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WHO ARE WE?
OUR MISSION...

Community Justice Initiatives Association (CJI) is a community-based non-profit society located in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. Considered the ‘go-to’ place for anyone wishing to learn or understand restorative justice practices from a real-world perspective.

Our mission is: To promote peacemaking, reconciliation and the resolution of conflict through the development and application of restorative justice values, principles and processes.

With over 35 years of experience providing conflict resolution programs in such settings as the criminal justice system, organizations, schools, businesses, and for private individuals, we are driven by a unique understanding of conflict in society and have become leaders and pioneers in what we call “restorative justice.”

Staff 2020/2021
Dr. David L. Gustafson - Executive Director, VOMP Facilitator, Trainer
Jennifer Siemens - Operations Director
Saskia Epp - Administrative Assistant
Heidi Knull - VOMP Facilitator
Susan Underwood - VOMP Facilitator
Zofia Switkowski - Restorative Action Program Coordinator

Board of Directors
Kaylie Maughan - Co-Chair
Russell Nelson - Co-Chair
Alison McVeigh - Secretary
Scott Nichols - Treasurer
Fae Chato-Manchuk - Director
Vic Derksen Siemens - Director
Coral Forslund - Director
As a past staff member who really counted and leaned on our board members for their unique skills and insight, it is my honour and excitement this year to be able to provide input to the Annual Report from the Board of Directors. I often gaze (over Zoom) at my co-chair, and fellow board members in gratitude for our connected vision and shared value of radical curiosity. This has come in handy as we navigate our second tough and demanding year of the pandemic. I have been thoroughly heartened as each member of the board has 'doubled-down' on their dedication, passion and eagerness, to both grow and learn together as we look toward a new future that is just beginning to unfold.

On behalf of the Board, I can truly say we deeply respect and support the work of the staff of CJI. These folks perform acts of kindness and compassion, alongside skillful facilitation of dialogue that resonates and create ripples in our community that have lasting effects. They collaborate with their clients to create and open spaces for hard, but needed conversations about trauma, impacts and the needs for change. Too often in our society and institutions, these conversations are avoided, or seen as problematic, and opening a 'Pandora's box' that may never be closed.

This past year of reflection has allowed the board to take a cue from our learned CJI Staff, and begin to ask deeper questions amongst our board members to ensure we are living up to our values and mission statement both as a board and organization. Further, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd which sparked deep conversations and hopeful action around police brutality, systemic oppression, white fragility and privilege;
Instead of shying away from these topics or virtue signaling through social media, we wanted to set aside meaningful space and time to acknowledge our current limitations and responsibilities. The outcome of the beginnings of these discussions have been the reshaping, standardization and creation of policy that will impact future clients and staff in a positive way. We are also in the process of bringing on new board members who can invigorate and add their perspectives and skills to this process. We are hopeful to meet in person at a board retreat later this year when pandemic restrictions allow, for an even deeper look at how we can better serve this organization.

As the board continues these movements, we recognize the staff have set a high bar and used this year to create some truly remarkable achievements. The Victim Offender Mediation Program (VOMP) continues to grow with Dave, Heidi and Susan continuing to move us with powerful stories of resilience, restoration and change, even as they moved to online models of communication when the institutions were closed for a short time. In their usual spirit, it only seemed to further the cause and lead to more opportunities to connect with those in need.

The Collaborative Sentencing Program (CSP) that Dave has founded and given much of his care, attention and time to building, has the potential to be a wholly new way to look at sentencing through a restorative wholistic lens. We were thrilled that it was finally granted funding this year by the Province of BC Civil Forfeiture Grant; something that was thought to be a hard obstacle to overcome. Just another showcase of how CJI, a long standing restorative justice program, is still leading practitioners into new territory.

