Enhancing Community Involvement in BC's Restorative Justice Programs: A Toolkit

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Just Outcomes

Building Justice Together

Introduction

Restorative justice (RJ) gives voice to a call within colonial Western societies to remember, reclaim, and learn from community-based traditions of responding to harm, while aspiring toward more relational and reparative approaches to crime and injustice.

"Conflicts are property," wrote the late Norwegian sociologist Nils Christie; and this property rightly belongs to communities.[1] As many Indigenous communities in BC and beyond have long understood, community relationships can do the work of justice and addressing human needs in ways that punitive and carceral systems were, to put it mildly, never designed to do. But while restorative justice services provide a promising forum for communities to (re)negotiate their roles in justice, RJ services are still frequently bound and shaped by the individualistic and colonial norms of dominant society. There is still a distance to go in imagining and achieving the transformative potential of communities in this work.

This Toolkit – inspired by the voices of Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers on the frontlines in restorative justice – is intended as a resource for RJ programs, practitioners and funders in BC who wish to think and act with creativity toward the role of community within these services. It is based on the insights and learnings of Just Outcomes' 2023-2024 BC Government-funded Listening Project, which centered the wisdom and experiences of 15 BC-based RJ and Indigenous Justice (IJ)[2] programs to explore the question of whether and how RJ is living up to its potential to meaningfully involve community to address harm. The project revealed both the importance of community involvement, and the constraints faced by local programs. For example, program reliance on justice system partnerships for funding and referrals sometimes causes programs to function within the confines of a system which has procedural norms that limit meaningful community engagement. In addition, the notion of "community" in RJ is complicated by the fact that, alongside their transformative potential, communities often reproduce patterns of inequity, domination and violence based on race, culture, gender and other human characteristics. Based on the insights of project participants and the Just Outcomes team's own lessons learned after decades of collective experience in the field, this toolkit offers concrete strategies to think and act beyond these kinds of constraints, toward new areas of potential within BC's RJ sector.

1 The British Journal of Criminology, Volume 17, Issue 1, January 1977, Pages 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a046783

2 From our understanding and learning, not all Indigenous Justice programs align with the language and concepts of restorative justice and may be more rooted in language related to Indigenous law or other expressions of justice. For the purposes of this document, we will refer to "restorative justice programs" as those self-identified programs who do use the framework of restorative justice as a central concept in their services, and this includes many Community Accountability Programs (CAP) and many Indigenous Justice Programs in BC.

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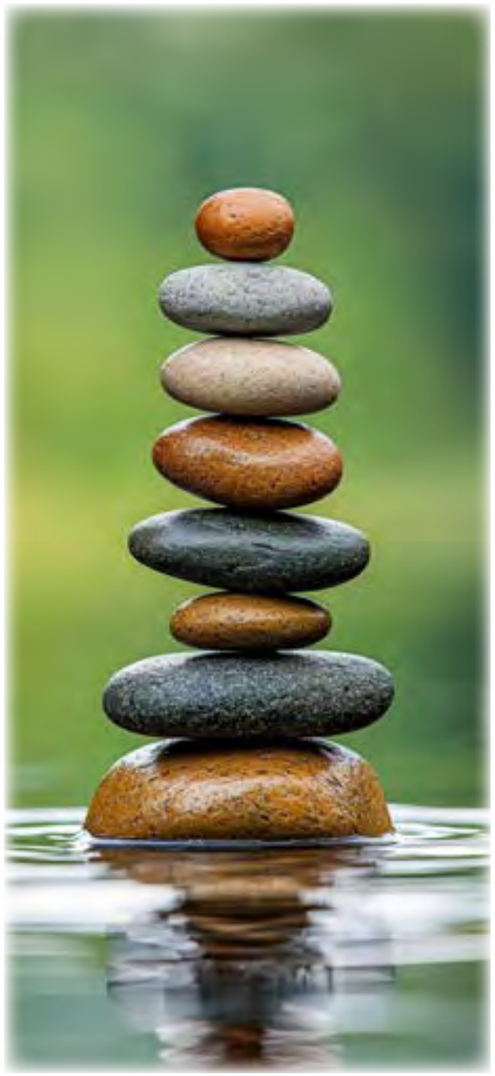
These dedicated practitioners helped us to see this exploration in new ways, and their enthusiasm and input has made this document infinitely better and more useful. Any errors or omissions are solely the responsibility of Just Outcomes.



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Context for this Toolkit

What is the purpose of this Toolkit?

RJ has sometimes been critiqued for focusing too much on the actions of one individual and its impact on one (or a few) other individuals, without attending to larger harms and systems that are at play at any given time. Harm and accountability are too often imagined narrowly and placed only on the shoulders of individuals or small groups. The purpose of this toolkit is to widen our view and thereby our practice. The work of justice takes place within an ecosystem of many moving parts and systems, some of which uphold oppression and marginalization, or unfairly benefit some and overtly harm others. To make positive change within systems, and not just within individuals, we can turn to communities and their role in affecting lasting change. In this way, we uphold the restorative principle of strengthening communities to prevent further harm rather than treating harm as a discrete problem that can be solved in isolation.

