

The Restorative Arlington Initiative

The Restorative Arlington initiative is a countywide, cross-sector effort to bring the benefits of restorative justice practices to Arlington. Starting in late April 2020, a dedicated group of 45 people who live, work, worship, teach, study and volunteer in Arlington County, Virginia, began to explore how to adopt restorative justice practices in Arlington’s schools, legal system, and community contexts. These Restorative Arlington working group members met for more than 1,300 person-hours over six months, learning from experts in both nearby communities and other parts of the country.

This strategic plan emerged from that work. In it, we outline the vision and principles that will guide the Restorative Arlington initiative going forward. It is the general framework for the more detailed implementation efforts that we are starting to develop. We hope it informs and inspires you to support and engage with the Restorative Arlington initiative.

Vision for a Restorative Arlington

An equitable, empathetic community that honors the dignity and humanity of all people and creates pathways for belonging, healing, accountability, and growth.

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Connection, Equity, Belonging

Restorative Justice & Restorative Practices

The terms Restorative Justice (RJ) and Restorative Practices (RP) refer to an approach and processes that:

- Have their origins in indigenous knowledge;
- Deepen connections among people through intentionally inclusive practices that cultivate empathy, trust, and mutual respect;
- Respond to harm by engaging all affected parties — and others as needed — in creative, collaborative processes that enable meaningful accountability through acknowledging and repairing the harm;
- Support community members in handling conflict in potentially transformative ways; and
- Advance equity through a framework that is deeply rooted in the understanding that we are all interconnected and we all have value.

91%

of harmed people would recommend a restorative conference to a friend.⁵

It is up to
8 TIMES

more expensive to use the court system than restorative justice conferencing⁶

Using restorative practices Minnesota schools reduced suspensions⁷ by

63%

Benefits for Arlington



Paths to Equity

A healthy, thriving community ensures that no one is marginalized, forgotten, “othered,” or considered disposable. As a county, Arlington is committed to becoming an equitable community “where all are valued, educated, healthy & safe regardless of race.”¹

When applied with an intentional focus on systemic contexts and power structures, restorative justice practices offer practical tools to bring about greater equity through:

- Reducing disproportionate impact of punishment and criminalization in school and legal systems
- Providing space to discuss, learn about, and take action on challenging issues of bias, power, and privilege
- Fostering institutional accountability for eliminating systemic inequities

Adopting effective restorative practices will enable us to build a strong culture of belonging, inclusion, and empowerment throughout our community.



Safety, Healing, and Accountability

Research confirms that RJ practices reduce re-offending and meet the needs of people harmed more effectively than typical court procedures.²

Harmed people who take part in face-to-face RJ conferences are more satisfied with the handling of their cases and suffer less from post traumatic stress symptoms. People who go through RJ processes to take accountability for causing harm are significantly less likely to commit additional harm. This is true for both youth and adults, and the effect is greater for violent crimes than for property crimes. Restorative practices also help improve safety by strengthening healthy relationships among community members, reducing the chances that people will cause harm.



Community and Collaboration

Restorative practices such as circle processes bring people together, help them connect more deeply, and enhance their ability to prevent and respond to conflicts and harms.

Schools, legal systems, workplaces, and community- and faith-based organizations use these practices because they meet people’s needs for connection, healing, and repair.



An Opportunity to Lead

We have the opportunity to be in the vanguard of this paradigm-shifting social movement.

People all over the world — and the greater Washington DC region — are embracing the transformative power of restorative justice practices. However, in most places they are only used in one or two systems. By taking an integrated and comprehensive restorative approach, Arlington will be a leader and a model for other jurisdictions to follow.



Smart and Effective Tools

Restorative justice practices have demonstrated their impact and cost-effectiveness in school, legal, and community settings. Legal system applications reduce recidivism, avoiding the cost and trauma of future harms.³ School-based restorative approaches increase school connection, help decrease the use of suspension and expulsion, and create a climate of strong relationships that support student achievement, leadership, health, and development.⁴

Becoming Restorative

Restorative practices fall on a continuum from proactive to responsive. Practices such as community-building circles require only a modest amount of facilitator training and participant preparation. Targeted interventions that address harm and conflict require extensive training and experience to facilitate, as well as additional preparation for participants.

