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FOR NEW ORLEANS, RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MEANS RECONCILIATION

by Dave Marsden

When Chris Gunther, New Orleans, La.'s coordinator for the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention and a Health Department lead, reached out to stakeholders throughout New Orleans, a student advocacy group called Rethinkers made clear to him and his Forum team the need to expand restorative approaches to conflict in schools.

Rethinkers was established a little while after Hurricane Katrina of 2005 to provide a way for young people returning home from time at other schools to talk about their experiences and how they could turn what they learned into action in New Orleans public schools. It currently operates in seven middle schools and a high school, conducting 5-week summer programs and student clubs to discuss topics such as school discipline, violence in the community, explorations of power and privilege, school food, school uniforms, and teacher–student and other interpersonal

DETROIT'S SAFETY STATIONS IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

by Martha Yeide

Detroit, Mich., is harnessing the expertise of past VISTA volunteer Maura Villhauer, associate at the Detroit Youth Violence Prevention Initiative, to coordinate current VISTA work with at-risk high school students. By supporting this effort, the city is helping the Forum achieve Goal 2 of the *National Forum 2014 Action Plan*, to enhance local capacity to prevent youth and gang violence. One strategy the plan mentions is the recruitment and placement of AmeriCorps Volunteers In Service To America (also known as VISTA) to support Forum activities. Detroit has adopted this strategy to set up and staff Safety Stations in three of the city's high schools.

Schools, as all Forum cities know, can sometimes be dangerous places for youth. They bring together youths who are in their peak crime years, which by itself can increase rates of victimization.¹ In 2011, students ages 12–18 reported being more afraid of victimization at school (4.0 percent) than away from school (2.0 percent).² According to the most recent (2011) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System data, 5.4 percent of high school students had carried a weapon on school grounds in the 30 days preceding the survey, and 5.9 percent had not gone to school because they felt they would be unsafe at, or on their way to or from, school.³

Healthy Climate Reduces Anxiety, Boosts Performance

Safety Stations are designed to contribute to a positive school climate. A positive school climate can help make school a better place for youth. Research has found that a positive school climate can reduce delinquency and victimization while improving academic performance. For instance, Khoury–Kassabri and colleagues (2004) found all types of victimization were lower at schools with a positive school climate.⁴ Studies have linked school climate with a variety of other outcomes such as academic achievement,⁵

relationships.

"When we met with the Rethinkers," Gunther recalls, "they educated us about the importance of restorative approaches. We see a great deal of promise in restorative justice as a way to not only promote positive and safe school climates but also engage youth as partners in violence prevention."

Emphasis on Repairing Harm, Not Punishing Offenders

Restorative justice programming has been around since the 1970s. According to criminologist Howard Zehr, restorative practice approaches have their roots in restorative justice, "a way of looking at criminal justice that emphasizes repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than only punishing offenders."* This concept has taken hold in New Orleans, becoming one of the focal points of the Forum team effort.

Though Rethinkers brought the Forum team's attention to restorative approaches, the Center for Restorative Approaches (CRA) had been active in New Orleans since 2009, when it began work at Walter L. Cohen High School. CRA is an independent nonprofit.

For CRA founder Troi Bechet, using restorative approaches is "a real way to not only keep our children in school but to heal and repair the harm that happens because of these types of incidences in school."

Bechet created the center in 2008 after traveling to a school for adjudicated youth in Baltimore, Md., and observing a successful community conference with young women who were involved in a fight.

She continues: "Restorative approaches hold children accountable in a way that makes them reflect on what they could have done differently and internalize their responsibility to themselves and others."

high school completion,⁶ and substance use.⁷ Positive school climate can derive from many components: clear policies against violence, supportive relationships between teachers and students, a sense of community within school, attention to safety issues, respect for all members of the school community, and responsiveness to students' needs.⁸

"The idea is to have a safe place for kids to come, to cool off, or to get some help with problems," Villhauer states. They are a place where students can find resources to avoid getting involved in violence or to help support and disseminate the violence prevention message. Kids don't come to school to fight, notes Villhauer; when they fight, they are acting out in response to a situation. The Safety Stations can help get them referrals to services they might need to address various problems. VISTA volunteers help staff the stations, reach out to other school and community staff, connect with other resources, and work with youths to connect them with opportunities in the school and community.



