

Restorative Justice: A Model for Social Work Practice With Families

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Abstract

Restorative justice is an innovative concept that has received some attention in the field of criminal justice but that has been largely overlooked in the social work literature. Restorative initiatives (e.g., victim–offender mediation, family group conferencing) have special relevance for family practice. That these initiatives are effective in meeting participants' needs and consistent with social work values are major arguments of this article.

ONE OF THE SIX VALUES OF SOCIAL WORK, as spelled out in the social work code of ethics, is social justice. And what is meant by social justice? In the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, Flynn (1995) defined social justice as the embodiment of fairness (reasonable treatment), equity (similar situations dealt with similarly), and equality in the distribution of societal resources. As political theorist Iris Young (1990) argued, however, “social justice may involve distribution of resources, but may also refer to other ways in which social institutions inhibit or liberate persons” (p. 34). The *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW Code of Ethics)*, 1999, speaks of social justice in terms of “meaningful participation in decision making for all people” (p. 1).

In terms of etymology, the word *justice* is derived from the Latin *jus*, which in classical times denoted right, especially legal right (Ayto, 1990). Consistent with this literal meaning and Young's (1990) formulation, the focus of this article is on one form of social justice known as restorative justice. *Restorative justice* is a humanistic form of settling disputes that strives to reconcile the needs of victims and offenders with the needs of the community. Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm of the injury (Zehr, 1995). My concern in this article is with the two best known forms of restorative justice—victim–offender mediation and family group conferencing (FGC). Both models are widely used in situations involving

youths and their families. Both models are family focused.

Restorative justice is a model with special relevance to the field of social work because social workers have caseloads that consist of persons who have been victimized by crime or who are ordered into treatment by courts because of offending behavior. Such clients may or may not be entangled with the criminal justice system. Social workers may be directly or indirectly involved in court proceedings; they may even be in a position to influence legislation pertaining to correctional treatment. Restorative justice, similarly, is of relevance to social workers in the field of child welfare; FGC is being used in some counties and states to arrive at decisions in cases of child abuse and neglect (see Burford & Hudson, 2000).

The teachings of social work, however, in many ways, are out of sync with the dictates of criminal justice. Mainstream criminal justice and the punitive ethos that underlies it must be understood historically, as a carryover in the United States from our somber Puritan past. Whereas social work has had a commitment for over 100 years to rehabilitation for youth offenders, the recent trend toward even harsher punishment for minors who commit crimes is all too typical (Roberts & Brownell, 1999). Children who have committed serious crimes are now being tried in adult courts as if they were adults. Increasingly, the focus is on the act itself, not on the age of the perpetrator or the individual circumstances.

Criminal justice proceedings, moreover, often reinforce the negative view that somehow the victim is responsible for the occurrence of the crime (Van Ness & Strong, 2002). Although the primary victim today is encouraged to speak during the sentencing portion of the trial, the secondary victims of crime—families and neighbors in the local community—have no voice at all, no matter how great the impact of the crime (Bazemore, 1999).

In this article I trace the origins of restorative justice and discuss contemporary trends in victim-offender mediation and FGC. The final portion of the article relates restorative justice and especially FGC to social work values and practice frameworks. Restorative justice, in fact, is at the intersection of policy and practice. Theoretically, it closely relates to the empowerment and strengths-based perspectives of social work practice.

The Roots of Restorative Justice

Throughout history, local communities and traditional cultures developed ways of managing conflict and of bringing an offender to accountability to the community. These means of righting wrongs were ritualized but based on communication among members of the community and families of both parties. These forms of justice were found in all cultures. In the Navajo tradition, for example, peacemaking is a form of communal response to help people who have been harmed by another (Sullivan & Tifft, 2001). Community justice operated in early modern Europe but gradually emerged into state-administered justice (Zehr, 1995).