Restorative Arlington is working to build Arlington’s capacity to use a range of proven restorative practices to create a stronger, more deeply connected community that can effectively prevent, reduce, and respond to conflict and harms.

Progress Toward the Vision

We are already on the path.

Since launching Restorative Arlington in January 2020 — and in the midst of the pandemic — here’s what we have been doing:



Informing and educating hundreds of community members about restorative justice and restorative practices. Arlingtonians have enthusiastically embraced the restorative approach.



Building community and connection among people from all parts of the county by adapting restorative circle practices during physical distancing.

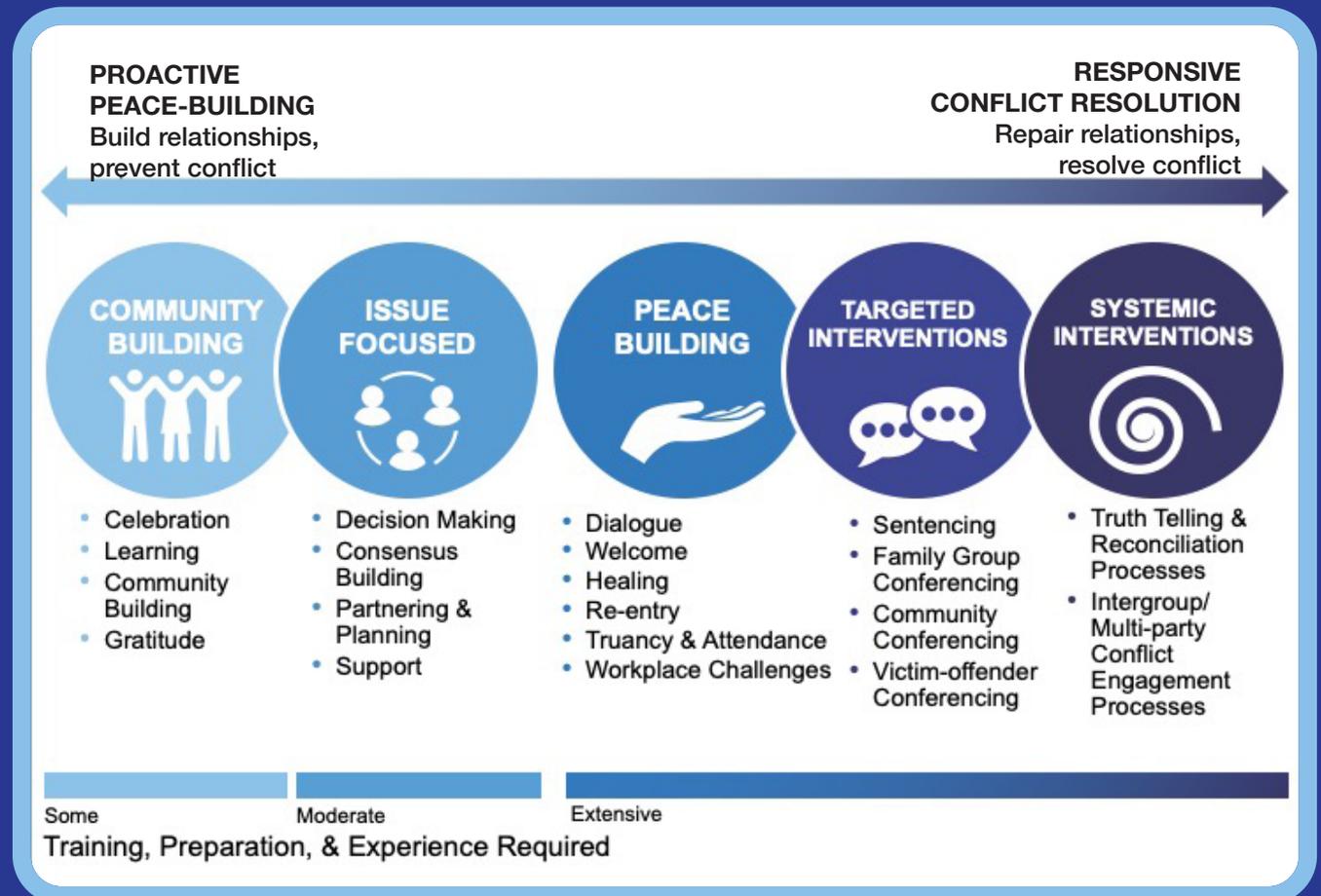


Engaging dozens of people in working groups and committees, including stakeholders inside and outside of county government. These dedicated Arlingtonians have spent more than 1,300 hours determining how to best adopt restorative practices in our legal system, schools, and community settings.