> *"To make positive change within systems, and not just within individuals, we can turn to communities and their role in affecting lasting change."*

How to Use this Toolkit?

"Reflection is also action"
Paulo Freire

This Toolkit should be understood not as a step-by-step guide, but as a series of ideas, strategies, and options that can be explored by programs depending on their specific needs, motivations and capacity. Our invitation is to take what is of value to you and your program, to learn, to share, and to not feel any obligation to implement all these ideas. In fact, simply reflecting on the ideas here, and having conversations within your program or with other programs, can be of value!
Furthermore, it is important to recognize that thinking about equitable access and addressing barriers to meaningful justice comes naturally to some, while for others, these may be new concepts that take time to explore. Wherever you are in your journey with this Toolkit, you are in the right place. This work is not about being perfect, nor does caring about accessibility mean stretching beyond your capacity or changing everything that is familiar. It means naming accessibility as something that matters, being open to learning, and considering what changes are possible within your context. Together, we can all consider how to create changes—big and small—that will make justice programs more inclusive, accessible, diverse and effective.

The Elephant in the RJ Room: Funding

Funding and resourcing for restorative justice programs is an ongoing issue shaping what is possible and on what timelines. Some of the strategies offered here will require additional funding to bring to fruition, and this may create barriers for some programs. At the same time, this Toolkit invites an attitude of creativity about what is possible with what we already have available.

Remember Relationships

Restorative justice is first and foremost a relational approach to justice – and relationships are at the heart of working with and for communities. All the options below must be conducted within the context of trusting and reciprocal relationships, and be attuned to when any activities move into the "transactional" space that may result in people being seen as commodities to "help". The goal here is not simply to improve the functioning of our individual programs, but to work at building caring, connected and just communities. The idea of "Restorative Communities," described in greater detail in this Toolkit's conclusion, offers a guiding vision for his work.

Getting Started:
Define a Vision for Community in Your Local Context

Note: This step is foundational to the optional Strategies 1-9 that follow.

Create the vision: While engaging community might sound valuable and even fun, each program needs to think through what it wants out of more community engagement. Is it to build up the program? To explore more equitable access for participants? To advance a community model of justice? Some combination of all? And what kind of community is being targeted? "Community" has multiple meanings. Lack of clarity leads to inequitable access, inconsistent roles, and mismatched expectations. To get started, consider some initial work to map out your program's vision.

1. **Convene a 2 to 3-hour internal team meeting** (ideally facilitated) to reflect on the following questions:
   - What matters to us about being a "community" justice program?
   - Who is currently considered "community" in our program?
   - Who may be missing? Who may be excluded?
   - What meanings of community exist locally?
   - How might we hope for community to be a part of our vision of justice?

2. **Facilitate a community focus group** (or more if needed):
   - Include Elders, youth, service providers, neighbourhood representatives, cultural groups, people with lived experience. Possibly a group of only 4-5 people, or up to 12.
   - Share a summary of your reflections and questions from step #1. Ask what they think—in particular, what they think a "community" vision of restorative justice includes? What is important about community participation in restorative justice? (if they don't know much about restorative justice, share your program's resources first). What "kind of community" needs to be involved with our restorative justice program?
   - Gather responses and compile into a short 1-2 page document to share with your organization

3. **Create a "Community Map."**
   - Geographic community
   - Idenity-based communities
   - Circles of care
   - Communities of practice
   - Justice system partners
   - Volunteers and liaisons

4. **Select your top 2-3 priority community areas of focus** to guide your community engagement strategy for the coming year.

- What does it mean for justice to be driven by community needs as opposed to system needs? Why is that important for your program?
- Which communities have too often been excluded from participating in restorative justice practices? (Think about potential barriers to participation like: being volunteer based, system referrals and bias, child care issues, language, and so on).
- Who might responsible parties and survivors identify as their community? What community connections are important to them and do they know they can include them in the RJ process?
- Which definitions of community best support the deepest values of restorative justice: equity, safety, inclusion, belonging, and accountability?

- Use a simple whiteboard or flip chart to create your Community Map in either #1, #2, #3 or build it during all of them.
- Support an Elder or culture-bearer to advise on the mapping session, with an honorarium or appropriate gift.

Strategy 1:

Think Creatively About Community Roles in Restorative Justice

Expanding community participation in restorative justice is not only about recruiting more people to fill existing roles, or attending more RJ processes – it's also about expanding the possibilities of what community involvement can look like. A reminder here, and for every strategy, that you don't need to do all these ideas at once, and just reflecting on what might be possible for your program is a wise start.

