

Restorative Justice Benefits Everyone

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Our neighbourhoods continue to become stronger and safer.

Police tell us that crime rates for almost every type of offence continue to drop. For the first time in many years, the population in Manitoba's jails has levelled off — lately, it has even declined.

We must continue to find better and smarter ways to reduce crime. This includes finding ways to change the behaviour of offenders, and giving victims a greater stake in being part of the solution. Restorative justice is a way to do that.

This spring, I introduced The Restorative Justice Act, which expands the use of restorative justice in Manitoba. Police and Crown attorneys will be encouraged to give victims information on restorative justice opportunities, while experts in restorative justice will be encouraged to expand its use in our communities.

While it is often presented as a "new" approach to public safety, restorative justice follows practices used by Aboriginal people in Manitoba for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Many individuals and groups working to reduce crime and jail populations support the principles of restorative justice. These principles echo the beliefs of the many diverse faiths of Manitobans.

Restorative justice can be applied anywhere — not just within the justice system, but in schools, workplaces, and other organizations. It can serve as an alternative to our "traditional" court system. Instead, where an offender is prepared to take responsibility for their actions, the community determines the best way for an offender to make up for their actions. The victim can also be part of this process. The restorative solution can include an apology, compensation or other creative responses. It can also require the offender to complete programs that address underlying mental health issues, including struggles with anger or addiction.

Restorative justice can reduce the likelihood of someone reoffending, and can also help increase the confidence victims of crime have in our justice system.

We are lucky to have strong community organizations dedicated to the expansion of restorative justice. Both Mediation Services and the Aboriginal restorative justice agency Onashowewin offer a range of programs to pursue healing and reconciliation. Both strive to facilitate constructive responses to conflict by offering community based, culturally appropriate methods of conflict mediation. Get in touch with Mediation Services at 204-925-3410 or Onashowewin at 204-336-3600.

As well, don't hesitate to contact my office at 204-783-9860.