Restorative Justice Summary

In communities and many countries throughout the world, Restorative Justice provides an alternative framework for thinking about wrongdoing.

The Restorative Justice movement originally began as an effort to rethink the needs which crimes create, as well as the roles implicit in crimes. Restorative Justice expands the circle of stakeholders to those with a stake or standing in the event or in the case beyond just the government and the offender to include victims and community members also.

Restorative Justice is limited to “judicial” needs- those needs of victims, offenders, and community members that might be met, at least partially, through the justice system.

Of special concern to Restorative Justice are the needs of crime victims that are not being adequately met by the criminal justice system. A major area of concern that gave rise to Restorative Justice is offender accountability. Community members have needs arising from crime, and they have roles to play. The basic concerns about the needs and roles of victims, offenders and community members continue to provide the focus for both the theory and practice of Restorative Justice. In short, the legal or criminal justice system centers around offenders and making sure offenders get what they deserve. Restorative Justice is more focused on needs: those of Victims, Communities, and Offenders.

Restorative Justice is based upon an old, commonsense understanding of wrongdoing and is the way many of our ancestors (and perhaps even our parents) understood wrongdoing.

- Crime is a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships.
- Violations create obligations.
- The central obligation is to put right the wrongs.

Three central concepts or pillars of Restorative Justice are: harms and needs, obligations, and engagement.

1. **Restorative Justice focuses on harm.**
   Restorative Justice understands crime first of all as harm done to people and communities.

2. **Wrongs or harms result in obligations.**
   Restorative Justice emphasizes offender accountability and responsibility.

3. **Restorative Justice promotes engagement or participation.**
   The principle of engagement suggests that the primary parties affected by crime – victims, offenders, members of the community – are given significant roles in the justice process.

Restorative Justice is constructed upon three simple elements or pillars: harms and related needs (of victims, first of all, but also of the communities and the offenders); obligations that have resulted from (and given rise to) this harm (the offenders’, but also the communities’); and engagement of those who have a legitimate interest or stake in the offense and its resolution (victims, offenders, and community members).

In summary Restorative Justice requires, at minimum, that we address victims’ harms and needs, hold offenders accountable to put right those harms, and involve victims, offenders, and communities in this process.