1. **Brainstorm/Map all possible community roles** in restorative justice. For example, community roles can include:
   - Facilitators: serving as volunteer or paid facilitators within program activities, including face to face 'encounter' processes, circles of support, community dialogues, or other activities.
   - Support Persons: individually accompanying affected parties, responsible parties and/or others through an exploration of their needs and motivations concerning restorative justice programming; attending dialogues as support persons.
   - Community Representatives in Restorative Dialogues: participating in restorative dialogue sessions, representing a community voice in ways that articulate harms and impacts of a particular community, and/or the community's responsibilities and commitment's toward harmed and affected parties.
   - Surrogate Participants: standing in as dialogue participants, when affected parties have a need for restorative dialogue processes but the responsibility is unavailable, or vice versa. Surrogate participants are those that have undergone similar experiences as those they are 'standing in' for, but were not directly involved in the particular incident being addressed.
   - Elders: providing advice, guidance and support to participants in a restorative justice process
   - Interpreters: providing language interpretation during participant engagement/case development work, dialogue sessions and/or follow-up meetings.
   - Facilitator Supporters: serving as debriefing partners and/or mentors for casework facilitators.
   - Community Liaisons and Educators: working on behalf of the program to engage other community members in program and/or educational activities (See also Strategy #2).
   - Funders: investing personal resources in restorative programs.
   - Service Providers: supporting restorative justice participants through mental health supports, trauma or addictions recovery, employment services, legal services, or other support services.

2. **Decide which role(s) you want to begin or expand** in the next 12-24 months, based on program mission, need and capacity.
3. **Develop simple role descriptions,** including:
   - Purpose
   - Qualifications (skills, lived/living experience, education, etc)
   - Time commitments
   - Code of conduct expected (similar to Guidelines)
   - Onboarding/Training needed
   - Compensation (if applicable)
4. **Pilot 1 new community role** for 3-6 months.
5. **Evaluate and adjust.**

⏭ Start by creating a "Community Support Person" role with a small honorarium.

Strategy 2:
Build or Strengthen Community Liaison Roles

As discussed above in Strategy 1, a liaison is someone who can communicate effectively between one group (or members of a group) and another. Community liaisons, or connectors (Elders, informal leaders, influential community members, cultural mentors) are among the strongest drivers of deep, meaningful engagement in BC restorative justice programs. If your program is looking to strengthen its connection with community, this can be another good place to start—with key individuals that can help.

1. **Identify existing informal community or RJ connectors** with whom your organization is, or could be, in relationship. **Examples**: Elders, Youth Workers, faith leaders, parent advocates, positive influencers, cultural teachers.

2. Invite 2-4 of them for a conversation about partnership and invite them to reflect on ways their community connection could inform a possible role to advance restorative justice within the organization (for role ideas, see next step).

3. Create a "Community Liaison Role Description." Responsibilities could include:

- Advising on cultural protocols
- Helping prepare participants
- Connecting programs to community resources
- Providing follow-up support with consent
- Mentorship for young people, those who have caused harm, or survivors
- Supporting safety plans for survivors (as appropriate

4. As your fundraising strategy allows, provide honoraria or set up paid casual positions (if possible.)

5. Training and other involvement: Find ways to integrate these community liaisons into your programming, events and/or offerings. Explore what type of training or mentorship they might find meaningful to provide to others, and/or to receive from your agency. Consider a co-designed training offered to other community members or staff.

6. Feedback: Regular check-ins with the RJ organization to provide insights and feedback on how the role is working or not working.

- What roles could we imagine developing to encourage community involvement more fully in our restorative justice programming?
- How are Elders/Matriarchs/or knowledge-keepers currently involved?
- How could we honour their contributions more fully?
- Who do involved parties see as leaders? What informal leaders have we not yet approached?
- How are we going to approach repair when the relationship feels strained?

⏭ Start by inviting one respected community member to observe or advise on your program, procedures, or processes.

Note: The process of building genuine community connection takes time and patience. There may be phases of rupture and repair. It's not all about everything going smoothly but about committing to building the relationship over time through listening, curiousity and shared purpose.

Strategy 3:

Strengthen Community Education and Awareness

Community misconceptions and lack of awareness about restorative justice have been identified as barriers for programs in engaging communities in service delivery. While providing valuable and principle-aligned service to communities is the most important facet of education and awareness-raising, programs can also be strengthened by additional education activities. If a Community Liaison role (Strategy 2) is available, they may be able to assist with aspects of Strategy 3.

1. Identify community awareness gaps: Who most needs to understand your service? What are the current strengths and gaps in their understanding? What messages do they need to hear?

Depending on your context and existing relationships, this may be accomplished through information conversations or structured processes like interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

2. Create a Community Education Plan with the following components:

- Key audiences —perhaps choose one to start (e.g., schools, immigrant groups, Elders groups, police, local clubs)
- Outreach schedule
- Material needs: slides, one-pager, stories (See #3, as part of this strategy).
- Key messages tailored to misunderstanding

3. Develop or source 2-3 education materials, such as:

- A "What RJ Is / What It Isn't"/Common Misconceptions one-pager, see Appendix 2 to get you started
- A community slide/power point deck
- A video or social media explainer – for example:
  - Nova Scotia Case Example
  - The Neuroscience of Restorative Justice (Ted Talk)
  - How Restorative Justice Could End Mass Incarceration
  - What is Restorative Justice? (Correctional Service of Canada)
  - CBC The National with Marlee Liss
  - Restorative welcome and Re-Entry Circle (Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth)

4. Host quarterly education events (online or in-person). Examples:

- RJ 101 for community members: Introduction to restorative justice including philosophy, stories, benefits, and opportunities for involvement.
- Restorative approaches in daily life: Presentations on the opportunities of a restorative approach in day-to-day interactions and relationships: parenting/family contexts, workplace, schools, etc.
- Dialogue nights on local events: Events aimed at convening community members on relevant topics and social issues, using restorative principles and practices (e.g. community agreements, talking circles) to guide discussions.