Today, deliberation takes place according to a standardized, one-size-fits-all trial or, more often, a plea-bargaining arrangement; victim input tends to be minimal in plea-bargaining hearings (Van Ness & Strong, 2002). Families on one side of the law are torn apart from families on the other side. Such court processes hardly enhance communication and healing among family members (Morris, 2000).

The legalistic concept of guilt, as Howard Zehr (1995) has indicated, is highly technical and removed from real-life experiences. The process rewards the person who denies his or her guilt and the one who has an aggressive, even ruthless attorney. The attorney's ability to demolish the witness, often the victim, is the measure of a successful lawyer. The whole adversarial process that dominates justice today harks back to the Middle Ages in England when hired combatants fought duels on behalf of accused individuals (van Wormer, 1997). Today's trial is the counterpart to yesterday's dueling, which was literally trial by combat. One side won while the other lost entirely. Crime eventually became defined as an offense against the state. The judge emerged as a sort of referee between the disputing parties.

Individual accountability—to the victim or community—rarely enters into the picture. If an accused person confesses

to the police, for example, his or her possibility of getting a good deal from the prosecutor is minimized.

The Case for Restorative Justice

Sometimes the adversarial approach is the best way if not to get at the truth (which it rarely does), then to protect the individual's rights. The right to representation by an attorney and the presumption of innocence are chief among these rights. Often, however, the pursuit of justice results in injustice. Factors of economics, gender, class, and race come into play. Justice, in practice, as Menninger (1966) suggested, may not bring fairness to all parties. Sometimes, too, the word *justice* is equated with vengeance. Witness, for example, the cry for "justice" in connection with the recent terrorist attacks on New York City (Peterson, 2001).

Justice, however, can be conceptualized another way. Justice can be sought in terms of reconciliation and the making of peace. Restorative justice suggests that the most important fact about crime is that it causes harm to individuals, their families, and communities (Bazemore, 1999). The most salient question thus becomes, "How can we best repair that harm?" not, "How can we punish crime?" Instead of focusing on a past wrong, what is needed is a form of justice that helps orient offenders toward the present and future state of affairs, toward membership in the community rather than removal from it. What is needed is a three-pronged system of justice: justice for the individual offender, the victim, and the community.

Restorative justice, as I have already noted, advocates nonadversarial forms of settling disputes and strives to restore individual lawbreakers to the community rather than isolating them from it. The active involvement of family members of both the offending and injured parties is one of the most striking aspects of this form of peacemaking. This outgrowth of Canadian Mennonite and Native American and Canadian Aboriginal peoples' traditions is emerging quietly to take its place alongside mainstream criminal justice (van Wormer, 2001). What does restorative justice seek to restore? It seeks to restore the torn fabric of community and of wholeness to all those affected by crime, to repair the harm done to the victim and community, and to make the offender accountable to both (Umbreit, 1998). Restorative justice condemns the criminal act but not the actor and holds offenders accountable, involves all participants, and encourages repentant offenders to earn their way back into good standing in society.

Victim-Offender Conferencing

Victim-offender mediation is probably the most common restorative justice program in the United States; restitution and community service are widely used sanctions. Such programs are proliferating nationally and internationally;

there are approximately 320 victim–offender mediation programs in the United States and Canada and over 700 operating in Europe (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001).

As suggested by its name, this model encourages one-on-one victim–offender reconciliation facilitated through a mediator. Since its inception in 1974 in Kitchener, Ontario, social workers have become increasingly involved in victim–offender conferencing as both community organizers and mediators (Umbreit, 1999).

Victim–offender mediation differs from other types of mediation—such as those found in the conflict situations of divorce and custody—wherein the focus is on settling a conflict in which both parties are disputants. Here, in this form of resolution, one party clearly has wronged the other and is prepared to accept the consequences. The issue of guilt or innocence is not being mediated (Umbreit, 1999). Because the primary focus is on dialogue, my preference is for the term *conferencing* rather than *mediation*.