Developing partnerships, including with Restorative Response Baltimore and George Mason University’s Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

Restorative Circle and Conferencing Processes



Partnership with Carter School

Through a generative, responsive, and flexible partnership, George Mason University’s Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution and Restorative Arlington are already collaborating to advance Restorative Arlington’s objectives through mutually-beneficial engagement of students, staff, faculty, organizations, and community members in:

- Leadership support and organizational capacity-building
- Outreach and access to technology and communications
- Co-construction of knowledge, research, project evaluation, and widely-shared publication
- Collaborative development and delivery of training, CEUs, and related materials
- Physical and virtual support for events and activities

The Restorative Arlington Approach

Our Mission

We create connection, belonging, and safety for all community members. We:

- Build capacity to implement and use restorative practices by providing knowledge, space, and tools
 - Strengthen our community through practices that build mutual understanding among people
 - Empower people who have been harmed to exercise their voice and choice
 - Promote healing, accountability, repair and restoration
 - Create space for all people to meet their needs with dignity, compassion, and courage
-

Our Core Values

Ensure Equity by offering processes that embody **dignity, respect, and inclusion**, and that support belonging, especially for people who have experienced marginalization.

Empower Community by developing **collaborative practices** that deepen the sense of **mutual care** for all community members.

Build Trust and promote **healing and safety** through **deep listening, exercising empathy, being authentic, and using a trauma-informed lens.**

Be Responsive to the needs of all community members by committing both to ongoing evaluation of our restorative practices and to improvement, with **courage and flexibility.**

Exercise Accountability through **fidelity** to the principles of restorative justice, **honesty and transparency** about our work, and a commitment to **just and fair treatment** of all partners and participants in our programs and processes.

Our Commitment to Restorative Principles

We honor and acknowledge the field of restorative justice/ restorative practices and the indigenous cultures from which it came. We strive to apply the wisdom, principles, and best practices of those with experience and expertise in this work. As part of a dynamic, growing movement, we try to be responsive and reflective, learning from our experiences and new insights and research.

As we implement restorative practices, we endeavor to:

- Honor the worth, goodness, and wisdom of every person
 - Promote shared voice and power, especially through engaging those who are affected in the response to conflict and harm
 - Ensure that participation in restorative practices is genuinely voluntary, validating the agency of participants at every point
 - Provide pathways for accountability, to include acknowledgement of the impact of harm and taking actions to repair the harm
 - Acknowledge the role of relationships, trauma, power, and systemic forces that impact our community and our interactions
 - Make restorative practices and training accessible, with provisions to welcome, support, and accommodate all members of our community
 - Train, mentor, and compensate a diverse cadre of restorative practitioners that reflects the community we serve
-

Learning, Collaboration, Empowerment

Restorative Justice Practices in Our Schools

Guided by restorative values of dignity, respect, accountability and fairness, Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) practices nurture healthy relationships, repair harm, transform conflict, and promote justice and equity.

The transformative power of “whole school” RJE supports the Arlington Public Schools (APS) mission of ensuring that “all students learn and thrive in safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments.”

In addition to addressing matters of discipline restoratively, RJE shifts school culture and prioritizes a relational teaching approach that fosters the resilience and well-being that support students’ academic achievement.⁸

The RJE approach clearly aligns with — and will strengthen — the APS vision of “an inclusive community that empowers all students” and the APS core values of equity, inclusivity, integrity, collaboration, and innovation.

In contrast with top-down mandates imposed on students or staff, RJE embodies the restorative principles of collaboration and voluntary participation, working with all members of the school community, honoring their agency, and empowering and celebrating student leadership.

Implementing RJE in our schools will:

- Enable all students, staff, and families to feel a sense of belonging in the school community
- Ensure students feel valued and affirmed for who they are and the diverse perspectives, ideas and thoughts they possess
- Develop students’ social, emotional, problem-solving and leadership skills
- Provide students and educators with effective ways to take responsibility and repair harm

I believe restorative justice is a must in the school system. I have observed restorative justice at my school and believe it to be more effective than a punitive method.