5. If this seems relevant for you in your community context, **create a relationship-building plan for system partners** like local police or RCMP detachments; crown prosecutors; schools, municiple staff, etc.

6. Track who you educate and how to follow up regularly.

- What misconceptions about RJ do we hear most often?
- What education methods are most culturally appropriate for our community? How do we collaborate to learn more about that?
- How do system partners understand our work? How do they fit into our vision for community involvement?
- How do we hold educational events that are accessible, or as accessible as possible?

- ⏭ Host a 45-minute "RJ Lunch & Learn" for any local agency.
- ⏭ Create a simple myth-busting infographic about RJ.

Strategy 4:
Strengthen Interagency Partnerships

Strong partnerships among community agencies can enhance the level of community engagement and participation in restorative justice, while strengthening supports for participants.

1. Create a Community Agency Map: List local groups supporting work adjacent to or interdependent with restorative justice (for example):

- Indigenous nations and their associated services
- Mental health
- Victim/survivor services
- Newcomer communities
- Cultural groups
- Youth organizations
- Identity-based harm supports
- Addiction recovery
- Employment service

2. Build Relationships: Network with local agencies with an eye toward relationships building, shared learning, and cross-referrals. Some options include:

- Attend local events or conferences which attract community agencies
- Host periodic lunches or gatherings for community agencies (as per "Actions to Get You started" in Strategy #3)
- Connect informally (e.g. coffee) with local agency leaders to build understanding and share ideas

3. Identify 3 organizations you want deeper collaboration with. Consider:

- Which agencies might be most likely to make referrals to my program?
- Which agencies would we be most interested in making referrals to?
- Which agencies would likely have personnel or clients with the skills/background to get involved with restorative justice?
- Which agency leaders/members might be suitable and interested in serving on the RJ program's Board of Directors?
- Who does similar work, that may be interested in co-learning opportunities?
- Who might be interested in collaborating on specific projects (including undertaking shared funding applications)?

4. Develop simple partnership agreements (2-3 pages max). Include:

- When to refer
- When to co-support
- How to share information (within consent)
- Who to call for what needs
- How to approach rupture and repair

- Which organizations are natural allies?
- How can we reduce competition and encourage shared advocacy?
- What do we need from partners that we cannot currently do ourselves?

- ⏭ Send a simple one-page "RJ program intro" to potential partners.
- ⏭ Invite one partner to co-facilitate a workshop.
- ⏭ Engage with municipality to possibly fund interagency collaboration, or to offer space as in-kind support.

Strategy 5:
Integrate Transformative Justice-Inspired Practices

1. **Select one TJ practice** to pilot for 6 - 12 months. Learn more about TJ pods here. Other examples:
    - Community Accountability Teams
    - Community-based safety planning
    - Collective support circles
    - Harm response teams for identity-based harms

2. **Co-design the pilot with the community,** including Elders and partners.
3. **Train staff and liaisons** on TJ principles:
    - Collective care/Circles of Care
    - Power analysis
    - Structural harm
    - Building safety outside formal systems
4. **Evaluate and document learnings** to share.

- What systemic issues do we see underlying local harm?
- What collective supports do participants need?
- Where might our program be participating in practices that uphold oppression or do not challenge it?
- How might the community share responsibility in accountability for harm?
- What existing groups are already doing this work, such as a Matriarch group?
- What gaps exist?
- How do we grow and learn when things go wrong?

- ⏭ Start with a "Community Check-In Circle" for follow-up support after an RJ process or other event that seems suitable.
- ⏭ Have a sign-up sheet at an event (perhaps from Strategy 3) that asks: Are you interested in exploring what a "Community Accountability Team/Circle" could mean for our program?

Short "Backgrounder" on RJ vs TJ

Transformative Justice (TJ) is a framework closely related to restorative justice (RJ). Some people view them as essentially the same, arguing that community-based restorative justice (particularly approaches that address the root causes of harm and remain independent from systems that may perpetuate harm) shares the same vision as transformative justice. Others see TJ as distinct, particularly in its emphasis on practical models for deeper community accountability and systems change. This emphasis may already align closely with your program's vision of restorative justice.

TJ has also developed a particularly strong fluency around power, including the ability to name and examine how power operates, both overtly and in more subtle ways. While the restorative justice movement has increasingly engaged with these questions, it has historically focused more heavily on individual actions, individual harms, and repairing harm between individuals. Transformative justice has more consistently centered power and systemic oppression as lenses through which to understand harm. As restorative justice continues to evolve in this direction, it is also increasingly engaging with critiques that some RJ practices can unintentionally uphold or reproduce the very systems that contribute to harm.

To learn more about the discourse on TJ, check out this short video: What is Transformative Justice?[1]

Another way to frame what a community-based approach to justice might look like, but is not using the terms restorative or transformative justice is in this video by Heartspeak Productions: The Problem With Youth - It's Adults! - Phil Gatensby

Possible Group Activity: What do you think are the connections and possible differences between Restorative and Transformative Justice?