First and foremost, victim–offender conferencing is victim centered. What it offers to victims is the chance to meet offenders in a safe, trusting environment where victims are surrounded by family members and key players in the event. With the assistance of a trained facilitator, the victim is able to tell the offender and others about the crime’s impact and question the offender about lingering aspects of the crime (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). There may or may not be a plan for financial restitution.

For the offender, such conferencing has the advantage of offering diversion from prosecution or the provision of the possibility of eventual parole. Psychologically, the opportunity to come clean as in cases of drinking and driving offenses can be a step toward personal rehabilitation and healing. Participation by family members of the offender can enhance communication by formerly estranged relatives and create a climate of compassion and reconciliation all the way around. Social workers can play an active role in case referral and intake, preparation of all parties for the encounter, conferencing, case follow-up, and research evaluation.

Key issues for social workers to resolve include the utilization of cofacilitators; the nature and duration of follow-up victim–offender meetings; the use of victim–offender mediation for more serious and violent offenses, including those in which the offender has been imprisoned; and the implementation of victim–offender sessions in multicultural settings.

Successful victim–offender programs have been implemented in Ontario and Manitoba, Canada; Valparaiso, Indiana; and Minneapolis, Minnesota; as well as Belgium, France and England (Umbreit, 1999). Following are descriptions of several exemplary programs.

In Minneapolis, the Central City Neighborhood Partnership has begun using a panel of neighborhood residents to meet with offenders charged with soliciting prostitutes. If the offender cooperates with the residents’ panel, the criminal case will be dismissed. At the conference, individuals in the neighborhood tell the offender about the effects of prostitution on the neighborhood. Typical sanctions would

be for the offender to contribute to an organization helping women escape prostitution, to write a letter of apology, and to help with construction on a halfway house (Knapp, 1999).

Another innovative program in Minneapolis is named AMICUS, which is Latin for *friend*. This organization sponsors a program for girls in trouble with the law that combines gender-specific concepts with the principles of restorative justice. A major challenge of this approach is to counter what the girls, hardened by their experiences with life and the criminal justice system, have learned—don’t trust anyone, don’t look your offenses straight in the eye, the victim is the enemy. Now

they are asked to sit in a circle with victims and family members—their own and the victim’s—their supportive probation officer—and to trust the truth that will emerge from the circle. Although individuals tell the offender how her behavior has caused them harm and discuss the strong feelings engendered by the behavior in question, a spirit of empathy, dialogue, and healing prevails (see <http://www.amicususa.org/>).

Within prison walls, members of victim impact panels speak to inmates. The purpose of these panels is to enable offenders to empathize with victims and/or family members for their loss. Some individual victims are arranging meetings with convicts for the purpose of communication, to get questions answered about the crime. Meetings are arranged with the help of a mediator. Sometimes the offender uses the occasion to make amends and ask for forgiveness. A kind of spiritual healing may take place, a healing involving both offender and victim. A Texas program focused entirely on victims has a waiting list of 300 victims wanting to meet their offenders (Morris, 2000). About half are the friends

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and family members of murder victims, another 25% the survivors of violent crimes such as assault and rape.

A moving description of the Transformation House program in Lexington, Kentucky, has been provided by Tereshkova (2000). Remarkably, the goal of the program is to bring together death row inmates with their victims' families to promote healing for both parties.

To learn more about the remarkable work that was being done at the women's prison in Kentucky, I went to central Kentucky to interview Linda Harvey, who is a social worker and the founder of Transformation House. Harvey's noteworthy work is family focused. Joining with a team of trained volunteers, Harvey offers interactive seminars to provide opportunities for healing for victims and survivors whose lives have been wrecked by violent crime. Seminars are offered in local prisons as well to help inmates face the impact of their crimes on surviving family members. Harvey's program is unique in that it operates outside the judicial system but in cooperation with prison professional staff.

