

COMMUNITIES FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Group gets support for bullying response

Communities for Restorative Justice (C4RJ) is the recipient of a \$5,000 award from the Foundation for MetroWest to support C4RJ's work addressing cyberbullying and criminal harassment among school children. C4RJ sought the funds in order to obtain expert, research-based guidance as it develops protocols for applying restorative justice in cases of bullying.

The topic, and C4RJ's approach, drew the foundation's attention because of recent tragic incidents of bullying that preceded the deaths of young people in Massachusetts and around the country. All Massachusetts schools districts are required to have in place by Jan. 1 a plan for addressing harassment, and particularly harassment using electronic communications.

"Given the headlines and the devastating consequences of new forms of bullying, the foundation believes C4RJ can have an important impact upon how young people understand the capacity of their words and deeds to hurt," said Meg Ramsey, trustee and chairman of the

Distribution Committee, at the foundation's award ceremony.

The Foundation for MetroWest promotes philanthropy, helps donors maximize the impact of their local giving, serves as a resource for local nonprofit organizations, and seeks to enhance the quality of life for all the region's citizens. For more information, visit www.FoundationforMetroWest.org.

Restorative justice provides a process wherein a victim, or target, is supported and offenders are held accountable for their actions and provided an opportunity to examine decision-making and learn about the effects of their actions. If the victim chooses to do so, he or she may meet with those who harassed or otherwise harmed them.

A nationally known author on the subject of bullying, Barbara Coloroso, has stated that restorative justice is an effective way of dealing with bullying because it puts the victim first and provides a forum in which both victim and offender can be assured a safe venue for discussion.

C4RJ partners with police departments in the region to provide restorative "circles" to address instances of criminal wrongdoing, including cases of harassment and cyberbullying.

"Youth interact today in ways unknown to previous generations. Use of e-mailing, texting, instant messaging, and networking platforms like Facebook has skyrocketed," said C4RJ Executive Director Jennifer Larson Sawin. "So often, young people don't recognize the power they wield in using these platforms to insult and intimidate others and to have their words potentially broadcast to so many others."

Added Sawin, "C4RJ seeks a leadership role in helping the communities we serve understand and respond to these problems with the best research and solutions available."

C4RJ, a nonprofit with a 10-year history, partners with police in Acton, Ayer, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Everett, Groton, and Littleton. For more information about restorative justice, visit www.c4rj.com.