1 The "Barnard Center for Research on Women" has a series of videos on YouTube that can help think through what Transformative Justice can look like. Search this channel on YouTube to learn more as you see fit..

Strategy 6:
Identify Equity Barriers to Community Participation

Community engagement in restorative justice programming raises practicalities around accessibility which, if left unaddressed, can present barriers to equitable representation and participation. Identifying and addressing these barriers can be an important step for restorative justice programs seeking to enhance community involvement.

1. Conduct an Accessibility & Barriers Self-Scan: Design and implement a simple process to engage community members in conversations about equity barriers to participation in your program's activities.

- Develop an outreach strategy to identify at least 3-5 community members from underrepresented groups, who are willing to learn about your program, and who are willing to provide input. (And then expect to respectfully invite, invite, and invite again!)
- Interview each participant individual or as a group, documenting responses to questions like:
  - What makes participation difficult?
  - What would make it easier or safer?
  - What support would your community need to participate?
- If more input is required, consider adding surveys, additional interviews or focus groups.
- Synthesize themes in writing for ease of reference.

2. Create an Equity Action Plan: In collaboration with others in your program, develop an Action Plan with 3–6 concrete improvements. In developing the action plan, consider topics including:

- **Power and Leadership:** How are power and authority being wielded within the program? What are the identities and lived experiences of people who hold power (including organizational leaders, facilitators and others)? How is power distributed? What voices are missing from roles of power and authority?
- **Language:** Can community members participate in program activities in their preferred language? What contributions can we make to remove language or barriers such as interpreters, written materials, audio materials and signing (for the hard of hearing).
- **Transportation:** what transportation options are available for community members to access program activities? Are bus tokens available?
- **Childcare:** Is the absence of affordable childcare inhibiting community participation, and how could his be addressed?
- **Compensation:** Is some form of compensation desired or required by potential community participants, and how could these needs be met?
- **Scheduling:** What times of the day/week are programming activities being held? How does the timing work for community participants, and what adjustments if any may be required?
- **Cultural Safety:** To what degree do community participants experience environments that are respectful and honoring of culture, free from discrimination, and where power imbalances, systemic inequities, and the impacts of colonization are actively recognized and addressed?
- **Trauma-Informed Supports:** To what degree do community participants experience environments where the impacts of trauma (individual, collective and systemic) are recognized, and where these understandings inform policies and practices to promote safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment while minimizing risks of re-traumatization?
- **Neurodiversity:** We have a lot more information than we used to about the different ways that people learn, connect and express themselves. What can we do to stay more informed and aware of how to stay optimally accessible in this area?
- **Disability Access:** How accessible are program activities to people with diverse physical and cognitive abilities?

4. Implement the Plan: in collaboration with your funder(s) as appropriate, take steps to put the plan into action.

- How is power currently distributed in your process?
- Who holds informal authority? Formal authority?
- What lived experiences are missing among facilitators? Do we just notice this for now, or are there action steps to become more diverse?
- What can we identify that may help more people be able to access our program?
- What cultures and subcultures do we serve? What options might we have to increase a sense of cultural safety for these groups?

- Consider how you may provide compensation for participation, avoid assuming provision of this valuable knowledge for free (perhaps there is a grant to receive).
- Add food to all community meetings.
- Create a simple intake question: "Is there anything that would help you or your support people participate more easily?"
- Choose one way that your program could be more accessible that does not require a large budget and implement it.

Strategy 7:
Exploring what could "Community Accountability" mean?

At the core of restorative justice is understanding healing, wellness, and also what accountability means or could mean. While a logic that centres punishment tells us that there is one individual responsible for wrongdoing, a more wholistic and restorative view tells us that every individual exists within an ecosystem of relationships and community organizations—relationships and community organizations that have built them up, but also failed them. Community organizations often strive to provide healing and wellness. When relationships and community organizations fail, how can they step into accountability?

1. **Explore your program's meaning of accountability:** Develop a short workshop for your team around how to expand views around accountability. Consider:
   - What could it look like for a community member to participate in an RJ process as not just a support, but also as a party looking to be accountable?
   - How could community be represented in a way that is meaningful to you? And then, what could meaningful accountability by community members or organizations look like?
   - What examples are there in the media, or in other programs, of what effective ad supportive accountability looks like in response to criminal harm?

2. **Create a mini-tool kit for community members** seeking to explore what accountability can look like (especially when supporting young people and survivors). Invite interested community members to explore the following activities:
   - How do we strive to provide healing and wellness, and where might we fall short?
   - Where do we see society/institutions/organizations not living up to their promise to young people, those who have caused harm, and survivors?
   - What role do people in our community play in that "failure"?
   - What capacities, education, understandings or supports might community members need to live up to their obligations to prevent harm?
   - What are some next steps you could take to show up in this way as a community member?

- Why does it matter to expand our view of how accountability is taken?
- How could it shift our program to understand that communities share responsibility for criminal harm and making amends for that?
- How is being accountable related to providing wellness and healing?

⏭ Pull a group together to watch this webinar on Restorative Justice and Community: Restorative Justice & Community: Reclaiming Connection and Responsibility for Our Neighbors

Strategy 8:

Establish a Continous Learning and Evaluation System

Long-term equity and community involvement require ongoing learning and reflection. This Strategy is meant to be used with the Template in the Appendix 1.