FGC

We have the Maori people and social services authorities of New Zealand to thank for the introduction of this innovative program: FGC. This model of restoring justice is an outgrowth of both aboriginal and feminist practice concerns stemming from the international women's and children's rights movements of the late 1980s and beyond. Evoking the family group decision-making model to try to stop family violence, the FGC made its mainstream criminal justice debut in New Zealand in 1989. It also made a stage appearance about the same time in England and Oregon. This model is currently being tested in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as in communities in New Zealand, Austria, England and Wales, Canada, and the United States (see Burford & Hudson, 2000). Currently FGCs are used in many countries as a preferred sentencing and restorative justice forum for youthful offenders. Despite differences among jurisdictions, one common theme is overriding: FGCs are more likely than traditional forms of dispute resolution to give effective voice to those who are traditionally disadvantaged.

I have filtered out from the literature a number of characteristics of FGC relevant to child welfare practice. Compared with traditional practices in family work, the philosophy of FGC entails the following:

1. The sharing of decision-making responsibilities with families
2. Role of the social worker as partner/collaborator rather than expert
3. Decision making by general consensus
4. Process and decision making more likely to reflect the culture, traditions, and needs of the participants
5. Stress on the quality of relationships, not family structures

6. Beginning with a broad definition of what constitutes a family
7. Acknowledgement of the value of kinship care over stranger care for children in need of care
8. A solution-focused rather than a problem-focused framework
9. A proactive rather than an investigative model for addressing child mistreatment
10. A focus on building up social networks while not being blind to the risks to children in an unhealthy social environment

Unlike FGC concerning the welfare of an abused or neglected child, FGC for youthful offender situations involves a slightly different cast of characters and a focus on "deed not need." The focus, in other words, is on the offense and the harm done. Compared with traditional forms of juvenile justice, FGC has the following characteristics (as described by Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). FGC:

1. Entails an informal, "around the table," nonadversarial process
2. Includes a trained facilitator as discussion leader
3. Directly involves the victim and community affected by the wrongdoing in the discussion of the offense
4. Involves the victim and victim's family directly in decisions regarding appropriate sanctions
5. Stresses offender awareness of the human impact of his or her behavior
6. Provides the opportunity for the offender to take full responsibility for his or her behavior
7. Uses a narrative approach as each person involved tells how he or she is affected by the behavior in question
8. Engages the offender's family members and support system in the conference
9. Solicits the families' support in the process of the offender's making amends and repairing the harm

With the passage of the Sentencing Act of 2002, New Zealand enacted new legislation to make restorative justice processes that had formerly been used with juveniles and families in the child welfare system also available for adult offenders (Parker, 2002). Morris (2000) described in detail the impact of FGC on the family members and others who attended one of these gatherings in New Zealand. This gathering of participants seated in a circle concerned Norman, a teenager had robbed a store and then mugged a woman on the street:

The conference opened in the usual New Zealand way: people introduced themselves, and a prayer was said. Then the facilitator explained the reasons for the Family Group Conference. The aims were to deal with past hurts, seek any possible conciliation and reparation, and

to make the offender accountable for his actions. The charges were read and Norman acknowledged he had done them.... Norman's father spoke next. All those who report on FGCs say that one of the most powerful influences on offenders are the voices of those near and dear to them, speaking about how their behaviour has hurt them. Norman's father expressed sorrow to all the victims for his son's actions. (p. 129)

Events did not end there, however. Plans were made to help Norman get a job, to get reinvented with the church community, and to make arrangements to pay restitution for his crime.

The way it is presently practiced in the United States, FGC is criticized for its sometime failures to adequately prepare the victims and their families as well as the offenders and their families. Umbreit (2000) cautions FGC organizers against offender-driven aspects, for example, letting the offender's group choose their seats first. Another idea that requires close monitoring, according to Umbreit, is the tendency to select probation officers and school officials as coordinators. Given the retributive climate of the American criminal justice system, conference coordinators may produce an atmosphere of shaming and blaming of the offender. The recommendation is for social workers or volunteers trained in conflict resolution skills to attend to the emotional needs of the diverse participants.

