

Ongoing Research Projects



Professionalization

Lead Researchers:
Susan Henderson and
Sylvia Dearing

The Professionalization Project focuses on professionalization within community-based programs and is being led by the community justice agencies, who have identified thirteen questions to guide the research process. This research will seek examples where community-based practitioners have been accredited, and the benefits and disadvantages of that professional designation. The data gathered will be used to evaluate the existing structure which sees the NSRJ Program being delivered by staff and community volunteers who are not professionals.



Restorative Justice, Gender and Violence

Lead Researchers:
Melanie Randall & Lori Haskell

The Gender Project aims to help develop the theoretical and conceptual basis for a critical assessment of the efficacy and possibilities for a restorative justice approach to crimes of gendered violence, including the potential for, as well as concerns about limits on, using restorative justice approaches to respond to violence against women.

The analysis generated for this component of the NSRJ-CURA will be based on a critical engagement with the key literature in the field of restorative justice with a particular emphasis on restorative justice in relation to gendered violence. It will also involve a critical assessment of any empirical research on the use of restorative justice approaches to crimes of gendered violence, including any evaluation studies which might exist and what they might tell us about work in the field to date.



Urban / Rural

Lead Researcher:
Tony Thomson

The Urban/Rural Project entails the secondary analysis of data being collected for other projects as new data or data that is released by the Province. Initially, the analysis will consider community size as the best indicator of urbanization. The analysis will seek differences between the most urbanized RJ agency, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and the largely rural/small town agencies (e.g., Annapolis Valley, South Shore, Cumberland, Colchester, Yarmouth region). Cape Breton is intermediary by this definition and it is hypothesized that differences will reflect this positioning. It is presumed that differences will cluster together in the rural agencies and not be more or less randomly spread among all the agencies.

The first question is to examine the existence of subjective differences by area. It is likely that rural subjects will perceive significant differences between rural and urban communities in terms of RJ practices because, in rural NS, the city is an important comparison point for the subjects' own work. Secondly, the project is seeking the release of non-identifying, quantitative data on offenders and RJ practices. The quantitative data will be analyzed to discover any systematic and meaningful differences in the way RJ is delivered in HRM versus the more rural areas of the province.

Professionalization

The first meeting of the Professionalization Project was held on February 17, 2009 via the NSRJ-CURA web conferencing site through Dalhousie University. Susan Henderson chaired the meeting. NSRJ-CURA would like to thank David Michels, Weldon Law Library, for his work in setting up the site and providing guidance to all the participants.

Graduate Fellowships



Research Suggests Public Open to Restorative Justice

In a thoughtful and well-received workshop, SMU Master's candidate Kathryn Bliss presented research showing that the public has a stronger appetite for restorative justice than previously thought. Ms. Bliss conducted a series of focus-groups in order to gauge public opinion, and discovered that feelings towards restorative justice, particularly in cases involving young offenders, were quite positive. "Above all," she said, "people really want to see that kids learn a lesson, which lends good support to youth restorative justice." Presenting her findings, Ms Bliss said she was gratified that her workshop was so well-attended, and she hoped that her research would be put to good use. Ms Bliss is still working on her degree under the tutelage of Dr. Diane Crocker, and we wish her all the best in completing her thesis.



Shannon Williams joined the NSRJ-CURA as its 2008/2009 Graduate Fellow.

Shannon grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan where she attended the University of Regina before becoming a social worker. In 2001, Shannon returned to the University of Alberta to study law while researching with the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice. She articulated with the Federal Department of Justice, later working as a Crown Prosecutor with the Public Prosecution Services of Canada. In this position, she has had the opportunity to conduct Youth Prosecutions, work with the Drug Treatment Court, conduct General Drug Prosecutions and review and approve files for the Alternative Measures Program. Shannon came to Dalhousie for her LL.M, presenting her work at the Restorative Justice Student Conference on March 27. Having completed her degree, NSRJ-CURA wishes her the very best in all her future endeavours.



NSRJ-CURA Welcomes Chrystal Gray

Chrystal Gray joined the NSRJ-CURA as Project Manager in September 2008. Having previously spent several years working for a CIHR grant, Chrystal is well-qualified for the position. She has said she "looks forward to the challenges ahead," and will be a welcome addition to the NSRJ-CURA team.

Partnerships and Affiliations

International Panel of Experts

NSRJ-CURA has appointed an international panel of experts to act as a resource for researchers to obtain information about restorative justice and the work of NSRJ-CURA in other countries around the world. The esteemed appointees include:

- * John Braithwaite
Australian Research Council Federation Fellow
The Australian National University
- * Dan Van Ness
Executive Director
PFI Centre for Justice and Reconciliation
- * Paul McCold
Adjunct Professor
Center for Restorative Justice, Simon Fraser University
- * Gerry Johnstone
Professor, Research Director
The University of Hull Law School
- * Lode Walgrave
Professor, Research Director
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
- * Joan Pennell
Professor, Center Director
North Carolina State University
- * David Daubney
General Counsel
Department of Justice Canada
- * Mylene Jaccoud
Professor
University of Montreal
International Centre for Comparative Criminology
- * Danny Graham
Chief Provincial Negotiator
Made-in-Nova Scotia Treaty Negotiation Process

Visitors



NSRJ Hosts Bruce Schenk of IIRP Canada

On April 26, NSRJ-CURA was delighted to welcome Bruce Schenk of the International Institute for Restorative Practices to Nova Scotia. Over the five days of his visit, Mr. Schenk participated in a number of discussion groups and presentations around the province, culminating in a full-day conference on April 30.

