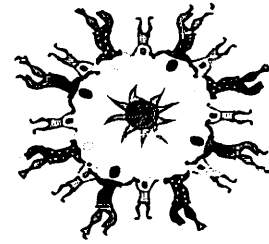


Tri-County Restorative Justice

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Biography:

Tanya Bain is the Director of the Tri-County Restorative Justice, located in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. In collaboration with referral sources, government, and community partnerships, the Agency provides individualized, forward-focused processes addressing youth accountability, victim voice and community needs. This work is done broadly within the community under the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program. As a community partner with the Department of Justice, she meets regularly with other Restorative Justice Directors to workshop, evaluate and share knowledge on Restorative Justice. Over her career she has been involved in testing new and proactive ways to implement a restorative approach to contribute to crime prevention. *Bringing Restorative Justice to Schools* and *Healing Approaches to Senior Abuse* are successful examples of community collaboration creating a reduction on the impact of the criminal justice system. Tanya identifies her increasing interest in working collaboratively across all sectors as an exciting opportunity to work through conflict, build relationships and help create healthier and safer communities.

Tri County Restorative Justice:

Tri-County Restorative Justice is a community based, not-for-profit Agency funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice. We are located at the Southern tip of our province in Yarmouth. Today, I will be offering my own community perspective and highlighting the success of our work by using a restorative approach. We have been delivering formalized Restorative Justice processes for the past sixteen years along with our eight sister Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Agencies ensuring youth accountability, victim voice and community needs. Our case stories and practical experiences have proven to be instrumental in Nova Scotia. We have supported other organizations that have used our formalized Restorative Conferencing model and broadly adapted and applied the restorative approach we take and the processes we use in our work. The Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Agencies are designed to work alongside partners within the criminal justice system.

A brief overview of our work at Tri- County Restorative Justice:

We receive referrals to our Agency for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 who are in conflict with the law. One of the minimum requirements is for youth to be willing to take responsibility for their actions. Within our processes, we assist youth in beginning to understand their responsibilities and consequences of their actions. We also help them begin reflecting on who was affected and how their actions have impacted others. There are three components to the RJ process: Pre-conference, Restorative Conference and Post Conference follow-up to ensure agreements are honoured.

Within a week of receiving a referral, we contact the individuals affected by the incident to arrange a *pre-conference*.

A pre-conference is an essential component of our work which involves meeting individually with those who caused harm, and then with those who were harmed. These conversations are a key component for caseworkers to explain the process, to listen to individual perspectives, to help identify root causes of the incident and begin to understand the web of relationships connected to each individual. Pre-conferences also provide an opportunity to begin identifying, describing and building connections with local resources that may be helpful in moving forward.

Throughout the Restorative process, we are very mindful of the support victims may need and safety concerns they may have. Victims decide how they may have input if they wish to be part of the process. Some victims want the opportunity to participate in person to share the impact of the crime and have a voice in determining what needs to happen to move forward. Some victims may chose a supportive friend or family member to represent them in the process.

Some victims may decide that they do not want participate in person but want to be updated on the Conference. Victims decide what is right for them and their decision is respected in Restorative Justice. Pre-conference work is important to understand the needs of everyone affected by the crime.

After the pre-conference work is complete, a Restorative Justice Conference is scheduled. It provides the opportunity to bring the individuals together in a facilitated, voluntary process to discuss what has happened and what needs to happen to make things better for everyone affected by the incident. Everyone at the conference helps design an agreement on moving forward.

Our Agencies became connected to NSRJ-CURA in 2005. I believe this partnership between community organizations, government, university partners and researchers was a starting point in Nova Scotia for Restorative Justice Agencies to really think more deeply about how we can strengthen our work. Professor Jennifer Llewellyn guided new conversations and opened our eyes regarding how a restorative approach could look in new contexts outside of the Criminal Justice system. Exploring relational theory helped us focus on the importance of relationships as a starting point as we broadened our work and supported new restorative processes. We realized that a restorative approach is more than Restorative Justice practices, more than conducting Restorative Conferences to solve problems, it's about how we approach our justice work and intentionally establish and build better relationships. Our thinking truly began to shift and we realized that our work could become so much more than responding when something goes wrong. We wanted to create better and more supportive relationships within our communities to ensure that things went right. It became clear that our work was about being proactive to build the relationships and connections required for public safety and to prevent crime. Our work in the Restorative Justice program with youth in conflict with the law presented clear opportunities and indeed required us to think more holistically about what justice required for offenders, victims and the community.

