative Justice Project Coordinator, reporting to County Manager Mark Schwartz. This agreement took effect on January 2 and will expire on December 31, 2020.

The MOA holds Ms. Rozzell responsible for “working with stakeholders in Arlington County to create and, as approved by the appropriate entities in Arlington County, begin implementation of a cross-agency plan to make restorative justice practices available to Arlington County residents and others who come to the attention of local law enforcement, court, education, health and other agencies.” The scope of work includes these key tasks:

- **“Engage the public**, both to ensure that community input and feedback appropriately inform the planning process and, during implementation, to disseminate information widely about restorative justice practices and how to access them.”
- **Recruit, convene, staff and facilitate** “multi-disciplinary working groups representing key stakeholders”, and “leading them through a process to learn about best practices in restorative justice and related topics and develop plans to implement restorative justice practices in Arlington County.”
- **Identify** potential community-based partners to implement the resulting plans.
- **Research and identify** funding sources to support implementation.
- **Document the process** and share as appropriate.

The rest of this update focuses on the progress we have made on this scope of work.

## BROAD PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The task of public engagement began almost immediately. It included public information sessions as well as individual meetings with key stakeholders. The information sessions revealed a strong interest in — and desire to implement — restorative practices.

The first indication of the enthusiastic public response was a meeting of a small group of mental health advocates on January 11<sup>th</sup>. Liane was invited to address the group for an hour before their regular monthly gathering. With only a few days’ notice, word went out on social media, and the event drew 72 people on an unusually balmy Saturday afternoon.

The crowd included County Board chair Libby Garvey, Commonwealth’s Attorney Parisa Dehghani-Tafti, nearly a dozen Arlington Public Schools employees, school board members and candidates, two people from the Sheriff’s Office and a host of engaged and interested community members, who signed up for our email list and indicated that they wanted to be involved in the project.

During January and February, Liane held or spoke at a dozen different meetings in the community, reaching approximately 200 people in person. The final public meeting was scheduled for March 18 at Washington Liberty High School. Due to the pandemic and subsequent shutdown, that gathering was canceled. Liane pivoted and switched to an online webinar format, which drew just over two dozen people — again on short notice.

### Diverse stakeholders

Participants in Restorative Arlington working groups and committees include a diverse representation of people from across the County. They range in age from 17 to 81, including two high school students who serve on the schools working group.

Not including VCircle participants, the group is:

50% White

30% Black or African American

13% Latino/a/x or Hispanic\*

4% Asian

7% Multiracial or other

\* Percentages don’t add to 100, since these categories include both race and ethnicity.

## Representation in Restorative Arlington

County agencies and offices:

- Arlington Public Schools: school administrators, APS disciplinary team members, teachers and restorative practitioners.
- Commonwealth's Attorney's office, including Victim/Witness program
- Public Defender's office
- Department of Human Services
  - Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families
  - Project PEACE
  - Teen Network Board
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- General District Court Judge
- Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court Services Unit
- Sheriff's Office
- Arlington County Police Department
- Animal Control

Participants also represent:

- Black Parents of Arlington
- Special Education PTA
- Arlington Special Ed. Advisory Committee
- Doorways for Women and Families
- OAR of Arlington and Alexandria
- George Mason University's Carter School
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington
- Our Lady Queen of Peace church
- Northern Virginia Mediation Services

In addition to the public meetings, in the 10 weeks before the pandemic, Liane met with three dozen stakeholders inside and outside of County government and gave presentations to the Community Criminal Justice Board and the staff of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.

As a result of this outreach, a large number of people who live, work, volunteer or worship in Arlington are intensively engaged in the key Restorative Arlington committees and activities:

- Working groups: 50 participants, including 45 members, 4 co-facilitators, and 6 presenters
- Virtual Circles (VCircles): 85 participants, 14 facilitators for planning and execution
- Planning team/steering committee: 18 people have been part of this over time
- Interim Capacity team: 10 members
- Summer intern: 1
- Interim Co-Coordinator

A number of people have been putting in a great deal of time and effort to move the initiative forward, often taking on overlapping responsibilities on more than one of the groups mentioned above. We would not be this far without their commitment and dedication.

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## INTERIM CO-COORDINATOR

Beginning in early March, Kimiko Lighty began volunteering for the initiative. She is a restorative justice practitioner and an Arlington parent who is active in the Special Education PTA and the Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee. She also has expertise in mediation, conflict resolution and organizational development, among other skills.

Starting in April, Ms. Lighty generously took on a full-time workload as a volunteer and has become the interim co-

coordinator for the project. She has led the development of the VCircles, facilitates the schools working group, and co-leads the Interim Capacity team. This arrangement will not last beyond December 31, however.

## WORKING GROUPS

After an application and interview process, we established three working groups to figure out how we will adopt restorative practices in our legal system, schools, and community settings, in ways that are equitable, sustainable, flexible and responsive to the needs of all members of our communities, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.