Zofia, our Restorative Action Program Coordinator and polymath graphic artist, media content creator, and education visionary has also shown her robust leadership and talent this year. She jumped fully into navigating the complexities of bringing the RA program into the classroom virtually. She created beautiful new manuals and workbooks that hold the legacy of its many contributors and that will continue to inspire students and learners of all ages. She has also delved deep into anti-racism work in the classroom and beyond with her efforts with North Shore Restorative Justice in partnership with CJI’s “Youth Justice Lab” workshops, to offer youth small cohorts for connection and exploration of restorative justice, conflict and social justice topics. We continue to be grateful to have Zofia’s dedication and leadership in building the Restorative Action program into the fantastic initiative it is today.

The Board is determined to explore funding options and alternatives that would enable all of CJI’s unique programs to continue their cutting edge, quality work and to meet the growing demand for their services. Not an easy task, but one we all are dedicated to, as members of the greater CJL community and also as board members. On behalf of the board, it is our pleasure to serve.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
BY DR. DAVID L. GUSTAFSON

"...If I have not love, I am nothing..."

In the final scene of the movie Legally Blonde (2001), Elle Woods (played by Reese Witherspoon) gets some great lines…. As part of her Law School graduation speech, she quotes Aristotle: “The law is reason free from passion.” Elle then carries on: “No offence… Aristotle,” but “I have come to find that passion is a key ingredient to the study and practice of law.”

After years of study at Harvard Law School, Elle has resolved for herself what seems to be a contradiction between a common conception of law as emotionless, and the practice of law as something that in reality always involves emotions.

Years ago, when I taught an upper-level course on Restorative Justice Models in use, worldwide, in the School of Criminology at SFU, I began each semester with a good-sized section of legal theory from a rather dusty law book: the early 12th century The Laws of Henry I (Leges Henrici Primi in the original Latin). The laws King Henry promulgated (and the theory behind them) start from the premise that mediation, facilitated victim – offender dialogue and informal agreements reached between litigants are far superior to judgements handed down at court.

In Henry’s time, of course, these were political courts in which the King, or some overlord would craft the judgements between disputing parties. It was acknowledged that seeking out common ground, drawing upon emotional bonds and appealing to the demands - not only of civility but of friendship and of love - could and would be more likely to create lasting peace than any dictate handed down by an authority. In fact, Henry went so far as to opine (and he was the King, after all) that: “An agreement supersedes law, and love supersedes judgment” (“pactum enim legem vincit et amor iudicium”).

We’ve since lost track, it seems, of the fact that an agreement crafted by the disputants and entered into voluntarily, is almost always preferable to a sentence handed down by an official justice.
In Henry I’s day, the assertion was that Love (amor) could provide a more effective resolution than a legal sentence. And, these were not ‘soft-on-crime-and-conflict’ sorts of resolutions: agreements reached based on an appeal to love and friendship were legally binding. In fact, they shared much of the framework of settlement judgements reached at court then and now, including being made in the presence of witnesses, being recorded, being filed for future reference and cited as legal precedents in cases to come. Often the conflict resolution dialogues and the final agreements themselves were overseen by a justice, a Nobleman or the King or Queen themselves. For disputants or litigants to sign these as settlement agreements or peace bonds was to sign them into law, with severe penalties, potentially, for breaching them.

The Laws of Henry I probably can’t offer us tidy lessons to be imposed on the practice of criminal law or of dispute resolution today. However, these examples from 12th-century law might just prompt us to consider how emotions and their expression should fit into a complete and complex legal system. “If, as Aristotle claimed, law really is ‘reason free from passion’, its impact would be constrained to the direct effects of its sentencing. [But] … if a key goal of law is to create social harmony that extends beyond the doors of its courtrooms and lawyers’ offices” and out into the communities it is charged to serve “it should take the social and emotional lives of its participants into consideration.”