Yasmina Mansour
Arlington Teen Network Board

I have been frustrated by our efforts to bring equity to our discipline practices and firmly believe that restorative practices are the way to go to not only move toward equity, but to really support student growth.

Shari Benites
Coordinator of Restorative Practices, Yorktown HS

Successfully Implementing Restorative Justice in Education

These recommendations from researchers and practitioners⁹ outline a path to successful implementation of whole school RJE in Arlington Public Schools:

1. Use principle-based RJE
2. Take a comprehensive approach to RJE
3. Emphasize the equity focus of RJE
4. Develop contextually sensitive implementation plans
5. Employ strategic rollout
6. Create long-term implementation plans focused on sustainability and professional support
7. Invest in long term, mixed-methods research examining RJE implementation

Schools Logic Model

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

Train all school staff and students, from elementary school through high school, in culturally responsive restorative practices and restorative mindset.

Offer training and orientation in restorative practices and restorative mindset to parents and families of APS students.

Offer ongoing coaching for educators to use circles for teaching as well as for nurturing relationships and community connections.

Create positions for restorative justice facilitators, coordinators, and coaches — at both county and school levels — to support RJE with equity and fidelity.

Establish benchmarks and use continuous evaluations to ensure RJE in APS is proactive, responsive, and effective.

Create RJE certification pathways for educators.

Default to using restorative justice practices for addressing discipline and behavior issues and harm in school.

Collaborate with RJ implementation efforts in the legal system and community.

OUTCOMES

All students feel a sense of belonging and know they are valued members of the community.

The use of exclusionary practices, including suspension and expulsion, will decrease for all students.

Students of color and students in special education will no longer be disproportionately affected by exclusionary discipline such as suspension and expulsion.

Academic achievement will improve for students of color and students with special needs.

Community building and dialogue circles are common throughout the school community: in staff meetings, classrooms, PTA meetings, IEP meetings, etc.

Youth lead restorative practices.

Resources, ideas, and expertise are shared across systems.

IMPACTS

Black and Brown students and families are valued and feel a sense of community and belonging.

Students with special needs and their families are valued and feel a sense of community and belonging.

APS is a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community for all — including staff of color, students, and families.

All members of the school community will be happier, healthier, and more engaged.

All students are confident, safe, and ready to learn.

Student leadership is celebrated as essential.

Strong and effective partnerships support the restorative approach.

Our schools are collaborative environments of belonging and safety that value and empower every person in the school community.



Safety, Accountability, Healing

Restorative Justice in Our Legal System

When harm occurs, those who are affected — especially the harmed parties and those responsible for the harm — are usually in the best position to create a solution that addresses the situation and repairs the harm.

To foster healing and safety, restorative justice breaks cycles of harm and trauma by addressing the needs of all involved, centering the needs of people who have been harmed. This means providing harmed people with the option to use a restorative justice process that treats them with dignity, empowers them to decide how their needs are met, and gives them a safe space to understand and address what happened to them.

For young people and adults who commit harm, restorative justice processes provide a dignified path to accountability and growth. When community-based restorative options are used instead of legal processes, people responsible for harm can be accountable for their actions without the stigma, trauma, and marginalization of legal system involvement.

In implementing restorative practices, we strive to address harms, limit their ripple effects, prevent them from recurring, and reduce the systemic racial and ethnic disparities reflected in both who is harmed and who ends up in the legal system.

Accountability

Restorative processes create a path to true accountability for those who have committed harm. Accountability is not the same as punishment, which does not require the person being punished to reflect on their behavior or to change.

We affirm Danielle Sered's five-step description of accountability:¹⁰

1. Acknowledge responsibility for one's actions
2. Acknowledge the impact of one's actions on others
3. Express genuine remorse
4. "Do sorry:" take actions to repair the harm as much as possible, guided by the people harmed
5. No longer commit similar harm

It was heartwarming because it was very obvious to see their regret. Watching them process the impact of what they had done was very powerful.

Harmed party
who participated in a
restorative conference
Arlington, Virginia

Legal System Logic Model

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

- Create a community-based restorative justice conferencing program.
- Partner with survivors in implementation planning
- Provide restorative healing circles for people who have been harmed.
- Start reintegration circles for youth or adults who are returning to the community from placement or incarceration.
- Establish circles of support and accountability and for youth and/or adults who are on probation or parole.
- Provide community-building and conflict circles in the Arlington County Detention Facility.
- Create an option for sentencing circles that involve all affected parties.