As part of their Leadership Week, Youth Executive Boards perform a skit on bullying the safe routes rally.





Troi Bechet (pictured) founded the Center for Restorative Approaches in 2008, having watched young women involved in a fight reconcile.

The benefit of restorative approaches is that they deemphasize guilt and shame. They allow all those involved to maintain their dignity and self-esteem, for they feel themselves part of a problem-solving activity, not part of a trial with a sentence at the end of the process. CRA is deeply involved in the New Orleans community through

- **Circle Work.** The center facilitates circles for community building, team building, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Bechet and her small staff also train people to use circles in day-to-day interactions.
- **Community Conferencing.** They bring together everyone who has been affected by a conflict or crime to speak about what happened and how they have been affected, and to decide how to repair the harm and move forward in a manner that minimizes the potential for a repeat of the negative behavior.
- **Training and Consulting/Professional Development.** They offer training and ongoing professional development in an array of settings. They concentrate on shifting organizational culture, building a cooperative team environment, and giving people opportunities to take responsibility for how they affect others.

Rethinkers and CRA have partnered in schools, although CRA has a much broader community agenda in the neighborhoods.

CRA Facilitates Through 366 Circles

Safety station youth and three VISTA team members take the college tour to Eastern Michigan University.

Schools were considered based on several data points: crime data, 911 calls, victim analysis, income, and school attendance rates. Three schools in areas of great need were selected: Cody High School on the west side, and Osborn and Denby High Schools on the east side.

Safety Stations were modeled after the Central Collegiate Academy, already in operation in another Detroit school. The program is attractive because it uses a youth-led, adult-supported approach. When given the opportunity, Villhauer notes, youths are very vocal with their good ideas. The Safety Stations give them an environment where they can take the lead on implanting those ideas. The Youth Executive Board helps create activities that are youth led and spread violence-prevention messages in school. For instance, at open-mic nights, kids can comment on their experiences with violence and talk about what's important to them. The VISTA volunteers staff the stations Monday through Friday; students are welcome before and after school, and during all lunch hours.

Students Organize Leadership Week, Sessions on Self-Respect, Bullying

Vilhauer mentions a leadership week that the youths organized last summer. At the 2-day event, more than 50 youths attended sessions on self-respect, bullying, and similar topics. They visited different neighborhoods to enrich their discussion of what they wanted for their own neighborhoods and brainstormed how to make that happen. They went on a college tour as part of the activities. Youths who attended came from across Detroit, so they had a rare chance to mix with one another.



A workshop led during Leadership Week.

The program is in its second year at Osborn and Cody, and in its first year at Denby. As a result, few data are available for assessing the impact of the program. Villhauer does note that there were some additional challenges to implementing the stations at Osborn and Cody, each of which has several distinct schools within one building. Since the Safety Station has to be physically located within one of the three schools, it

Students at the Wilson School, including one Rethinker, have received training by CRA and are involved in a project in the Peer Facilitators Club. The goal of this club is first to discuss problems between and among youths, teachers, administrators, and all members of the school community, and then to repair relationships and prevent escalations that can lead to violence.

Funding comes from grants, earned income, training fees, and fundraising/donations. As of nine months ago, CRA had conducted 366 circles to handle student and community problems. Of these, 93 percent resulted in a signed agreement between all parties, and of which 86 percent were carried out successfully. As Bechet puts it, "This keeps our kids out of the school-to-prison pipeline." It has also significantly reduced suspensions.

CRA wants to be responsive to the community and schools and is continually adjusting to meet needs.

Currently, Gunther is working with CRA and Rethinkers to create an implementation manual that will prepare schools for bringing in CRA and the restorative process. As he sees it, the role of the Health Department and the Forum is threefold in assisting these organizations in New Orleans's public health-oriented violence prevention effort:

- Provide "pass through" financial support.
- Assume the role of "documenter" of the restorative process.
- Disseminate the "lessons learned" so that restorative approaches can be expanded.



All Rethinkers programming and meetings happen in Circles. Here Rethinkers engage in a small group discussion during the summer program.