Social work educators Kemp, Whittaker, and Tracy (2000) have adapted a strengths-based social network model of FGC for child protection practice. Central to their model is network facilitation to tap into the real power of natural helping. Network meetings are conducted to prepare participants for extended family decision making. The connection between the individual families and community resources is given special attention. For example, advocacy for kinship caregivers to become eligible for the same resources as are available to nonkin foster parents may be undertaken. Interlocking demands of previous poverty, social exclusion, weak community linkages, and troubled extended family relationships are typical challenges facing families seen in child welfare practice. Network facilitation is individually tailored, as Kemp et al. have indicated, on the basis of an identification of existing and potential network members. Ideally, FGCs will make creative use of network meetings for reconnecting estranged network members to the family circle.

Restorative Justice and Social Work Values

The *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999) states, "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty"

(Preamble). The empowerment approach is the basic organizing framework of social work practice. The overall goal of empowerment practice is social justice (Gutiérrez & Suarez, 1999). Restorative justice is closely linked to social justice in its emphasis on fair play for all participants.

Consistent with basic social work practice, restorative justice originates at both the grassroots and macro levels, often through court officials who define how the social institutions of justice are set up and the specific procedures that apply to achieving justice for victims, offenders, and their families. As an international movement, advocacy for the adoption of restorative justice principles nicely fulfills the NASW standard (1999, sec. 6.04c) that "social workers should promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally." The United Nations, in fact, has taken notice of alternative forms of justice, such as offender-victim mediation and informal means of dealing with certain crimes, as a development consistent with the human rights initiative. In 2002, the United Nations approved a Canadian resolution that encourages countries to develop and implement community justice according to the basic principles provided (Restorative Justice, 2002).

The mission of social work is rooted in a set of core values. According to the *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999, Preamble), the core values of social work are social justice, service, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Restorative justice very closely relates to social justice or fairness in that the victims and offenders each have their interests represented in the proceedings. Restorative justice as a holistic approach moves beyond simplistic either/or, winner-take-all modes of settling disputes into the realm of negotiation and the attempt to be fair to both parties. Third-party solutions can maximize benefits for all and minimize social costs. When lawyers are involved, they work with each other rather than against each other.

Through embracing members of the extended family, restorative justice, moreover, has been found to be highly effective in work in minority communities. These minority communities, including Native American, African American, and Latino traditions, are collectively rather than individually focused. The spirituality components, nonbureaucratic processes, and reliance on mutual aid are compatible with the values and traditions of the Latino community (Gutiérrez & Suarez, 1999) as well as with African American-centered principles (Carter, 1997). Indigenous populations such as North American Native tribes incorporate spiritual leaders into the healing process. In aboriginal culture, all life is viewed as sacred; disruptive acts typically are viewed as signals of relational disharmonies. The conference often draws on spiritual powers to remedy the relational disharmonies (see Ross, 2000).

Restorative justice, with its emphasis on truth-telling and its roots in religious forms of resolving disputes, leaves the door open for participation by spiritual leaders as well as for expressions of remorse by offenders. Part and parcel of this growing movement to deal with crime is the role that healing and even, at times, forgiveness plays. When it occurs, forgiveness can play a healing role, enabling victims to get on with their lives. It can help offenders face their actions and grapple with their futures (Lampman, 1999). The focus on spirituality makes this approach especially appealing to minority groups, for example, Christians (van Biema, 1999), those involved in indigenous rituals in New Zealand (Bazemore, 1999), as well as Canadian Aboriginal peoples (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 1998). In *The Spiritual Book of Restorative Justice* (Hadley, 2001), multi-faith perspectives and traditions, including Aboriginal religions, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism, are examined in terms of key ideas and practices of restorative justice.

