



RESTORING COMMUNITY

BECK INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND POVERTY
FALL 2016 NEWSLETTER

COMMUNITY MATTERS!

Programs supported by the Restorative Communities Collaborative (RCC) provide the experience of a caring community. Analysis of data from 13 participating programs shows, for marginalized men and women, that belonging to and participating in community contributes to increased coping and functioning.

Data analysis reveals that:

- ◆ Prior to joining the intensive community programs, the overwhelming majority of participants had minimal awareness of and involvement in community. Isolation and,

for some, alienation made it difficult to function because they did not have confidence in building supportive relationships.

This finding was related to serious trauma levels that included Post Traumatic Stress Disorders.

- ◆ After completing the intensive 19 to 24 session program that provided a rich community experience, the participants' measure of community awareness and involvement was associated with higher levels of coping, social support and spirituality, as well as reduction in trauma symptoms.

Of particular note is that these findings were specifically strengthened

for three groups of participants: women, individuals who are chronically homeless and those with histories of incarceration.

These important findings suggest that community is a major factor in supporting participants' progress. Community is inherently related to recovery, healing, learning and on-going development that is possible because of increased coping, support and reduced trauma symptoms.



Welcome! to our 2016-17
Beck Institute Doctoral
Students & MSW Interns

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Temitayo Pedro
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Daisy Lopez
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RCC'S RESTORATIVE PRACTICE MODEL — GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY

Being welcomed into community is a fundamental experience for program participants. RCC programs introduce **restorative life practices** and build coping skills as part of restorative programming. From the simple act of sitting together at dinner to sharing their personal narrative, boundaries between "us" and "them" begin to blur and healing relationships form. Participants take on roles and responsibilities for the group in a supportive environment where they develop

their sense of belonging.

In this **safe space**, participants are empowered to learn personal restorative practices such as mindfulness with solution-focused methods used for goal-setting. In developing their stories, participants discover personal strengths and understanding of how to move forward in a new direction, gain confidence, find their voice and rebuild important relationships.

Through their individual work

with mentors, participants encounter community members who long to know them, hear their stories and partner in their healing.

Transformation and reintegration into a welcoming community of hope is possible as participants embrace restorative life practices together, witness and affirm one another, create options and, eventually, become advocates for change in their community.

ON BELONGING



In working as a program facilitator with RCC programs, I have learned that the vital sense of belonging is not afforded to all people. Too often, it has been stripped away with incarceration, incinerated by domestic violence, shunned in homelessness, and disconnected for veterans. Without a sense of belonging we all can become isolated and alienated; we feel alone. Healing rarely takes place in these alone places. Within the Restorative Communities I have witnessed participants reporting that we are all they've got. We are their lifeline to being in relationship and to being connected. And because program staff cultivate these relationships with intentionality and safety, we buffer against isolation and provide a peaceful oasis of hope and belonging—this is where healing happens.

The Restorative Life Practice Model promotes healing –through connection to community. Community buffers against alienation and isolation, both key risk factors for recidivism, or in the case of survivors of domestic violence, returning to the abuser. Graduates of our programs report experiencing a deep sense of belonging that often becomes a family-like experience. The Mentee/Mentor relationship fosters unconditional acceptance and positive regard while affirming the mentees choices as they set goals towards a more hopeful future. Sharing their life stories as a collective promotes bonding and is restorative in that participants recognize that their struggles may be universal – other people have experienced similar suffering, shame, pain and regret. This leads to the recognition, “I am not alone.” And they discover the strength in being survivors with others. ~ Sarah Franek, Program Facilitator, Poughkeepsie ~

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

For Program Participants:

- ◆ After the intensive program, reduction in trauma and improvement in coping contributed to participants' ability to manage anger and handle discrimination.
- ◆ Participants experience spirituality in community which acts as a protective factor against the impact of trauma.
- ◆ These findings demonstrate that participants are better able to manage personal relationships and interactions in everyday life – both skills essential to successful reintegration in society.

For Congregations:

- ◆ Through “living one’s faith”, mentors, staff, and volunteers who become members of these restorative communities increase their commitment to social justice.
- ◆ For congregations, a renewed experience of community developed that is described as transformative.
- ◆ Collaboration between congregations, community providers and local businesses expanded capacity to meet the needs of program participants.

‘TIS THE SEASON OF GRATITUDE



The Restorative Communities Collaborative thanks our partners for continuing to learn with us and for enriching our understanding of how best to support people in transition.

INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS – UNITARIAN CONGREGATIONS + AGENCIES

In January 2017, the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn will launch the pilot Phoenix Rising program in partnership with Housing+Solutions! Phoenix Rising serves women with a history of chronic homelessness (many of whom are Veterans, survivors of domestic violence, and/or have incarceration histories) but who are now in permanent community-based housing.

As hosts, First Unitarian has raised significant funds, have 15 mentors eager to meet their mentees and will coordinate the meals. Housing+Solutions is recruiting and interviewing potential participants, providing the Coordinator and Facilitator and embedding the critical role of Case Management into their existing support service team.

In addition, Housing+Solutions has a permanent trauma therapist on staff to further support the women during the pilot program and beyond. RCC believes this unique collaboration between a congregation and a social service agency is an extraordinary opportunity as, upon graduation, participants will continue to be supported by the Housing+Solutions services. This continuity of care is targeted to cement the other elements of the RCC model—strong mentorship, work with the Restorative Life Practices, and a welcoming community at the First Unitarian Congregational Society.

Join us in wishing *Phoenix Rising* tremendous success!