Rethinkers conducts a yearly retreat to choose a topic for the summer program based on the most salient issues. Rethinkers and its adult

can be difficult to reach youths attending the other two schools and may decrease the likelihood that they feel free to access the station.

Nonetheless, Villhauer is working with others to identify qualitative and quantitative metrics that will help better shape the programs. They are interested in having the youths document their stories.

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- ³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. N.d. "Youth Online: High School YRBS." [Web page and data portal](#).
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supporters work alongside each other in the restorative process in New Orleans, but it is the students who are accountable for making it work.

Renee Smith, on the cusp of graduating high school, looks back on her six years as a Rethinker and says it has been "life changing and meaningful to the point that it touches almost every aspect of my every day."

Teaching young people and the rest of the school community responsibility for solving school problems is a highly effective tool in meeting the goal of safer and more productive environments for everyone.

*Howard J. Zehr. 1990. *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

Funding Opportunities

The Justice Department's Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health (OMH) have announced a new joint solicitation: Minority Youth Violence Prevention: Integrating Public Health and Community Policing Approaches (MYVP). A national initiative, MYVP will demonstrate the effectiveness of integrating public health and community policing approaches to address disparities in public health access and the risk of violent crime in distressed neighborhoods. OMH will support 8 to 10 demonstration sites that integrate violence prevention and crime reduction models with public health— and community-oriented policing approaches. Applications ([available here](#)) are due June 13, 2014.

Applications are now being accepted for the Community Policing Development (CPD) Program. The application will close on Monday, June 23, 2014, at 7:59 p.m. EDT. For more information on this program, on other COPS funding opportunities, and on how your agency can apply, visit the [Grants and Funding](#) section of the CPD Web site.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is announcing a new

NEWS & VIEWS

Reports

Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons From Boston

Harvard Kennedy School and National Institute of Justice, March 2014

According to this [paper](#), law enforcement should always consider scope, structure, and tone when using social media. In light of Boston, Mass.'s experience, social media presents both opportunities and challenges to police. The ways in which it can help develop new models of policing mainly center on community engagement. While use of social media creates new capabilities and possibilities for police, law enforcement agencies should make sure they are shaping the tools. Effective use means respecting the characteristics of social media but using them in ways adapted to the traditions and goals of community policing.

Trends in Bullying, Physical Fighting, and Weapon Carrying Among 6th Through 10th Grade Students From 1998 to 2010: Findings From a National Study

American Journal of Public Health, June 2014

In a [study](#) that examined 12-year trends in bullying, victimization, fighting, and weapon carrying and gender, grade level, and race/ethnicity variations among U.S. adolescents, researchers found American teens are much less likely to engage in bullying than they were a decade ago. Bullying perpetration, bullying victimization, and physical fighting decreased from 1998 to 2010; declines in bullying perpetration and victimization were greater for boys than for girls.

Trends in Children's Exposure to Violence, 2003 to 2011

JAMA Pediatrics, April 2014

Crime and violence have been declining among children and youth. In this [study](#), three national telephone surveys of representative samples of children and caregivers were compared. Samples included parents of children ages 2 to 9 and youth ages 10 to 17. Of 50 trends in exposure, there were 27 significant declines and no significant increases between 2003 and 2011. Dating violence decreased, as did some forms of indirect exposure, suggesting fewer American children have been exposed to violent acts.

Promoting Protective Factors for In-Risk Families and Youth: A Brief for Researchers

Administration on Children, Youth and Families and Development Services Group, Inc., March 2014

This [report](#) explores protective factors that help youths and their families cope with trauma, focusing on five populations that are often victimized. Looking at existing research, the Administration on Children, Youth and Families and

grant program, **"Now Is the Time" Healthy Transitions: Improving Life Trajectories for Youth and Young Adults With, or at Risk for, Serious Mental Health Conditions**. The purpose of the program is to improve treatment access and support services for youth and young adults ages 16–25 who have, or are at risk of developing, a serious mental health condition. Applications are due June 13.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) is accepting applications for "Now Is the Time" Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) **State Educational Agency Program (NITT–AWARE–SEA) cooperative agreements** and **Local Educational Agency (NITT–AWARE–LEA) grants**. The purpose of the NITT–AWARE–SEA Cooperative Agreement program is to build and expand the capacity of SEAs to increase awareness of mental health issues among school-aged youth, provide training for school personnel and other adults to detect and respond to mental health issues in children and young adults, and connect children, youth, and families who may have behavioral health issues with appropriate services. The NITT–AWARE–LEA program aims to help local educational agencies begin to support training of school personnel and other adults who interact with youth in school settings and communities to detect and respond to mental illness in children and youth, including how to encourage adolescents and their families to seek treatment. Applications for both programs are due June 16.