Service, which in the order provided by NASW precedes the other core values, clearly relates to the requirement for social workers to volunteer their expertise and caring to persons in need. Activism to set up progressive programs and advocacy with state legislators for restorative initiatives are examples of services that dedicated social workers could provide.

As social workers increasingly recognize the need to deal with the spiritual as well as the biopsychosocial needs of their clients, a recognition not focused on among kindred professions (apart from ministry), social workers may come to see that they have a major role to play as policymakers and therapists in restorative justice meetings. This involvement would be especially appropriate today as the Council on Social Work Education revises its curriculum standards to include spiritual development as central to an understanding of human behavior in the social environment (Miller, 2001).

Dignity and worth of the person is the second core value of social work. With restorative justice, the dignity of both offender and victim are maintained through a process that is diametrically opposite to customary criminal justice proceedings—the orange suit, the publicity attached to the arrest and trial, the opposing lawyers' indignities and accusations, especially of witnesses. Here there will be a meeting; each side will have advocates and supporters who are given a chance to speak. The focus on the offender is on the offender's whole personality, not on only the act or acts that have caused the harm. Keep in mind that this process typically follows the formal adjudication of guilt or innocence and that at this meeting, the offender owns up to his or her wrongdoing and apologizes. Ideally, this informal but emotionally intense process humanizes the offender and victim. The emphasis on restoring the individual to the community rather than removing him or her from the community is an aspect of restorative justice of special benefit to women and minorities who so often fail to get individual attention

through the adversarial process. In this framework voice is given to women's concerns, for example, victim's concerns about feelings of safety.

The importance of human relationships is clearly a theme of the restorative justice movement. Offenders are restored to the community physically often through community service projects and psychologically through the contrition and remorse shown toward the victims. For juvenile offenders, such a drawing together of offender and victim in a face-to-face meeting might be especially conducive to helping them turn their lives around.

In a summary of his program evaluation findings, Umbreit (1998) reported that for victims, although the possibility of receiving restitution appeared to motivate them to enter the mediation process, after mediation they reported that meeting the offender and being able to talk about what happened was more satisfying than receiving restitution. Even in cases of extreme violence, victims and offenders often spoke of their participation in a mediated dialogue in which they expressed their pain as a powerful and transformative experience that helped them to heal, to let go of their hatred. In a study of arranged and monitored meetings between incarcerated inmates in British Columbia and the victims, victims reported they could see the offender as a person rather than a monster: They felt less fearful and more at peace. Offenders felt more empathy of victims' feelings and increasing self-awareness.

Integrity is a core social work value. We have seen how FGC has as its central premise the integrity of the family unit. Integrity, too, is strongly evidenced in a format built on the truth and frank disclosure rather than on creating a certain image to impress members of the jury. Consider the Canadian healing circle as reported in a *Toronto Star* article ("Healing Circle," 2001). According to this news story:

All the people touched by an offence have an opportunity to speak—at length—about how they were affected. That means an offender sees and bears, firsthand, the human impact of his or her actions. It means the victims hear why the offence occurred. And it means the offender hears his or her own voice, often apologizing through tears, offering to make amends. At the close, a contract is drawn up detailing what took place and how the offender will repair the harm. (p. NEO4)

Angel Yuen, a social worker with the Toronto District School Board, has facilitated many such meetings. What strikes her about such circle gatherings is the humanizing quality, how all present come to appreciate the magnitude of the harm that was done.

This brings us to competence, the final core social work value. Social workers, through their training in the social aspects of human behavior, in their work with both victims and perpetrators, have experienced vicariously the tragic

consequences of violent and nonviolent offenses. The profession's more than 100-year history of struggling with ways to promote social justice for oppressed populations demonstrates a commitment to vulnerable groups in society, such as persons with mental illness and survivors of domestic violence. The social work profession, with its long history of advocating for community-based treatment, its belief that most human beings are redeemable, and its stress on interdisciplinary team work, can expect to be playing an increasingly active role in facilitating nonadversarial forms of justice such as those described in this article.

