



## Restorative Justice: Recommitting to Peace and Safety

Many Canadians feel that the justice system that has been in place for decades is not always the best practice to deal with some criminal acts. The justice system protects human rights, dignity and demographic values. Restorative justice offers the same protection, but includes everyone affected by a crime, costs less, reduces delays and resolves the problem when the offender owns up to the crime. In the formal justice system, there may be long delays after harm has been done before a judgment is given. The main goal of the formal system is to decide whether the accused is innocent or guilty. Those who suffer harm may not get a chance to speak except when the trial is over. They can't talk about what would make them feel better. An alternative system of justice is needed to respond to those needs.

The philosophy of restorative justice is based on community healing. In other words, the community decides what is best for itself in terms of resolving certain criminal matters. The focus in restorative justice is on offender accountability, problem solving, and creating an equal voice for offenders and victims. The best results occur when the victim, offender, and the community jointly resolve the affects of a offenders' behavior. There are many options within restorative justice. The RCMP is championing one specific process: Community Justice Forums (CJF).

## What is a Community Justice Forum (CJF)?

A CJF is a safe, controlled environment in which an offender, victim and their families or supporters are brought together under the guidance of a trained facilitator. Together they discuss the offence, how they have all been affected, and jointly develop a plan to correct what has occurred. Offenders must accept responsibility for their own actions. They are confronted with how their behavior affected the victim personally - and they hear it directly from their victim. The conversations are often difficult and emotional, so a neutral, impartial and well trained facilitator is present to guide the conversation. Each is encouraged to speak openly, honestly and fully. Together they create a plan that will satisfy the needs of everyone. Sometimes it is enough for the offender to apologize and return what was taken or fix what was broken. Other agreements may include community service work, counseling, or addictions treatment for the offender. Other solutions are possible, and welcomed.

## Do my circumstances qualify for a CJF?

The following conditions must be met before an offender can be considered for the process:

- The offender must take responsibility for his or her actions and be willing to participate voluntarily.
- Victim involvement is essential to the process.
- Criminal cases are referred to the process by the police or Crown.
- The facilitator must feel that the case is suitable for a CJF.

## The Benefits of a Community Justice Forum

- Often costs less and happen more quickly than the court system
- Everyone has a chance to hear and be heard
- Outcome is chosen by those most directly affected
- Everyone gains a deeper understanding of the incident
- Those affected find out why the harm occurred
- Those who committed the act own up to the harm they caused
- Bonds between people can be restored or created
- Victims and offenders receive closure and healing

## Why are Community Justice Forums successful?

A CJF is powerful in its ability to return balance to the lives of those involved. The process provides an opportunity for offenders to accept responsibility for their actions and to understand the impact of their behavior on others. This realization often brings about deep feelings of remorse and empathy. Consequently, when offered the chance, many offenders are willing to do whatever they can to repair the harm they have caused. Moreover, when victims are able to express how they have been affected by what has happened and then see and hear genuine expressions of remorse, they are often quick to accept and to forgive. This enables everyone to return to the community with a sense of closure and optimism for the future.

## Where can I get more information?

For information about Community Justice Forums and other restorative practices, check our website at [www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca). For more information that applies in your area or to discuss a specific case, please contact your local RCMP detachment.

The RCMP works in cooperation with all police forces, levels of government, Aboriginal leaders, and communities in Canada.