The U.S. Department of Education is making an estimated \$9.75 million available in grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to increase their capacity to help schools in communities with pervasive violence better address the needs of affected students and break the cycle of violence. All LEAs (public school districts, including charter schools that are considered LEAs under state law) are eligible to apply. **Applications** are due June 30.

The National Institute of Justice is accepting applications for its **Developing Knowledge About What Works to Make Schools Safe** funding opportunity. Under the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, the Institute will fund projects that discover more about how personnel, programs, and activities contribute

Development Services Group, Inc., found children and young people have a greater chance of overcoming negative events if conditions that promote well-being are present, including a sense of purpose and optimism, caregivers with strong parenting skills, and supportive teachers and school staff.

New Reports on Youth Deincarceration

National Council on Crime & Delinquency, April 2014

The National Council on Crime & Delinquency **summarizes** stakeholder views on reducing youth incarceration, identifies ways to budget for reform, and focuses on supervision, placement, oversight, transfer to adult court, and family involvement.

Reducing Recidivism for Justice-Involved Persons With Mental Illness

Merrill Rotter and W. Amory Carr

The Rotter and Carr report ***Reducing Criminal Recidivism for Justice-Involved Persons With Mental Illness: Risk/Needs/Responsivity and Cognitive–Behavioral Interventions*** reviews the intervention paradigm:

Risk/Needs/Responsivity. The authors concentrate on criminal thinking and the structured cognitive–behavioral interventions that were created or adapted to specifically target the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with criminal recidivism. Sections address evidence-based criminogenic risk assessment, cognitive–behavioral therapy and adaptations for justice-involved populations, and motivational interviewing. This 2013 document was published by the Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation (Delmar, N.Y.).

Reentry Through Employment

Council of State Governments

The Council of State Governments' Justice Center developed ***The Reentry and Employment Project*** to provide policymakers and practitioners with the tools necessary to improve reentry and employment outcomes for individuals with criminal histories. Policymakers across the political spectrum agree that employment can be the gateway to successful reentry for persons recently released from prison or jail. However, the obstacles that millions of adults with criminal records face as they seek to enter the U.S. workforce are formidable. This 2013 publication was designed to help the corrections, reentry, and workforce development fields work together to navigate those obstacles.

Oregon Males, Youths of Color Disproportionately Suspended, Expelled

Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest

Suspension and Expulsion Patterns in Six Oregon School Districts, just released by the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, examines student exclusionary patterns in urban school districts in Oregon during the 2011–12 school year. The study examines exclusionary discipline by grade, gender, race/ethnicity, and special education status. Key findings: a) The number of students receiving exclusionary discipline was 2.5 times as high for male students as for female students. The percentage was higher

to school safety. Applications are due July 10, 2014.

Training Opportunities

Law Enforcement Responses to Adolescent Girls

This no-cost, 2-day training will equip law enforcement first responders with effective responses to situations that involve contact with 12- to 17-year-old girls who may be suspects, offenders, or victims. The training—sponsored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and hosted by the Rochester (N.Y.) Police Department—is specifically designed for law enforcement officers in jurisdictions experiencing an increase in adolescent girl-involved delinquent behavior who have the ability to implement a proactive approach in their policies and practices. To attend the training in Rochester, N.Y., on June 23–24, 2014, [register here](#). Registration ends June 11.

Best Practices in Child Forensic Interviewing Webinar

The Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center will host a Webinar to highlight the recently published *2012 APSAC Practice Guidelines on Forensic Interviewing in Cases of Suspected Child Abuse*, discuss the evolution of child interviewing methods and models, and indicate emerging areas of agreement and change related to best practices in child forensic interviewing. The 2-hour Webinar will be held on June 26, beginning at 1:00 p.m. To participate, [register here](#).