1. Create a simple evaluation framework with three categories (participation metrics, equity measures, and community impact measures), or use the template in Appendix 1.

2. Gather data quarterly (light-touch).

3. Host semi-annual reflection sessions with:

- Staff
- Community liaisons
- Elders
- System Partners

4. Share Evaluation findings with funders to advocate for change.

- What forms of community involvement are working well?
- Who is still missing?
- What new needs have emerged?
- How is community showing up in partnership in ways that are meaningful?

⏭ Add a question to participant surveys: “Did you feel community was represented in the process? How so?”

Strategy 9:

Build Connection with Other Similar Programs

We are not alone in this work. We can be accountable to and with each other when we stay in connection with other programs, share the ideas, successes, challenges, and build relationship.

1. Create a Community of Practice where you invite aligned programs to connect regularly. Create an agenda that includes:

- Circle Check-in and Check out
- Getting to know each other's work
- Examples of barriers that programs are facing, and what is being tried
- Help and resources that are available

2. Look for opportunities at regional conferences (in BC, such at the one hosted by RJABC). See if you can pull together an in-person lunch together, or an after-conference visit.

3. Explore ways social media platforms can help with sharing ideas, and staying in contact to troubleshoot emerging issues.

- What other programs would you like to build connection with in BC?
- Who is pursuing a similar vision of building up community involvement in justice responses?
- Who can we partner with that might help us build up our ability to be accessible (that is, they are serving a community that does not often access our program), and what can we offer them as well?

- Pull together one or two other programs you feel a connection with and set a date for a one hour virtual call where you talk about some of the ideas in this Toolkit.
- Start a conversation with a program that serves a community you would like to be able to serve more as well. What can you envision together?
- Co-write a grant with a similar minded organization.

Looking Ahead: A Vision for Restorative Communities

Effective community engagement in restorative justice work is ultimately about building stronger, safer, more resilient and more just communities. We hope that the strategies offered in this toolkit will serve the good not only of individual programs, but the broader texture and experience of the communities in which they serve.

In "The Little Book of Restorative Justice and Community: Reclaiming Connection and Responsibility for Our Neighbours (2026)," authors Sheryl Wilson and Caitlin Morneau offer a vision of "Restorative Communities" which transcends what we do when specific incidents of harm and crime occur. Whether we are speaking about a regional/geographical community or a tight-knit community of interest, this concept is an invitation toward living our restorative principles within the everyday fabric of community. The offer the following guiding principles for Restorative Communities:[1]

1. Lead with Values: Identify shared values within the community, and examine the places where these values differ.

2. Develop a Sense of Mutuality: Mutuality is an understanding of our fundamental interconnectedness – that what is good for you, is also good for me and vice versa. It is about developing a sense of 'We' that is not based simply on agreement on presenting issues.

3. Bring an Asset Mindset: Focus on gifts, talents and strengths within the community, rather than deficiencies.

4. Create Shared Agreements: Be explicit about what share community values mean in practice, especially when disagreements, conflicts or harms occur.

5. Extend Welcome: Bring newcomers into the community or group in ways that are warm, compassionate and curious.

6. Learn Through Listening: Pay attention to what each community member has to offer the bigger picture – thoughts, skills, perspectives, feelings – rather than only the 'experts.' Listen to each other deeply.

7. Celebrate the Little Things: Take time to honour the accomplishments of the group and the individuals within it; create opportunities for connection and shared voice in times of celebration.

8. (Re) Connect: As Wilson and Morneau point out, some groups and communities may tend to think "we already know each other well enough" or "we have been doing his stuff together for a while." The idea of Restorative Community invites us toward finding new, perhaps even playful, ways to connect that bring out new facets of one another.

9. Support Each Other and Grieve Together: Be honest with each other about how we are affected by difficult circumstances; greet these times with mutual connection and care.

10. Explore Consensus Decision-making: When making tough decisions together, demonstrate value for each voice by exploring consensus where possible. Try to avoid the temptation to strive for "efficiency" by using top-down, authoritative decision-making processes which can lend themselves to blind spots and a lack of buy-in down the road.

11. View Conflict as Opportunity: When conflict occurs within communities, it means something important is at stake. Instead of avoiding the conversation or simply trying to win your side of the argument, try a curious approach which asks: what can we learn from each other here?

12. Lead Through Collaboration: Partner with other communities toward shared visions in ways that share power and ownership while enhancing relationships.

As restorative justice providers grounded in values of respect, relationship and repair, we have a unique role to play in the ongoing creation of more restorative communities. Hopefully, the strategies offered in this Toolkit – along with the many other creative ideas that you may develop in your community – may be practical means to help us take our seat in the circle within an increasingly just and resilient community.

1 Wilson, S., & Morneau, C. (2026). Little book of restorative justice & community: Reclaiming connection and responsibility for our neighbors. Good Books. Pgs. 64-75

Appendix 1:
Evaluation Framework Template

1. Reflection: Why Evaluate?

Before creating an evaluation plan, reflect on the purpose of the evaluation. For example, is the evaluation intended to:

- Improve program design?
- Demonstrate impact to funders?
- Strengthen community relationships?
- Increase equity, accessibility and inclusion?
- Support learning and adaptation?
- Other?