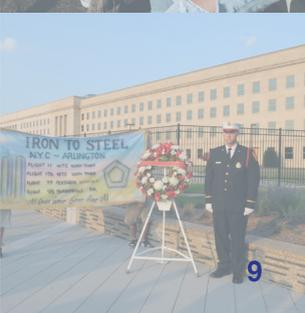
OUTCOMES

- Adults and young people who commit harm take accountability and recidivism decreases.
- Increased use of restorative processes.
- Increased community confidence in restorative justice.
- Increased diversion from system involvement: fewer arrests, court costs, prosecutions, and use of probation and confinement.
- More survivors of harm choose restorative justice and achieve satisfying results.
- Lower crime rates.
- Budgetary priorities shift toward funding for restorative processes and needs-centered services, especially for those most vulnerable.

IMPACTS

- Cycles of harm and trauma are interrupted.
- People who have been harmed experience healing, an increased sense of safety, and amends or repair.
- Community affirms the dignity, worth, and humanity of survivors of harm and those who cause harm.
- Safer, more equitable, more compassionate community that is better trusted by members who have been marginalized.
- People responsible for harm have:
 - Improved educational, employment, and health outcomes
 - Access to accountability, healing, and growth
 - A better understanding of the impacts of their actions
 - Greater ability to contribute to their communities
 - A restored sense of belonging and investment in the community

An equitable legal system for youth and adults that enhances safety by valuing and addressing the needs of people who have been harmed and those who are responsible for harm, and focusing on accountability, healing, and repair.



Belonging, Thriving, Caring

Restorative Practices in Our Community

Restorative practices offer community members powerful tools to create and strengthen the connections and sense of belonging that weave our relationships, families, neighborhoods, and organizations together.

Neighborhood groups, workplaces, faith-based organizations, recreation centers, service providers, advocacy groups, and people in many other settings can learn and use restorative circle and conferencing processes. The dignity, mutual caring, and inclusion that people experience through these practices deepens understanding across differences, leading to greater harmony and reduced conflict.

By ensuring community members understand, have ready access to, and get training in the range of restorative practices, we build their capacity to meet their needs and to address conflicts with a trauma-informed lens, without creating or exacerbating harm.

When confidence in these practices grows, more people will opt for them instead of unnecessarily relying on adversarial responses.

Whole family or two-generation approaches to restorative practices enable parents and caregivers to respond to children's decisions and actions in compassionate ways that allow for repair and learning.

Community-Based Restorative Processes

Community Building
Dialogue
Celebration
Healing
Decision Making
Grief and Mourning
Welcome
Support
Addressing Conflict
Response to Harm

Just so nice to meet some new people and be able to establish community pretty quickly. It was empowering to hear from others about their lives and fears and nourishment in this strange time. This week has been hard and this circle was a perfect way to end the week on a positive.

Participant in a Restorative Arlington virtual community-building circle (VCircle)

Community Logic Model

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

- Conduct an analysis to determine where restorative practices are most needed in the community.
- Find out where there is community interest in learning about restorative practices.
- Offer training in circle processes and other restorative practices.
- Work with youth-serving programs to create a pathway for youth to experience and learn to lead restorative practices.
- Use circles (online or in person) to connect community members and to address the needs of specific groups.
- Build alliances with people who have been marginalized.
- Create a community-based restorative justice conferencing program.
- Collaborate to develop RJ processes to address concerns around policing.
- Create a restorative truth-telling process around the impact of systemic racism in Arlington (e.g., in housing, school, courts).

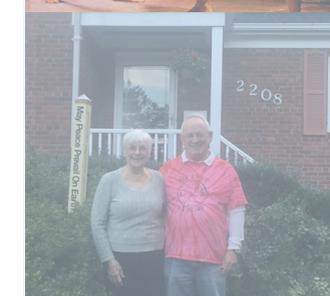
OUTCOMES

- Effective and ongoing mapping of community needs, assets, and aspirations.
- The spectrum of restorative practices are available and easily accessible to all community members.
- Community members seek out and use restorative practices to build community and as the first response to conflict and harm.
- Decreases in arrests, prosecution, and convictions.