If Aristotle is right, then CJJ has been operating from flawed premises for the whole of its existence. But if ‘Elle’s graduation speech was closer to Truth, and the Laws of Henry full of wisdom in their recognition of the place and role of both reason and passion / feelings / emotion, we’ve not only been in the mainstream of those truths about justice, we’ve helped to direct and give force to that stream. Not only do CJJ’s operating principles and premises harken back to a time and an ethic reminiscent of the Laws of Henry, but our programs’ outcomes have also long demonstrated the wisdom found there. Reason plays a part, and must; but the expression of emotion and mechanisms based in and operated as an outgrowth of the law of love produce profound and lasting resolutions as the stories here in this year’s Annual Report, collecting on our website, and certainly in our files, quite clearly attest. The ancient echoes reverberate. They have for almost 40 years.
As we head into our next decade (stretching for the 50-year anniversary mark), we’ll continue to build what we do upon those same values and principals, believing that a marriage of intellect and passion as demonstrated in the writings and the ethic of St. Paul, for example, eclipses Aristotle’s:

...earnestly desire and strive for the greater gifts [if acquiring them is going to be your goal]. And yet I will show you a still more excellent way [one of the choicest graces and the highest of them all: unselfish love] 1 Cor. 12:31 – 1 Cor. 13. Amplified Bible

As we shape our next program developments - especially our nascent Collaborative Sentencing Program (CSP) we’ll keep firmly in mind two things: 1) “…if I have not love, I am nothing…” and 2) that “…strategies that formally enable emotional processing, expression and relationship building are anything but irrational [contrary to reason]; they could be – and in fact prove to be - instrumental to law that works.”

References:
RESTORATIVE ACTION PROGRAM
BY ZOFIA SWITKOWSKI

Sitting in a circle at D.W. Poppy Secondary, I invite a group of Grade 12 students to reflect on the past year of the pandemic, and how it has affected them. When the talking piece reaches her, a quieter student sitting across from me takes a few deep breaths before opening up about the loneliness she has experienced; the isolation from friends and family. A tall senior in worn cowboy boots speaks for the first time about how the pandemic has impacted his mental health. Another student reflects on how the simmering conflict in his family escalated with everyone stuck at home, leading to a divorce. We hold space together, grieving what we have lost, yet seeing a piece of our own experience reflected in each story shared.

I ask, gently, What have you learned about yourself through this pandemic? As usual, I’m floored by the insight and honesty of these brave young folks. One teen shares, “I’ve learned so much about myself and my relationships. My mum and I are so much closer now.” Another explains, “I have had time to think about who I really am and what my needs are. I feel like I know more about how to help myself and how to ask for help when I can’t do it alone”.

It is a wild understatement to say that the 2020/21 school year was not what any of us expected it to be. The circle I describe above is one of hundreds in which participants opened up about their experiences of the pandemic. Other times, the conversation centered on interpersonal conflict, racial justice, or identity. Despite the challenges of the past 9 months, the Restorative Action Program has remained a steadfast support in the Langley School District, carving out space in the school day for children and youth to gather, to process, to communicate through hurt and to give voice to their experiences.
In the last 8 months, we worked with over 1600 youth and adults, held nearly 280 Peace Circle sessions, and facilitated 17 mediation files. These services were distributed across six elementary schools, three middle schools, and six secondary schools.

We saw an increase in the complexity of files, with mediations requiring an average of 8 separate meetings (including exploratory meetings, conferences, and follow-up). Feedback from participants in both restorative mediation and Peace Circles has been overwhelmingly positive, and the waitlist for next year is filling up fast.

While our Conversation Peace peer mediator training took a back seat this year due to cohort restrictions, we received many requests for training from both inside and beyond the Langley School district. With a little practice – and a lot of patience with technology – we were able to offer virtual learning experiences to approximately 375 adult participants, from Langley to Terrace, to Nelson. These offerings ranged from full-day training on facilitating community-building circles, to shorter sessions on the foundations of restorative justice in education. In addition to these virtual training sessions, the Restorative Action Program worked with North Shore Restorative Justice Society to train two groups of high school students on the skills of peer mediation, as part of a “Youth Justice Lab” initiative.