Getting clear on the intended purpose of your evaluation activities can help guide your focus.

2. Core Evaluation Areas

Decide what areas/domains you'd like to evaluate. As an example, this framework template is built around four key domains:

- **Reach & Participation** (Who is involved?)
- **Quality & Experience** (How meaningful is the involvement?)
- **Equity & Inclusion** (Who is missing and why?)
- **Community Impact & Outcomes** (What difference is it making?)

Following are some examples of the types of Metrics, Indicators and Data Sources that could be used within these domains[1]. Remember to keep evaluation activities realistic for your program. It's okay to start small and grow from there!

Domain 1: Reach and Participation

Key Question: Who is participating in community roles, and how broadly are we engaging?

Metric	Sample Indicators	Data Source	Frequency of Review
Number of community members involved	# of facilitators, support persons, liaisons, circle participants	Program records	Quarterly
Diversity of participants	Representation across age, gender, culture, language, lived experience	Intake forms (optional/self-identified)	Quarterly
Types of roles filled by community	# in each role (facilitator, Elder, support person, etc.)	Program tracking	Quarterly
Community involvement beyond cases	# of education events, prevention activities, community dialogues	Event logs	Quarterly
Repeat engagement	% of community members who return for multiple roles	Volunteer/staff tracking	Annual

1 All associated domain tables were created with the assistance of Chat GPT (Open AI).

Domain 2: Quality and Experience

Key Question: Is community involvement meaningful, safe, and effective?

Metric	Sample Indicators	Data Source	Frequency of Review
Participant/community member's sense of safety	% reporting feeling emotionally and culturally safe	Post-process surveys	Ongoing
Sense of meaningful participation	% reporting their voice mattered in the process	Surveys / interviews	Ongoing
Clarity of roles	% reporting they understood their role and expectations	Surveys	Ongoing
Preparedness of community participants	% who felt adequately trained/prepared	Training feedback forms	After training
Satisfaction with the process	Qualitative feedback from survivors, responsible parties, and community members	Interviews / surveys	Ongoing

Domain 3: Equity and Inclusion

Key Question: Are we removing barriers and engaging those most impacted by harm?

Metric	Sample Indicators	Data Source	Frequency of Review
Representation of marginalized groups	% of participants from underrepresented communities	Self-identification (optional)	Quarterly
Accessibility supports provided	# of cases/events with supports (translation, transport, childcare, etc.)	Program Logs	Quarterly
Barriers identified	Common themes from feedback (e.g., language, cost, trust)	Interviews / surveys	Semi annual
Compensation provided	# and % of community participants receiving stipends/honoraria	Financial Records	Quarterly
Inclusion of culturally relevant practices	# of cases involving Elders, cultural protocols, or community-specific practices	Case notes	Quarterly

Domain 4: Community Impact and Outcomes

Key Question: Are we removing barriers and engaging those most impacted by harm?

Metric	Sample Indicators	Data Source	Frequency of Review
Representation of marginalized groups	% of participants from underrepresented communities	Self-identification (optional)	Quarterly
Accessibility supports provided	# of cases/events with supports (translation, transport, childcare, etc.)	Program Logs	Quarterly
Barriers identified	Common themes from feedback (e.g., language, cost, trust)	Interviews / surveys	Semi annual
Compensation provided	# and % of community participants receiving stipends/honoraria	Financial Records	Quarterly
Inclusion of culturally relevant practices	# of cases involving Elders, cultural protocols, or community-specific practices	Case notes	Quarterly

3. Qualitative Learning

Recognizing that numbers won't tell the whole, this is an opportunity to dive deeper into other ways of collecting data.

Collect stories & reflections from identified individuals (up to you who that is). Document:

- Moments where community involvement made a difference
- Challenges or tensions (e.g., power dynamics, representation gaps)
- Feedback from Elders or community liaisons
- Examples of systemic barriers showing up
- Unexpected outcomes (positive or negative)

Sample Question: Describe a recent situation where community involvement significantly shaped the outcome. What worked? What was difficult? What would you change?

4. Equity Reflection Check

Conduct a bi-annual, in-house reflection to consider questions like:

- Who is consistently missing from our processes?
- To what extent are we relying on unpaid labour, and what are the implications of that?
- Are some voices carrying more influence than others?
- Are cultural and community practices being respected or tokenized?
- Where are systemic barriers still showing up?
- How is community involvement helping understand what accountability means?

5. Data Collection Tools

Create accessible tools for your program to collect information. Some options include:

- Short post-process surveys (5–8 questions max)
- Excel or simple data tracking
- Annual partner interviews (30–45 minutes)
- Community feedback circles
- Facilitator reflection forms

Sample Survey Questions

For Community Participants

- I felt safe participating in this process. (1–5)
- I understood my role. (1–5)
- I felt my voice mattered. (1–5)
- I would participate again. (Yes/No)
- What could we improve?

For Affected and Responsible Parties

- Did community involvement feel helpful or supportive?
- Did you feel represented by those involved?
- What would have improved your experience?