Through the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, the National Restorative Justice Training Institute trains social workers and others on mediation and conflict resolution in communities, schools, workplaces, and the justice system. Support and technical assistance are provided by systemic change in the juvenile justice system (see <http://ssw.che.umn.edu/rjp/default.html>).

Evaluation Studies

What do the research results show? Restorative justice reform is an evolutionary process that begins with small pilot projects in jurisdictions wishing to implement systemic change in juvenile and criminal justice (Bazemore & Umbreit, 1998). To ensure the continuation of such programs, it is important to examine the impact of initiatives on the participants and to gauge the success of the interventions in achieving restorative justice goals; such goals include progress toward rehabilitation by the offender and progress toward healing by the victim. The evaluation research varies from general descriptions of particular interventions to more carefully conducted studies with comparison groups. For the form of intervention most often studied—victim-offender mediation—the evidence of program effectiveness has been consistently favorable. For example, in Vermont, where the restorative justice model is used, preliminary studies show that over 80% of the more than 4,000 offenders who have gone through the mediation process have completed it successfully and that they are less likely to reoffend than those who go through probation (Bazemore & Umbreit, 1998).

In Winnipeg, Manitoba, in a diversionary project called the Restorative Resolutions Project, of the 81 cases accepted into the program by officials, results were moderately successful. Over \$130,000 (Canadian) in restitution was paid to victims; many clients followed through with the community service work; one quarter of the victims received written apologies from the offender; and clients demonstrated statistically significant lower recidivism rates as a result of participation in the program. One shortcoming of this project was the refusal of victims to meet the offenders face to face; instead, they submitted statements. More educational and counseling work presumably needed

to be done to prepare victims for a personal encounter (see Bonta et al., 1998).

An interview with Thomas Quinn (1998) of the National Institute of Justice provides the results of a survey developed by the University of Delaware and sent to a large sample including legislators, judges, corrections officials. Findings revealed that the respondents stressed several positive effects of the interactions—offenders were more likely to understand the impact of their crimes and to be forced to face the consequences of their acts, and the system worked more efficiently in diverting cases from the formal process and meeting the needs of victims. Concerns expressed about the program were vagueness of the term *restorative justice*, due process issues (e.g., ensuring that participation was voluntary), the time-consuming nature of the preparatory work, and sentence disparities.

Perhaps more compelling than the survey findings on victim satisfaction are the personal stories collected by Ruth Morris (2000) in her world travels and Howard Zehr (2001) in his interviews with crime victims years after their victimization. John Sage, for example, whose beloved sister was murdered, has found peace in speaking on a victim impact panel that visits prisons. "I'd never seen a group of people with less empathy in my life," he shares, "but I saw things happen. People's lives changed over a period of 90 days. I saw men admit to things they had never admitted to anybody" (p. 164).

Conclusion

Roberts and Brownell (1999) quoted Stanley Witkins, who said,

As I see it, social work should be ... a catalyst for thinking in new ways about ourselves and those with whom we work, helping us to articulate major policy issues, generating more just alternatives, and evoking reflections on issues that define us as a profession. It should challenge taken-for-granted beliefs ... and promote new forms of understanding and practice.

As Roberts and Brownell (1999) further indicated, forensic social workers in counties in Florida, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Texas (and, I would add, Canada) are leading the way in implementing a restorative community justice model to aid in healing victims, helping offenders repair the damage they have done, and providing the supervision they need for a new start in life. In terms of its ability to incorporate native rituals in healing meetings and in inclusion of religious concepts that are culturally specific to the participants, this model has special appeal for minority groups and especially indigenous populations. The inclusion of input from extended family and community representatives endears this approach to cultural minorities as well.