The key deliverables for the working groups are plans and people:

**Plans:** each working group will develop strategic plans for implementing restorative practices in their respective areas of focus.

**People:** working group members themselves will form a cohort of informed champions for restorative practices in the County.

Since late April, the working groups have been meeting twice a month for 2.5 hours each meeting, with preparation in advance. We estimate that between the 45 members and 6 other people who have presented and participated, we have spent ~1200 person hours on working group tasks.

Between April and late June, the working groups had joint meetings in order to build a shared knowledge base and unified vision. Starting in July, the groups began holding separate meetings to focus on their plans.

The Legal System working group is planning how to achieve wide availability of restorative justice, so that people who have been harmed by crime have the possibility of a restorative justice process to address their needs. The working group will plan implementation of restorative processes for both youth and adults who have committed offenses, with a focus on reducing system involvement.<sup>3</sup>

The Schools working group is planning how to achieve wide adoption of restorative practices throughout Arlington Public Schools. Their plan will support and expand on existing restorative practices that are being implemented in several schools.

The Community working group is working to ensure that restorative practices are available outside of formal systems, and that there is widespread awareness of restorative justice. With such a wide scope, this group is continuing to refine their vision and explore possible approaches in order to plan effectively.

In August, we have teamed up with Restorative Response Baltimore to offer the working groups and other Restorative Arlington participants an online version of their Restorative Mindset training, which is a foundational training that they use as a prerequisite for potential restorative practitioners.

## “VCIRCLES” RESPOND TO CURRENT NEEDS FOR CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

In response to the pandemic shutdown, we adapted the restorative practice known as Community Building circles to the online environment and invited Arlingtonians to participate biweekly, starting in April. These Virtual Circles, or “VCircles,” provide an opportunity for community building, connection and support for Arlington residents and extended community members.

VCircles also offer an opportunity for Arlington Community members to become familiar with a basic restorative circle process. They present a model of community-based restorative practices that requires little training to replicate. As such, they provide an on-ramp to building capacity to use this fundamental restorative practice.

One of the VCircles goals is for participants to feel deeply heard, deeply respected, and better connected to other Arlington community members. VCircles evaluations suggest that this has in fact happened.

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<sup>3</sup> “System involvement” here includes everything from the point of arrest through informal and formal court supervision and processing.

### Sample quotes from VCircle evaluations

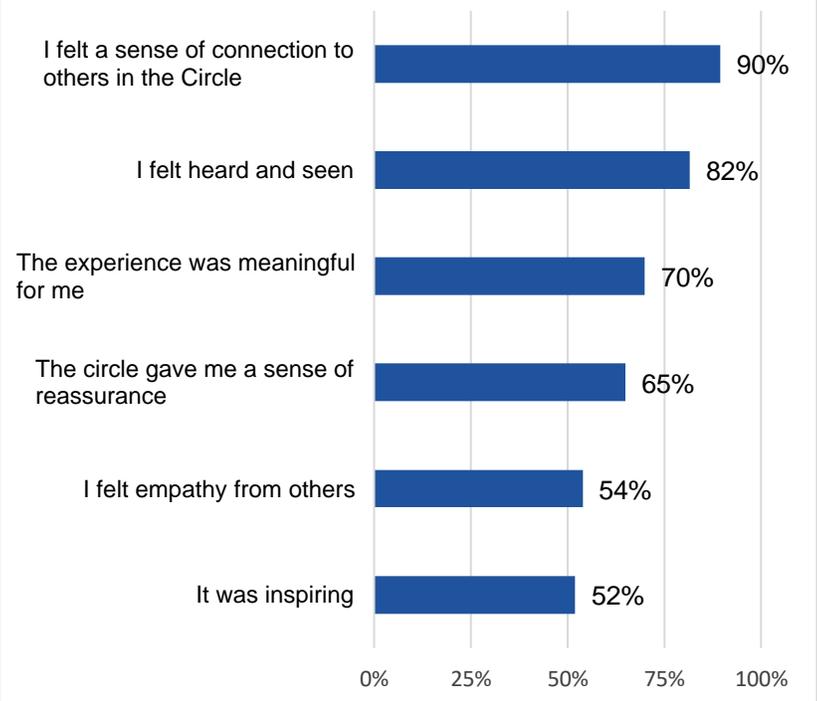
I appreciated making connections with open minded people and learning new approaches to adjusting to our new normal.

It was well-structured and included diverse participants (community roles, experiences, familiarity with circles).

Just so nice to meet some new people and be able to establish community pretty quickly. It was empowering to hear from others about their lives and fears and nourishment in this strange time. This week has been hard and this circle was a perfect way to end the week on a positive.

Since April, approximately 85 people have participated, and 14 facilitators have helped plan and/or implement the VCircle model. Together, we estimate that 300 person hours will be spent on planning and holding VCircles by the end of August. Unfortunately, due to limited capacity, VCircles will end on August 28.