As we come to the end of a school year like no other, our steadfast belief in the importance of restorative responses to conflict and harm has only been reaffirmed. We have witnessed our young folks demonstrate incredible resilience, and it has been an honour to walk alongside them as they navigate an increasingly complex social landscape, both within and beyond their school walls.

“I am invigorated to see that school communities are recognizing this more and more each day.

Back in September, I began the school year by creating adaptations to our programming and consulting with our school district partners to create safe practices so that our work could continue. I am aware of many restorative schools-based programs that were unable to run this year, and am grateful for the support and collaboration from District Principal Michael Morgan that made it possible for me to work safely with students face-to-face.

The 2020/21 school year saw significant staffing changes for the program, with long-time staff Cristy Watson retiring from her role as Restorative Action Teacher in the Langley School District. Cristy has dedicated countless hours over the past decade to working restoratively with children and school staff. The Restorative Action Program would not be where it is today without her wisdom and patient guidance. The impact of her dedication, skill, and compassion will undoubtedly be felt far into the futures of both students and educators alike. I am elated for (and slightly envious of) those who will be so lucky to cross her path in the years to come. Thank you, Cristy - you are incredible!

Despite staffing capacity reduced by nearly 40%, the Restorative Action Program was able to maintain deep connections with staff at schools throughout the district.

"It is vital now more than ever that our young folks know they are unconditionally valued and cared for, and that they belong."
If our experience at CJI of COVID-19 has done anything positive, it has been to require us to become extremely creative. That creativity has had to extend to where we work, when we work and how we do our work. As with many who have learned to cope, Victim Offender Mediation Program (VOMP) Staff have learned to split our time: to make home offices work on some days and then come into the CJI office on others.

The institutions, however, are another matter. They have been ‘shuttered’ to us for many months. This has made it difficult for us to connect with the inmates and has complicated their ability to access our services. Fortunately, this year has seen a number of our prisoner participants granted day parole opportunities, enabling us to more easily connect with them either in virtual face-to-face or in-person meetings. It is the virtual meetings between the victims / survivors and the offender participants which have been the most challenging piece for us. We have had to adapt, to grow and to learn to use a variety of new technological platforms to communicate with all of the parties involved.

Understanding the IT aspects of organizing and facilitating the face-to-face meetings between the victim and offender participant parties has been only part of the equation. It becomes more complicated at the point of ensuring that everyone involved also has the necessary equipment and understanding required to engage with us and with one another. Even more challenging is the difficulty presented by needing to “read” people when engaging with them virtually. So much can be lost when we are unable to sit in the same room with participants during these conferences. In person, one hears tone and pacing differently, takes in body language and discerns energy differently; conversation flows more naturally. We are working hard to learn ways to ‘check in’ with participants, to multiply ways of clarifying what is being said and intended, and to make those interventions flow naturally and fluidly.

While we have had some success with bringing cases to conclusion between offenders on parole and their victims, our present inability to enter the prisons means that we are meeting with them - in every circumstance and at all stages of the process - virtually. We haven't had the opportunity, yet to test what we have learned in the virtual settings with parolees in a face-to-face meeting between an offender who is incarcerated and their victim(s). There will likely be some aspects that we will still need to work out. Fortunately, we have some wonderfully supportive staff on the inside in each of the Pacific Region Institutions so,
although progress is slow, we are still making progress. The exciting part of all this is that while these methodologies are new to CJI and for the Restorative Opportunities (RO) program nationally; we are blazing new trails exploring what is possible in the Victim Offender mediation process using these tools.