IMPACTS

- Communities are able to respond to harm and open space for accountability without creating stigma or further marginalization for the parties involved.
- Community is safer and neighbors trust each other.
- All community members — including those who have experienced marginalization — have a deeper sense of connection, belonging, and mutual care.
- Community members have increased confidence in their capacity to build sustainable peace in ways that enable people to thrive.

People who live, work, study, visit, and worship in Arlington cultivate communities of trust, connection, and mutual care and work together to resolve conflict and harm in fair and compassionate ways.



What's Next

These are some of the steps we will take as we move into implementation:

- Create a solid organizational structure that includes:
 - Governance (via a steering committee)
 - Implementation teams focused on each area, comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders
- Maintain and leverage partnerships with key stakeholders and organizations
- Plan for iterative and mixed-method evaluation to track success and fidelity
- Reach out to and engage community members, especially people impacted by harm and trauma
- Adapt to Arlington's context, especially our tradition of neighborhood-level engagement
- Seek sustainable funding

WHAT WE HAVE

Multiple partners and people who are deeply engaged; fairly wide base of supporters.

Proven process for community building circles (VCircles).

Cadre of developing facilitators.

Vision and values.

Some experience with cases.

Connections with the field:

- Rooted in the wisdom and experience of the RJ tradition
- Trusted relationships, ongoing consultation with experts and practitioners in RJ

Guides and processes for communication and engagement.

WHAT WE NEED

Dedicated staff, fully funded and resourced, with expertise in RJ and in the needs of this project, to perform these functions:

- Coordination
- RJ facilitation
- Communications
- Operations and finance (contract or PT)

Dedicated funding:

- For staff
- For partners/facilitators who provide services
- For training and development of staff and partners
- To support accessibility for all participants

Communications:

- Technology
- Support to develop comprehensive engagement, connection, and communications strategies
- Tools (language/lexicon) to share information about the program, honoring the culture shift and giving people entry points

Evaluation plans, which we will develop in partnership with the Carter School and implementation teams.

Framework for ongoing collaboration with institutional partners.

Increased representation from people representing communities that have experienced marginalization.



Get involved!



Learn more about restorative justice
<https://is.gd/learnrp>



Visit the Restorative Arlington web site
<https://topics.arlingtonva.us/restorative-arlington/>



Fill out our interest form
<https://is.gd/RAform>



Sign up for Restorative Arlington news
<https://www.arlingtonva.us/subscribe/>



Questions?
Contact RJ Coordinator Liane Rozzell at lrozzell@arlingtonva.us

Notes

1. RACE: Realizing Arlington's Commitment to Equity at <https://topics.arlingtonva.us/equity/>

2. Many studies confirm the effectiveness of restorative justice processes.

This rigorous meta-study examined results from ten studies: *Face-to-face Restorative Justice Conferences are cost-effective in reducing reoffending and increasing victim satisfaction*, Campbell Collaborative Summary, https://campbellcollaboration.org/media/k2/attachments/0145_CJCG_Strang_Restorative_justice_PLS_EN.pdf

The full paper is: Campbell Systematic Review 2013:12 Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) *Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review* by Heather Strang, Lawrence W. Sherman, Evan Mayo-Wilson, Daniel Woods, and Barak Ariel <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.4073/csr.2013.12>

3. For a useful table of literature reviews and meta-analyses, see *A Review of Restorative Justice in Florida and Other States*, Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, January 2020, <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/MonitorDocs/Reports/pdf/2002rpt.pdf>

4. This paper cites results from many others on the use of restorative practices in schools: *Increasing School Connectedness for Girls: Restorative Justice as a Health Equity Resource*, by Thalia González and Rebecca Epstein, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality Initiative on Gender Justice and Opportunity, <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2020/03/Restorative-Justice-as-a-Health-Equity-Resource.pdf>

5. *Restorative Community Conferencing: A study of Community Works West's restorative justice youth diversion program in Alameda County*, 2017 <https://impactjustice.org/resources/restorative-community-conferencing-a-study-of-community-works-wests-restorative-justice-youth-diversion-program-in-alameda-county/>

6. Strang et al, note 2.

7. González and Epstein, note 4

8, 9. *The Starts and Stumbles of Restorative Justice in Education: Where Do We Go from Here?*, by Anne Gregory and Katherine R. Evans <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/restorative-justice>

10. *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair*, by Danielle Sered, The New Press, 2019

Acknowledgements

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