

What is Restorative Community Service?

The Restorative Community Service program of the Clark County Juvenile Court (CCJC) was initiated in January 2001 as an initiative to change the face and nature of community service. CCJC's commitment to a holistic Restorative Justice focus has dramatically changed our understanding of the purpose of community service and how it is practiced.

Restorative Justice can be defined as a community's purposeful response to crime that is focused on meaningful outcomes for offenders, victims and the community. Such a response focuses on what needs to be repaired, what needs to be healed and what needs to be learned. It brings balance to the community's response, placing a high priority on the needs of victims and the community.

One aspect of responding restoratively to offenders is holding them accountable for the harms they have caused, and to do so in a manner that the accountability actually integrates the offender into the fabric of the community. Accountability is important not only for the victims of crime and for the broader community, accountability is important for the offender's own growth as a responsible community member. In taking meaningful responsibility for their crimes, by making amends, offenders can establish themselves in the community as positive, contributing citizens.

Restorative Community Service focuses on accountability, integration and change. It provides offenders with the opportunity to fulfill their obligation to make amends for their crimes by giving service of recognized value back to the community. Through performing such service offenders can begin to change how the community views them. They have the opportunity to be seen as individuals who can contribute positively to the health and well-being of their community. Offenders can also begin to change how they see themselves, as individuals capable of making positive contributions to the community in which they live. **Melding accountability for harms done with the chance to make a positive contribution to one's community creates the opportunity to integrate these youth into the fabric of the community.**

Active community involvement is key to making community service a restorative activity. Community members working side by side with youth on projects selected and planned by the community is an essential element. Without this community involvement the full restorative potential of community service is lost. When members of the community volunteer their time to work with juvenile offenders, the youth see the value the community places on the work. The community volunteers also have the opportunity to interact with the youth on a personal level to convey to them the purpose and value of the work. By their very presence and willingness to give their time and effort, community members give credibility and value to the community service.

Community volunteers fulfill a second crucial role. As stated, community service that is restorative helps integrate offenders into the community. Having offenders work in isolation only increases their sense of separation and being marginalized. Working side by side with a positive role model from the community provides juvenile offenders with an opportunity for community connection. Youth can see themselves as capable of relating to positive adult members of the community. They have the opportunity to engage in conversation and to receive messages of affirmation for who they are and what they can contribute to the community.

Making community service restorative requires more than a name change. It requires a new way of understanding the purpose of such service and how it is carried out.