

Vermont's Restorative Justice Programs Position on Racial Injustice

In March of 2017, the Vermont Association of Court Diversion Programs, DOC-funded Community Justice Centers, and the Balanced and Restorative Justice programs of DCF unanimously adopted the Principles of Restorative Justice, collaboratively developed by the Scaling-Up Restorative Justice Workgroup. Our programs strive to operate based on those principles. This document acknowledged that in Vermont, “services embracing a restorative vision for addressing harm continue to evolve and expand.” The principles were meant to orient and guide us toward effectively supporting relationships rooted in justice and respect and identified the following key points:

1. Harmful actions are violations of people and relationships.
2. Violations create obligations.
3. Restorative justice seeks to engage and support those who have been harmed or victimized.

We join many others who, since the May 25, 2020 killing of George Floyd by police officers, are working to acknowledge and address the structural and institutional racism that has existed since this Nation's founding. At this time in history, we who provide restorative justice services in Vermont have an obligation to look within to explore, and as necessary address, our role within the larger structure of racism and injustice. Vermont arrest and incarceration data show a disproportionate number of people of color in our criminal justice system. In the words of Angela Davis, *“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.”*

In addressing matters referred to us, we are committed to work in partnership with State and local government and the volunteers who represent our local communities to provide support and accountability to all parties, including addressing the underlying conditions that have led up to the violation.

As we seek to hold ourselves accountable and move toward a justice system that brings dignity, safety and repair of harm for all, we commit to:

1. prioritize diversity in all its forms (race, age, income, lived experience with the criminal legal system, etc.) when recruiting staff and volunteers for our work, with the intent to best represent the communities we serve;
2. collect and share data that will help identify inequities in accessing restorative options at our agencies for people of color in Vermont;
3. engage in at least six hours of anti-racism training annually to explore our own implicit biases and privileges, the foundation and historical roots of our restorative practices among indigenous peoples here and around the world, the roots and current forms of racism, and what it means to be anti-racist;
4. use a standing agenda item on our member agency and association meetings, at least quarterly, to examine our policies and practices in light of these commitments so we work in ways that are inclusive and equitable, respect the dignity of all, and build relationships rooted in justice and respect.

Signed,

Addison County Restorative Justice Services

Barre Community Justice Center

Bennington County Center for Restorative Justice

Brattleboro Community Justice Center

Burlington Community Justice Center

Caledonia and Essex County Court Diversion at Northeast Kingdom Youth Services

Easterseals Vermont (BARJ provider in Addison County)

Essex Community Justice Center

Franklin Grand Isle Restorative Justice Center

Greater Falls Community Justice Center

Hartford Community Restorative Justice Center

Lamoille Restorative Center

Montpelier Community Justice Center

Orange County Community Justice Center

Orleans County Court Diversion at Northeast County Community Action

Orleans County Restorative Justice Center

Rutland County Community Justice Center at BROCC Community Action

Rutland County Court Diversion and Restorative Justice Center

Spectrum Youth and Family Center (BARJ provider in Chittenden County)

South Burlington Community Justice Center

The Community Restorative Justice Center in St. Johnsbury

Washington County Court Diversion

Williston Community Justice Center

Windham County Court Diversion/Youth Services

Windsor County Court Diversion