

UCSC Restorative Justice Program News

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There is an exciting Restorative Justice Program now open for students at UCSC, affiliated with Colleges, Housing and Educational Services (CHES), which began in the Fall Quarter of 2015. Restorative Justice is a method of addressing offensive and harmful actions, which derives from ancient, traditional practices of community conversation and cohesion. It is also used to build support within communities.

The general idea is this: After someone has caused harm, to one or more people, the group involved come together for a transformative, collaborative experience of safely discussing the incident and its impact, and reaching mutual solutions for that person to make things right. "The process can be deeply satisfying with profound effects," says Vicki Duval, the Program Coordinator. The benefits are far-reaching.

People who have caused harm have the opportunity to: learn how their actions effect others, develop accountability and remorse, give back to their community, regain trust, repair relationships, and gain the motivation to not repeat the act, thereby lowering recidivism and increasing safety on campus.

People who were impacted by harm are given a full voice and a vital role in the participatory justice process. They can express themselves about their experience and perspective, get answers, and be an integral part of the decision-making, leading to renewed empowerment and feelings of safety.

Support people can also participate in the dialogue, sharing their experiences and thoughts, as integral, valued members of the campus community.

All participants benefit from the process by learning effective communication and conflict resolution skills, which can be carried out into every area of life.

Unlike many other justice processes, which are mandatory and which tend to keep people apart, this process is voluntary and brings people together. Rather than a third party making a decision about the outcome, the actual parties involved in the incident make a decision together.

While the services are mainly geared towards students in housing, many issues can be addressed in which a student, or group of students, is experiencing harm. Those issues are divided into two distinct types of cases: those that do, and those that don't, violate University policies.

For situations that do violate a University policy, Restorative Justice can be used in conjunction with official University processes. For situations that don't violate a University policy, Restorative Justice can be used to directly address the situation. Anyone (students, staff or faculty) can request Restorative Justice services for students by simply contacting the office at vduval@ucsc.edu or 459-3451. (To clarify: conflicts involving staff or faculty are handled by the Campus Conflict Resolution Services).

Restorative Justice is also effective for small or large groups that want to discuss difficult issues or resolve conflict. The intention of this circle process is to provide a safe format for expression, give equal voice and acknowledgment to everyone, build understanding, improve constructive communication, strengthen relationships and, when appropriate, to find resolutions that serve all equally.

Community building is another feature of the program. For example, new groups that are forming can participate in a Restorative Circle process to begin establishing how they want to collaborate and grow.

Another useful feature of this program is that individual students can go in for one-on-one coaching, to learn the skills for peacefully resolving their own issues. “Perhaps you have a challenging situation with your roommate that you want to handle yourself, but you don’t quite know how to approach the conversation. I can teach you some effective communication and conflict resolution skills, and practice with you, so that you feel ready to talk with your roommate on your own,” says Vicki.

The program also offers one-on-one anger management sessions, which can quickly make a big difference. “Once I help people to realize, on a deep level, that no one ‘makes’ them angry, and that they can thoughtfully respond, instead of impulsively react, they feel empowered to control their anger and make better choices, which can improve their relationships, their moods and their self-esteem.”

Vicki Duval, who has a Master’s Degree in Restorative Justice & Conflict Resolution, has been at UCSC since the beginning of this school year, creating and launching the program. She brings much experience to campus after spending 17 years developing and directing several Restorative Justice Programs in collaboration with the Santa Cruz County Probation Department, local schools, Juvenile Hall, County Jail and Court.

Vicki’s programs include the Conflict Resolution Team at Watsonville High School, the Victim Offender Dialogue Program with Juvenile Probation, the Family Reentry Meeting Program with Adult Probation, the Parent Teen Mediation Program with Juvenile Hall, Conflict Resolution Skills classes for residents at the Blaine Street Women’s Jail, and an in-depth Training for Trainers in Victim Awareness. She has created and presented trainings around the country and will also be offering facilitation training at UCSC.

“I’ve facilitated about one thousand Restorative Justice dialogues and seen so many incredible things happen. People converse and connect in ways they never thought possible. They gain new perspective on what happened and what can be done, re-build their sense of community, and feel empowered through a justice process that includes and values them. The vast majority of people I’ve worked with are highly satisfied with Restorative Justice because it transforms their experience of the incident.”

“I’ve seen people, who couldn’t stand the idea of being in the same room, have such powerful, healing conversations. I’ve watched someone who was petrified to leave home, return to their normal, free-flowing life, after the person who committed the harm apologized and promised to never cause harm again. I’ve seen people find ways to get along, and co-exist comfortably, when they thought it would never be possible. And I’ve seen groups get closer and more connected, with each person feeling honored for the thoughts, experiences and values they bring.”

Some students may resist asking for help for various reasons: fear of getting someone in trouble, preferring to avoid rather than face the person, or thinking it’s just something they have to live with. “Anything that is having a detrimental impact on your life, and on your experience at UCSC, is worthy of addressing and working towards change.”

Vicki wants students to know about this program and receive all of the benefits it has to offer. “If you are living with a situation that feels uncomfortable, disruptive or in any way harmful to your well-being, or if you want to build healthier, stronger ties with an individual or group, please contact me for a private meeting where we will discuss your situation and determine the most effective way to transform it. That may be working one-on-one, or through a Restorative Justice dialogue with others, or in collaboration with other campus resources.”

“You have a much better chance of improving a challenging situation when you address it rather than avoid it. Please reach out and get the support that’s here for you, even when it feels like nothing will change...because things can and do change, often in just one meeting.”