North to the Yukon
Perhaps one of the most powerful face-to-face meetings we have ever conducted, came together in Carcross-Tagish First Nation in the Yukon this past October. Heidi had been invited to travel to Whitehorse last March with CSC’s Victim Services Officers for meetings with colleagues there. When Heidi did her VOMP presentation, one of the Community Parole Officers (PO) was present. He was intrigued with the idea. A short time later, one of the offenders on his case load informed him that he had long wanted to be able to apologize to people he had harmed in the Carcross Community. The PO had also heard from community leaders in Carcross that a victim there wanted to meet with this same parolee.

Having heard about what he saw to be an ideal process during the information sessions in the spring, he was able to reach out to us, make the referral and enable us to get the process started for each of the parties involved. Within weeks we (Dave and Heidi) were in Carcross, conducting preliminary meetings with both parties, the offender and the trauma survivor, and with the leaders and community members who were supporting them both. Within weeks we (Dave and Heidi) were in Carcross, conducting preliminary meetings with both parties, the offender and the trauma survivor, and with the leaders and community members who were supporting them both. The face-to-face meeting can best be described as ‘beautiful’; it was certainly experienced as powerfully healing by both participants and by the leaders who participated in the circle. After many years of struggle in the aftermath of trauma, Cindy, the survivor (not her real name) was able to hear the words she had longed to hear for so long, and the family member who had offended against her was finally able to say the words he had for so long longed to say.

Cindy later reflected outside the ‘long house’ as we walked along the lake beside the sacred fire that had been kept burning through the entire duration of the process, that having ‘voice and agency’: being able to exercise choice in every aspect of how the process unfolded, had been wonderfully empowering for her.

The following day, Reg (again, not his real name) came back to the circle to visit with us, and with Cindy, sharing his own profound gratitude for a process that had enabled him to take full responsibility and help him find his way ‘home.’ Almost immediately following this meeting (perhaps best described as a form of spiritual ceremony) other community members – aware to at least some degree that these meetings had been taking place – began to surface, disclosing that they had similar needs, and hoping to participate in similar healing processes soon. One of our vivid ‘take aways’ from all of this is the value – and in fact the imperative – of taking every opportunity to provide information to the different organizations with whom we, as VOMP staff, must work closely. This spring, we have begun to create PowerPoint presentations for use in these sorts of information meetings (which for now have to be done virtually) with Institutional and Community Parole Officers, other Institutional Staff and Managers, Victim Services Officers, Parole Board Members and Regional Communication Officers.

These presentations would include a component explaining how we are exploring and learning to use the virtual aspects of the process to the fullest possible effect. As the world is changing, we are changing with it, hoping that at some point soon it will have become second nature to manage all these processes with ease on a virtual platform, while hoping that we can keep up those skills, but be meeting with the folk we serve face-to-face but in person, once again.
Every year we make the Youth Black Book, available and accessible to more community agencies, service providers, community policing, institutions that serve youth, and secondary as well as elementary schools via the web. The objective is to make youth aware, in the easily accessible format of the internet, of useful information about services available to them in their communities and to provide a pro-active tool in helping them independently make healthy and responsible choices.

We distribute wallet sized information cards, free of charge, to all schools and community service organizations in in the Fraser Valley. Youth are encouraged to access the website for any help, questions or useful information they may need. The website and important numbers are listed on the card and can easily be carried in a wallet. We have designed the card to be a convenient reminder that the Youth Black Book is available online at www.youthblackbook.com

Each year we distribute over 15,000 of these cards. Our goal is to replenish the supplies annually. This project is not only a beneficial resource guide, but is also essential for the youth in our communities. We are dedicated to ensuring that it continues to provide the assistance that they need.

CJI would like to thank the generous financial supporters of this project in 2020/21:
- City of Langley Community Grant
- City of Surrey Community Grant
- Township of Langley

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The ongoing and faithful support of individuals, organizations, foundations and community groups helped to sustain CJI’s programs over the very challenging last year. The Board of Directors and staff would like to acknowledge and extend appreciation to these contributors:

- Chris Spencer Foundation
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- Hamber Foundation
- Langley Mennonite Fellowship
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