Evidence-Based Practice Academy

The MacArthur Foundation is providing support for state or local jurisdiction policy teams to participate in a special Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Academy. The fall 2014 EBP academy—to be held in Lafayette, La., Sept. 10–12—is being planned and organized by the Institute for Public Health & Justice at Louisiana State University and by Advancing EBP. Participating teams will be selected on the basis of how well their applications reflect the involvement of key stakeholders and their commitment and capacity to bring evidence-based programs to scale in their jurisdiction. A maximum of 10 delegations will be admitted, if they can meet minimum requirements for team makeup. Priorities will be given to teams that show strength of leadership and diversity

for American Indian, black, Hispanic, and multiracial students than for whites. B) The most common reasons for suspension and expulsion were physical and verbal aggression and insubordination/disruption. C) Nearly 40 percent of students who were suspended received more than one suspension.

News

Office of Justice Programs Releases Program Plan

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has launched a new, searchable online document of current funding opportunities and new initiatives, the OJP [Program Plan](#). It features the latest and most complete information regarding both competitive and noncompetitive grants, training and technical assistance, research, and other resources available to the justice community. The Program Plan is divided into 10 thematically organized sections:

- [Initiatives to Address a Wide Range of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Issues](#)
- [Breaking the Cycles of Mental Illness, Substance Abuse, and Crime](#)
- [Preventing and Intervening in Juvenile Offending and Victimization](#)
- [Managing Offenders to Reduce Recidivism and Promote Successful Reentry](#)
- [Effective Interventions to Address Violence, Victimization, and Victims' Rights](#)
- [Enhancing Law Enforcement Initiatives](#)
- [Supporting Innovation in Adjudication](#)
- [Advancing Technology to Prevent and Solve Crime](#)
- [Innovations in Justice Information Sharing](#)
- [Resources to Address Justice Issues in Tribal Communities](#)

Other Resources

More than 1,500 communities and tribes operate a youth justice diversion program. These courts train teenagers—including former juvenile offenders—to be judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and jurors who handle low-level offenses, promote accountability, provide access to youth resources, and reduce and prevent juvenile crime. Global Youth Justice has recently launched [500 Web sites](#) to promote juvenile justice diversion programs nationwide.

of roles in the juvenile justice system. The deadline for applications is 5 p.m. CDT, June 30. To apply, follow [this link](#).

NCJFCJ Annual Conference

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges will hold its 77th [Annual Conference](#) "From Surviving to Thriving: Healthy Families, Healthy Courts" in Chicago, Ill., on July 13–16, 2014. Topics include child abuse and neglect, trauma, custody and visitation, judicial leadership, juvenile justice, sex trafficking of minors, family violence, and drug courts. A preconference workshop will be offered to professionals working with juvenile justice–involved youths who have mental health, trauma, or substance abuse issues.

Coalition for Juvenile Justice Youth Summit

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention will cohost the [2014 Juvenile Justice Youth Summit](#) Aug. 7–8, 2014, in Washington, D.C. The Youth Summit seeks to cultivate and empower a new generation of juvenile justice advocates. Youth participants will engage in skill-building, networking, and leadership development. Participants will learn the basics of juvenile justice and have the opportunity to delve into more detail on trending topics in juvenile justice reform. The event will also feature activities around the 40th anniversary of the passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

Int'l Police Chiefs to Host Leadership Institute

The International Association of Chiefs of Police will host a [Law Enforcement Leadership Institute on Juvenile Justice](#) on Sept. 16–18, 2014, in Seattle, Wash. As many as 30 law enforcement executives from across the country will be selected to attend this training program to learn strategies and tools for responding to juvenile offenders and at-risk youths.

Int'l Police Chiefs' 121st Annual Conference, Expo

The International Association of Chiefs of Police will hold its [Annual Conference and Exposition](#) in Orlando, Fla., on Oct. 25–28, 2014. The conference will feature renowned keynote speakers, forums, technical workshops, and the largest exhibit hall of products and services in the law enforcement community. This event will provide a forum for

learning, collaborating, and experiencing new technology for thousands of dedicated law enforcement professionals from across the country and around the world.

Contact Us

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