### Which of these applied to your experience of the VCircle? 83 responses



## BUILDING INTERIM CAPACITY TO MEET PRESSING NEEDS

As the Restorative Arlington initiative has developed, and people have become more aware of the power of restorative practices, we have been asked to provide restorative interventions for different situations. Calling on local practitioners who were willing to volunteer, we have been able to arrange for restorative responses to address the Yorktown High School banner situation and context, as well as one case each in juvenile court and in the circuit court. We have done this on an ad hoc basis, since each situation seemed especially suitable for a restorative response.

However, we anticipate an ongoing need for restorative responses such as these — including training — while we are building out a sustainable long-term plan to provide such services and training consistently. To address this need, we formed an Interim Capacity team. This team will set up the needed infrastructure so that we can begin to provide access to a *limited number* of high quality, equitable restorative justice processes and training to meet *some* of Arlington's needs in the medium term, starting in October, if possible.

To do this, we will leverage the pool of skilled restorative practitioners and trainers in the DMV, including here in Arlington. For a number of reasons, especially equity, we will not rely exclusively on volunteers for interim capacity. Instead, we will seek funding to compensate the facilitators for their work on cases, as well as to pay a coordinator to match and supervise facilitators and serve as a bridge between them and referral sources.

These are the Interim Capacity team's key tasks:

- Identify funding sources;
- Contract with or hire a coordinator;
- Create a roster of vetted facilitators and trainers;
- Create processes, policies and procedures for using the capacity;
- Set up case tracking and evaluation processes; and
- Create materials for training and orienting end users.

## PARTNERING WITH GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY'S CARTER SCHOOL

Starting in January, we have been in touch with faculty at George Mason University's Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution (formerly the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution), to discuss building a productive relationship between the Carter School and the Restorative Arlington initiative.

Our primary liaison has been Professor Susan Hirsch, who serves on our planning team/steering committee and our interim capacity team. In addition to Dr. Hirsch, several Carter School alumni and graduate students are involved in the Restorative Arlington working groups, planning team/steering committee, and interim capacity team. As the initiative has taken shape, we have agreed on several areas where partnering will benefit both the Restorative Arlington initiative and the Carter School. These are outlined in a Letter of Intent signed by Carter School Dean Alpaslan Özerdem and Arlington County Manager Mark Schwartz.

In the letter, the Carter School notes that they expect to provide:

- Leadership support and capacity building
  - Serving on teams as needed
  - Joint grant proposals
- Technology and communications
  - Amplify Restorative Arlington activities
  - Communication strategy and tools such as web site, listserv, resource storage.
- Research & publication
  - Assessment and evaluation for Restorative Arlington projects
- Training and content development
- Possible CEU credits for courses or training
- Service-learning options where student projects will support Restorative Arlington priorities
- Facilities and support for events and activities

## TRANSITION TO IMPLEMENTATION

Each part of the initiative has a role in the transition to sustainable, equitable, and effective implementation of restorative practices:

- Working groups: create strategic plans, ensure a cadre of informed champions;
- Steering Committee: build partnerships, provide accountability, create a sustainable structure for implementation;
- Interim Capacity team: find and leverage resources to provide restorative practices and training as a bridge to full capacity;
- VCircles: provide community engagement opportunities and an experience of restorative practices.

In addition to these activities, we are taking on additional public awareness activities to continue spreading awareness about restorative practices. We are working with the Arlington Public Library to acquire books and other materials and to set up a resource page where people can learn more about restorative practices and find items to share in book or discussion groups.

Since Liane Rozzell's tenure ends in about five months, the Restorative Arlington teams and the County need to determine how to implement the strategic plans without losing momentum. We are exploring different options. We do know this: the current configuration, with a sole staff member dedicated to this work, is *not* a sustainable option going forward. That model has only succeeded thus far due to the addition of a second, unpaid, full-time staff person and many, many unpaid hours on the part of at least a dozen people.

In order to transition this effort into 2021, these functions will need to be in place *before December 31*:

Staff needed to carry the initiative forward:

- Project Coordinator
- Legal system implementation coordinator
- School system implementation coordinator (within APS?)
- Community-based implementation coordinator
- Operational support

Additional resources needed:

- Physical and virtual workspace and technology
- Funding for interim capacity:
  - training, services, additional expenses

For longer-term, sustainable implementation, dedicated staff will be needed to facilitate restorative practices, provide training, mentoring and coaching, supervise facilitators and provide operational support. These functions may be housed in a non-profit partner or partners, which can take case referrals from a variety of sources. In any case, the provider would also need a budget to support training, services and additional expenses.

An ongoing steering committee of some kind should also be in place to provide oversight and accountability, and to support the implementation process.

In summary, a lot of dedicated Arlingtonians are putting a great deal of time and energy into the effort to adopt restorative practices to meet the needs in our County. We are making progress toward a truly Restorative Arlington. We appreciate the Board's support for this work.