

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #6

Title: *Let's Talk About the Circle*

Our group met just one time, and during those two hours we packed in a lot of information, some of which must be hard to remember right now. We had just begun to dip our big toes into the water, trying to build a bit of trust and begin to understand the power of the circle. Many past participants in Restorative Justice have told us that they have never been in a circle like this one, a space where people are their authentic, honest selves and share so openly with each other. When we come back together, we will continue on a path to create a circle where people build trust with others in the group by sharing their thoughts with each other, and doing the growth work that will help all of us learn new ways of being in the world.

Let's talk a little more about the circle...here are some of the important ideas about Restorative Justice circles that we shared at the first session:

- **In the circle, everyone is equal.**
There is no hierarchy in the circle—no one is more important than anyone else. By sitting in a circle, we respect and accept the voices of everyone in the circle.
- **When you have the talking piece, everyone listens.**
There are no side conversations or comments expressing your support or disagreement with what is being said. Some say that holding the talking piece in your left hand means that it is closer to your heart, and that you will speak directly from your heart—your truth. In the circle, we listen with curiosity and compassion.
- **When the going gets tough, turn to wonder and curiosity.**
If you feel judgmental or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought him or her to this belief." "I wonder what he's feeling right now." "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself." Set aside judgment and listen to both others and yourself.
- **What is said here stays here, what is learned here leaves here.**
Building trust requires that you don't share others' stories. You can share what you are learning from the experience, but protecting each other's privacy is critical to this being a safe space for everyone.

We often think about the circle as being the heart and soul of Restorative Justice because of the power of this sacred space to transform individuals. It doesn't just happen because we are sitting in a circle, or because we have circle guidelines. It happens because everyone is committed to protecting this time and space so that every single person can be vulnerable enough to speak their truth. It is fine to write all of this down on paper, but the real power will show itself when we are all back together sharing our lives with each other.

On the other side of this handout is some poetry and other writing about circles. Enjoy!

Be kind...Show someone gratitude...and Be safe...Back to you next week.

~ Ms. Caro-Bruce

My First Circle

Fifteen years ago, I was in prison. I had been invited to go inside the hundred year-old walls to be part of something called Restorative Justice. That was all I knew. I stayed for three days, and those three days changed my life. I sat in a circle with thirty inmates, twenty volunteers and three survivors of violent crime. Over those three days, we talked openly and honestly not about crime, but about harm. Restorative Justice brings together offenders, victims and the community to heal the harm caused by crime. This was vastly different from my experience as a lawyer who had spent thirty-five years in criminal courtrooms. In those courtrooms, there was precious little concern for the victims, the accused, the families and the community who were all affected by the ripples of harm that spread from the crime. In prison those three days, I saw a way that people could come together, hear each other's stories and rediscover empathy.

~Rev. Jerry Hancock

The Circle

Compassion and Trust
Listening to our Stories
Helping Heal the Harm

~Ms. Companik,
RJ volunteer

Lifeguards

We breathe the same air
Our ripples meet and mingle
Life-saving circle

~Ms. Wallace,
RJ volunteer

Trust the Circle

We sit together
Being present and mindful
In a circle of trust

~Ms. Companik,
RJ volunteer

A Round

Our circle's round
A community in sync
Harmonious song

~Ms. Wallace,
RJ volunteer

Power of the Circle

*I pin all my hopes on
quiet processes
And small circles in which
Vital and truly transforming
events take place.*

The Witness of Rufus Jones
Words & Music, Bryan Sirchio

*You have
noticed that everything
an Indian does is in a circle, and that
is because the Power of the World always
works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In
the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all
our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and
as long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The
flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the
four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south
gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty
wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the
outer world with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is in
a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball,
and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls, Birds make
their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes
forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both
are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and
always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a
circle from childhood to childhood, and so its is in everything
where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests
of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's
hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great
Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.*

*-- Black Elk in Black Elk Speaks as
told through John G.
Niehardt*

*Never settle in any circle
that is not fully
committed
to forever walk in the
direction of endless
opportunities and
possibilities.*

Edmond Mbiaka

Black Elk, 1863-1950
Oglala Sioux Holy Man