The visit was an important opportunity for “dialogue and the exchange of ideas,” according to Emma Halpern of Tri-County Restorative Justice, who along with Professor Jennifer Llewellyn helped to organize the visit. In particular, many members of Nova Scotia’s restorative justice community were keen to learn about the framework that Mr. Schenk has developed for implementing restorative justice principles, a concept he described as “more than a philosophy, a way of thinking and being.”

The focus of Mr. Schenk’s framework is to allow restorative justice and community-based thinking to be applied more broadly to deal with a diverse range of circumstances, from schoolyard bullying to prison violence. Susan Henderson of John Howard Restorative Justice, one of the participants in Mr. Schenk’s visit, spoke glowingly of the importance of his ideas saying they “profoundly affected the way I’m approaching restorative justice.”

For his part, Mr. Schenk expressed delight at the depth of interest in restorative justice practices which he found on his visit, evidence of Nova Scotia’s position at the forefront of the restorative justice movement. As he put it, “there’s nowhere else in Canada that has what Nova Scotia has,” adding that it was “an honour to be able to experience that and share it with others.”

NSRJ-CURA to Hold International Conference

NSRJ is pleased to announce plans to host an international conference at the Westin in 2011. The conference, which will be held in partnership with the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), will run from June 15-17 with pre-conference training seminars scheduled for June 13 and 14.

Ted Wachtel, the President of IIRP, visited Halifax on September 23-26, 2008 to preview the venue as well as to meet with representatives of the NSRJ-CURA, staff

from Community Justice, and others involved with restorative justice projects.



Chief White Makes the Case for Restorative Justice

On November 19-21 NSRJ welcomed Chief Vernon White of the Ottawa Police Department. His visit involved several functions, including speaking at Saint Mary’s University and Dalhousie Law Hour.

Chief White peppered his lectures with statistics supporting restorative justice, while also drawing examples from his own experiences. With particular poignancy, Chief White spoke of his own mother, a slightly-built woman with “blue eyes that could slice you in half,” and how her discussions of personal responsibility and morality affected him more than his father’s corporal punishment ever could.

Chief White’s visit also included meetings with representatives of HRP and the RCMP, Pat Gorham of the Department of Justice, a visit with Yvonne Atwell and the Community Justice Office, and an interview with Don Connolly of CBC Nova Scotia’s popular “Maritime Morning” program.

Visitor from China

The NSRJ-CURA was delighted to welcome Professor Hongwei Zhang from Guangxi University in Nanning, China as a visiting scholar from June 16 to July 9. This visit was part of a multi-disciplinary study tour sponsored by the Government of Canada.

Professor Zhang was sent to learn about Western approaches to restorative justice. Ironically, Western scholars have long pointed to Chinese traditions as good examples of inherent community justice, while in China these methods have largely been phased out in favour of court-based processes.

Having received visits from Australian and Chinese scholars interested in our program, NSRJ-CURA looks forward to welcoming other overseas visitors with whom to exchange views and insights. These visits confirm that interest in restorative justice is a global phenomenon which transcends differences among many legal and cultural contexts.

Project Updates

Director's Questionnaire

Over the winter and spring we designed and administered a questionnaire for agency directors to gather some basic information on policies, practices and staffing. We also asked questions about the community and how it gets involved. The information will help lead researchers develop interviews for several of the research projects by directing them toward particular issues that are relevant.

Survey of RJ Staff, Volunteers and Directors

During the summer, the university and community partners worked collaboratively to develop a questionnaire that addressed the projects' research questions and that made sense from a community perspective.

The questionnaire asks for views on a variety of matters related to RJ principles and practices and the policies of the Nova Scotia RJ program. The survey is currently in the process of being conducted and we hope to have the results back by the fall. The data will be used to inform several projects, including:

- * Community in Restorative Justice and Community Capacity Building
- * A Critical Race Approach to Restorative Justice: The African Nova Scotian Context
- * Restorative Justice Principles in Practice
- * Restorative Justice in Urban and Rural Contexts
- * Due Process for Offenders and Victims in Restorative Justice

Work on this questionnaire and other research methods led NSRJ-CURA to develop a document that governs how we will deal with issues relating to privacy and research ethics: *Policies and Procedures on Research Ethics and the Protection of Privacy* (PPREPP). This document covers each stage of research—from data collection to data destruction—for the following sources of data:

- * Questionnaires
- * Focus Groups and Interviews
- * RJ Checklists
- * RJIS and JEIN

Focus Group/Training Event

On December 4 & 5, 2008, the NSRJ-CURA hosted a very successful focus group/training event at the Best Western Chocolate Lake. Among the 58 attendees were the NSRJ-CURA Policy Board Members and RJ Agencies' Directors, as well as other volunteers and case workers.

The first day consisted of five breakout groups comprised of various members of the agencies, boards and volunteers. There were two sessions for each focus group, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each group had the opportunity to meet and discuss community and diversity/equity. The lead researchers later had the opportunity to meet and discuss issues relevant to the grant, including a presentation by Kathryn Bliss of her research.

The event also included a one-day training session facilitated by Lori Haskell entitled "Violence, Victimization & Trauma: the Complexity of Trauma Responses." The presentation focused on responses to trauma and the issue of how to treat victims of PTSD. In particular, characteristics of gender, age, and socio-economic background were discussed with regard to how these factors might affect a victim's response to stress.

The presentation closed by advising practitioners that the very act of treatment creates a connection with their client, which can be helpful in regenerating the social ties which a traumatic episode can sever.

If you're interested in finding out more about NSRJ-CURA, please feel free to contact us:

NSRJ-CURA
Room 428, Weldon Law Building
6061 University Avenue
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 4H9

Phone: (902) 494-2989
Email: nsrjcura@dal.ca
Website: www.nsrj-cura.ca