Over the years, during our pre-conference work with referred youth, we noticed many who were experiencing poor relationships within schools. Many youth were not in school or had poor attendance, a low interest in education, and negative relationships in the school community. Often, behavioral problems led to suspensions and suspensions led to conflict with the law. Tri-County Restorative Justice became part of a team in the provincial dissemination of the *Restorative Approaches in Schools* model. The outcome of this initiative has been the gradual spread of this approach to more than 100 schools in Nova Scotia with a growing commitment from government to further support this grass roots growth of a community building approach. For us, we truly want to help support youth in our community by creating better connections in our schools to prevent youth from becoming in conflict with the criminal justice system and also from entering our Restorative Justice offices.

In terms of criminal justice work, when we reflect on the successes of addressing school based incidents, it is very exciting to connect the implementation of a restorative approach in schools to the reduction of referrals to our Restorative justice offices.

We tend to want to focus on how to respond *when things go wrong*, but we now continue to recognize that the focus should be on daily interactions and intentionally thinking about creating better and more supportive relationships in our communities across sectors. To contribute to the well-being of our communities, we have since supported various community groups, individuals, and organizations as they adopt a restorative approach. Our position within Crime Prevention has allowed us to think more broadly about how we can respond to these community needs and become partners in proactive ways. We want to be a helpful resource and link for organizations/departments/individuals to share strategies with one another. In a cross-organizational approach, building meaningful and stronger relationships while exploring and implementing solutions to issues of common concern is where we continue to see so much success.

Healing Approaches to Senior Abuse (HASA) Network and Restorative Approches to Senior Safety (RASS) consists of diverse groups of individuals (community, government & researchers) within our community working together and thinking through some complex issues regarding our senior population. This group was established to begin thinking collaboratively about restorative ways to address senior issues and identify gaps in services. Issues are addressed by Senior Safety Coordinators who are working directly with seniors and their families. We have regular meetings working together across sectors and systems to broaden our knowledge, share resources and brainstorm strategies to help seniors and their families and create deeper community partnerships. Everyone brings a unique perspective to the table. We see the benefits of intervening early and proactively with seniors who may be at risk, in similar ways we see successes in youth referred to the NS Restorative Justice Program at earlier stages and entry points.

Sharing knowledge and listening to partners in our communities, and subsequently connecting to others provincially, nationally and internationally regarding personal experiences, policies, best practices, action plans, theory and research have shaped our Agency significantly. These collaborative efforts have allowed us to support work outside of a criminal justice context and think about community building more holistically. We have so much to learn from one another which can only enhance our vision to explore new ways of collaborating and focus less on thinking that one organization can do all of the work. When we have conversations and information exchanges regarding restorative work, we allow our eyes to open wider to the possibility of broad collaboration and solving community issues.

Over the years, Restorative Justice processes have contributed to more meaningful outcomes for victims and referred clients but this work is more than just responding to Restorative Justice cases. The proactive work we now do contributes to the relationships that we have built over the years within Restorative Justice with individuals, groups and stakeholders.

We have noticed increased levels of community support in our traditional Restorative Justice conferences and our work has resulted in many new cross-organizational opportunities that are focused on crime prevention.

As the smallest rural Restorative Justice Agency, we have slowly shifted our focus. Not only do we think about the impact of crime on victims, offenders and community, we support organizations and institutions moving forward with a restorative approach. This does not mean that we are involved in the roll out of all restorative work in Nova Scotia; it means that we are much more connected across sectors than we ever have been. We are able to do this work under one of the Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program goals: Strengthening Communities.