Reverend Walter LeFlore of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, NY “Coming Home Program” reflects:

“This program has surpassed my hopes and expectations across a number of dimensions. Participants, mentors and facilitators quickly established a deeper bond than I could have imagined. We provided a safe harbor for the participants. **Mentors got comfortably close to a population we might otherwise have never knowingly encountered.** Our congregation built relationships with other local congregations who were happy to support our work and feed us. I believe, literally, everyone involved benefited by our involvement in the Coming Home Program.”

The Coming Home Program at the Reformed Church of Bronxville has supported many women returning from the Valhalla Jail. Connections with one another and the Program made it possible to navigate “re-entry” and feel supported in finding jobs, rebuilding family life, and regaining children from the child welfare system. Realizing how adverse experiences in their past may make it more difficult to function successfully today has been pivotal for these resilient women in their recovery. Embraced by this welcoming community, they are beginning to see themselves worthy of a second chance.

HOW ‘L,’ A SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, FOUND COMMUNITY

When I came into the program, everyone said I was so timid and I had a lot of shame. I did not realize that my self-esteem was so bad until after I was around people and they saw the change in me. It happened gradually. The staff did not try to make things ok and people did not force their opinions on me. There was a lot of love in the group. A lot of love and compassion. It was so nice to sit together and connect over good food. It helped create a mood and was peaceful. We learned how to be present in the moment.

In the group, they allowed everybody to talk and to express how they were feeling. You would get to a part and just start crying and have to stop. We talked about flooding and catharsis and that really helped. It clarified why we were feeling this way and that it was ok. The facilitator

reminded us that everything we had gone through does not define us, we don’t need to be ashamed of it and **we are not alone.**

That was the best part of it for me. When you are going through things and you feel like you don’t have anybody – no family, or family that doesn’t understand – that was so hard.

It was hard to trust at first but that changed. Everyone affirmed everyone else. People really started to understand self-love. Each one of us has something special about them and a role in the group. **We felt part of something larger.** I now have more faith in people. My mentor was wonderful! She really helped me to organize myself, see how to set my goals and accomplish them and, we have continued our relationship. Even other mentors helped me when I was trying to figure out what school to go to. They and the staff said they can see me reaching my goals. That has been so inspira-

tional. That’s some of what I got from the program – affirmation, balance and inspiration. I got accepted in the school I wanted and am excited to keep working on my goals and moving forward with my life.

The **Restorative Communities Collaborative** supports restorative life practice where spiritual traditions engage people in transition. Progress has been made in developing a replicable, restorative life practice program that includes community development. Central to this work is the life skills empowerment model developed by **Catholic Charities** and the **Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing** over 25+ years ago.

ASK ANITA— An Interview with Beck Institute Director, Dr. Anita Lightburn

What is Beck? What does Beck do?

The Beck Institute is focused on working collaboratively with the faith community to make a difference for marginalized people struggling with poverty. Our main project is the Restorative Communities Collaborative (RCC). It is an alliance and cooperative among faith communities who develop restorative communities to support people in transition.

Some of the populations served in these 19 to 24-week programs include: survivors of domestic violence, veterans, homeless persons and those who were previously incarcerated. The RCC members learn together, sharing ideas and addressing challenges. Our learning collaborative has worked for the

past 6 years to develop a replicable model for congregations.

So, you run these programs?

No, actually we support the programs that the RCC congregations run. Our team of consultants work to help new programs get started and work toward sustainability. We provide best practice guides (the **Restorative Communities Guide**, with a **Mentor Workbook** with training for the mentors who will work with the participants.

Fordham doctoral students are a valuable part of the team, working in program development and evaluation. We also support MSW interns who provide supportive social service for participants and learn about the heal-

ing and restorative work of communities.

What kind of research are we talking about?

We know the programs are exceptional for all involved, many say transformative! Participants and congregations tell us that they love them. But, that's not enough. We really need to know if what we offer is actually helping people.

We have over five years of research documenting participants' needs and goals, as well as program evaluation that considers outcomes, including participant satisfaction, trauma levels, coping, social support, empowerment, spirituality and the meaning of community.

Do these programs actually help with trauma?

Yes! The data has helped us in recognizing the seriousness of participants' trauma. Many participants begin the program with high trauma levels that result from extensive trauma histories.

In response, a trauma informed restorative program has been developed that has created a community approach including restorative life practices with the life skills curriculum. Participants actually learn about trauma and how it affects the brain and how it effects their day-to-day functioning. They learn new ways to cope and heal.

The Ripple Effect — Programs Expand their Reach and Build Community

In 2015-16, 120 participants, 130 mentors and 1,240 people were involved in the RCC programs. An impressive 560 congregation and community members provided and took part in the meals with participants. Collaboration with 65 agencies enriched possibilities for restoring community and all contributions made a difference.

Find us on the Web:

Fordham University > Beck Institute

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HONORING OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Kathleen and Brian MacLean, both Fordham Class of 1975, matched from their family foundation an anonymous grant for the next two years supporting "capacity building" and research that evaluates the model's effectiveness with survivors of domestic violence, homeless persons, veterans and returning citizens so that it can be replicated in other congregations.

Trinity Wall Street has provided two years of support for developing re-entry programs in the greater NY area with our Restorative Communities Collaborative Congregational partners.



The Beck Team: Angela Belsole, Vincenza Corcoran, Patricia Dawson, Reverend Alistair Drummond, Sarah Franek, Donald Garner, Sue Groman, Anita Lightburn, Linda Ryan, and Amanda Sisselman-Borgia