The significance to social work family practice is especially pronounced in the field of child welfare. The FGC model, especially in its social network-building aspects, is a prime format for decision making concerning the vested interests of the child. The impetus within social work for kinship care, for resources to help make this possible, and for community support combines to make family conferencing an excellent fit for the disposition of child welfare cases.

In family practice in which one or more members are involved in the criminal justice system, restorative justice offers promise in terms of its reconciliation and healing powers. Restorative justice is a process designed to bring out the best in the offender—instead of becoming isolated and embittered, being grateful for fair treatment—and in the victim—instead of seeking revenge, accepting the offender's apology and/or restitution. Empowerment, honest sharing, accountability of the offender, recovery of losses, and a sense of satisfaction in helping the offender to change are key features of this dynamic approach. The challenge to the social work profession is to learn ways of making correctional strategies more consistent with social justice and to participate in the planning, research, policy-making, and facilitation aspects of this more humanistic form of justice.

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techniques that helped locate “hidden populations or those less likely to volunteer for research” included consulting African American families familiar with the community, contacting religious, medical, and social institutions to access minority subjects, and “snowball sampling” (discussion of which covers ways to limit bias).

Kam-shing Yip, Mei-yuk Ngan, and Irene Lam explore a little discussed problem and its consequences in *A Qualitative Study of Parental Influence on and Response to Adolescents' Self-Cutting in Hong Kong*. Building on reports that parents or professionals who mishandle this problem may provoke further self-mutilation (which peaks between ages 16 and 25), the authors offer cultural perspectives (for example, Chinese emphasis on submission to authority figures as a factor in nonempathetic parental response) and useful findings for strengths-based parental training, individual counseling, family therapy, and self-help groups to help adolescents work through their frustration, anger, and feelings of emptiness relating to self-cutting.

Adital Ben-Ari and Faisal Azaiza report on *Effectiveness of Helplines Among Sociopolitical Minorities: A View From Both Sides of the Line* about helping the Arab population in Israel. Their report demonstrates that attitudes toward giving and receiving help are inextricable from political, economic, and cultural factors. For example, in the Arab culture, seeking help violates belief in “the ability of the collective to provide support in times of need and the belief in fate and destiny.” Nonetheless, young Arab women, “those with the least power and in need of the most help” are finding that helplines can be lifelines “in a society plagued by social and political upheaval” when the informal support system (family or community) fails, and professional systems of service delivery frighten.

Julie Schroeder sees social workers as an important addition to defense teams working toward appropriate sentencing through better understanding of the circumstances and conditions leading to homicide in *Forging a New Practice Area: Social Work's Role in Death Penalty Mitigation Investigations*. In describing social work roles, knowledge, and skills in mitigation as a specialty, the author cites “excellent preparation courses” as those “addressing legal and ethical issues in capital cases, report writing, legal research, working with difficult populations, crisis intervention, and victim mediation,” as well as life history research.

Alex Gitterman and Julianne Wayne help those interested in developing skills in group work to learn how to transform discomfort into productive work and mutuality in *Turning Points in Group Life: Using High Tension Moments to Promote Group Purpose and Mutual Aid*. Building on the skills model for building mutual aid in group work of Shulman and others, and well-illustrated by case histories, the authors bring their experience in both the practice and teaching of group work to bear on identifying areas in group formation and functioning that are potentially critical to its success and effectiveness. “Discomfort in a group represents a sign that something important is happening. As workers recognize the discomfort and model courage and openness in exploring and dealing with it, they help members to do the same.”

Finally, **Katherine van Wormer** shares an important and timely issue, *Restorative Justice: A Model for Social Work Practice With Families* (a subject akin to network therapy, which has its roots in nonadversarial rites for settling disputes in the natural healing circles of indigenous peoples). She connects this model from criminal justice with the values of social workers (social justice, personal dignity and worth, human relationships, integrity, and competence) to help expand our repertoire of skills and services. “At its heart, restorative justice builds on ... active involvement by offenders in their rehabilitation,” which “can be empowering for all concerned.”