6. Using the Data

Develop a plan on how you will use the data you collect. For example:

Quarterly

- Review participation and equity metrics
- Adjust recruitment and outreach

Biannual

- Hold reflection session with staff and community liaisons
- Identify 2–3 changes to implement

Quarterly

- Share findings with funders and partners
- Advocate for:
  - Community education funding
  - Compensation for community roles
  - Partnership resources

Appendix 2:
Dispelling Misconceptions about RJ[1]

Restorative justice is not . . .

a particular program, process, or blueprint

Restorative justice is relevant as a paradigm that guides responses for any crime or harm--both individual and systemic. It provides a compass for how we might respond meaningfully to address the needs of those impacted, even when dialogue or encounter are not possible or beneficial.

primarily about forgiveness or reconciliation

Processes informed by a restorative justice approach have sometimes been associated with concepts of forgiveness and/or reconciliation. However, forgiveness or reconciliation should never be expected, much less coerced in any restorative justice process. It is true that, particularly compared with adversarial justice, restorative justice provides a context where these goals may at times arise for those with justice needs. Where this is the case, these needs should emerge through participants' own intentions, not out of any overt or subtle pressure by others (especially facilitators!)

conflict mediation

Conflict is defined as tension that occurs when people have different ideas, understandings, or positions on an issue. Mediation is best understood as a process to address these situations, where parties define and discuss their interests, morals, and ethics in the situation. Restorative justice, on the other hand, addresses harm and injustice. In these situations, ethics require an acknowledgement of harmful and unjust behavior by a responsible party toward those who have been harmed. Referring to this as a conflict risks minimizing and/or mutualizing the harm done to those harmed, while also failing to provide those who commit harms with opportunities to be accountable for their choices.

primarily intended for individual cases of minor, youth, or first time offending

Experience and research has shown that processes guided by a restorative justice approach may have the greatest potential impact in more severe cases where there has been significant individual or systemic harm.

new

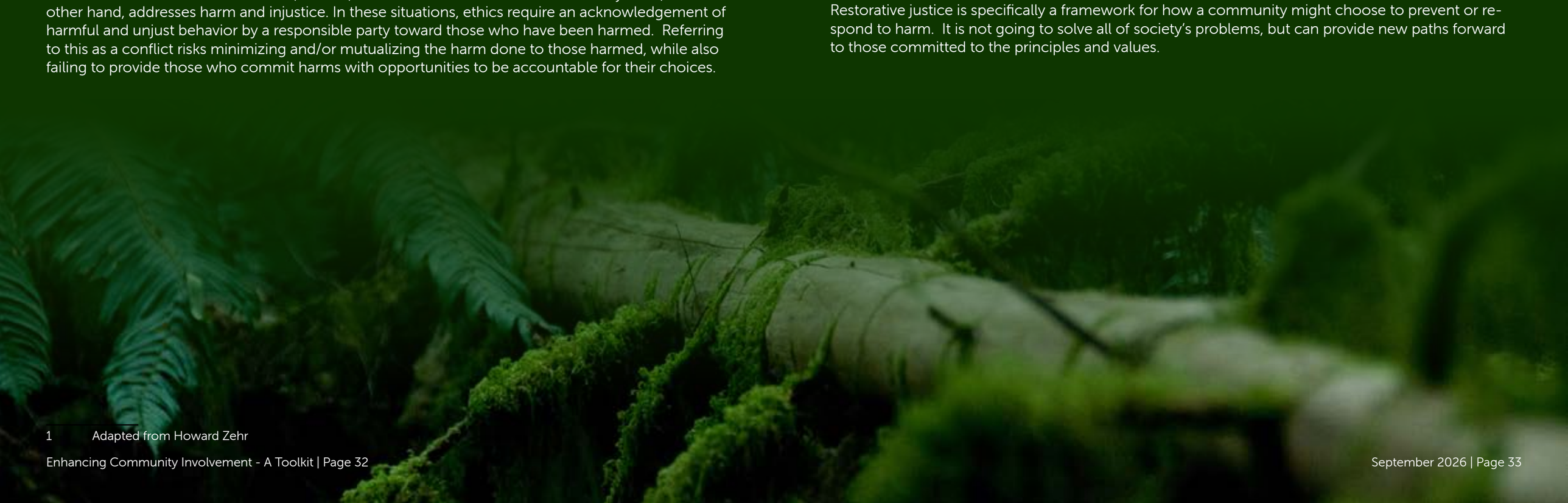
Restorative justice as a discipline owes a great deal to the wisdom and traditions of Indigenous peoples around the world. The roots of what Western culture calls "restorative justice" are likely as old as human history.

necessarily a replacement for incarceration

A restorative approach to justice requires that we think critically about why, whom, in what circumstances, for how long and to what end we as a society incarcerate people. Some restorative justice advocates identify as prison abolitionists and some do not. In practice, some programs under a restorative justice umbrella currently operate within correctional facilities.

a panacea

Restorative justice is specifically a framework for how a community might choose to prevent or respond to harm. It is not going to solve all of society's problems, but can provide new paths forward to those committed to the principles and values.



1 Adapted from Howard Zehr