

The Restorative Justice Advisory Committee

2025 Annual Report



Submitted by: The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

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Restorative Justice Advisory Committee Membership

Seat	Member	Appointed By:
Secretary, EOPSS	Undersecretary Andrew Peck	Ex Officio
Secretary, HHS	Scott Taberner	Ex Officio
House of Representatives, Speaker	Representative Simon Cataldo	Legislature
Senate, Senate President	Senator Pavel Payano Replaced Senator Robyn Kennedy on 9.17.2025	Legislature
President, MA District Attorney's Association	DA Marian Ryan	Ex Officio
Chief Counsel, Committee for Public Counsel Services	Attorney Kristen Graves	Ex Officio
Commissioner of Probation	Brad McNichols	Ex Officio
President, MA Chiefs of Police Association	Ret. Chief Fred Ryan	Ex Officio
Executive Director, MOVA	Lisa McCue Replaced Stephanie McCarthy 1.24.2025	Ex Officio
MA Sheriff's Association	Andrea Berte	Ex Officio
Retired Trial Court Judge	Hon. Peter Agnes (ret.)	Governor
Restorative Justice	Kara Hayes	Governor
Restorative Justice	Maddrey Goode appointed on 3.31.2025	Governor
Restorative Justice	Vacant as of 6.24.2025 Formerly Susan Jeghelian	Governor
Restorative Justice	Samuel Williams	Governor
Restorative Justice	Vacant	Governor
Restorative Justice	Vacant	Governor

Restorative Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC) Statute

The Restorative Justice Advisory Committee (hereinafter “RJAC” or “the Committee”) was established by Section 202 of Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018, An Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform (hereinafter “*The Criminal Justice Reform Act*”):

“The advisory committee shall consist of 17 members: 1 of whom shall be: the secretary of public safety and security or a designee who shall serve as chair; 1 of whom shall be the secretary of health and human services or a designee; 1 of whom shall be a member of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker; 1 of whom shall be a member of the senate appointed by the senate president; 1 of whom shall be; the president of the Massachusetts district attorneys association, or a designee; 1 of whom shall be the chief counsel of the Committee for public counsel services or a designee; 1 of whom shall be the commissioner of probation or a designee; 1 of whom shall be the president of the Massachusetts chiefs of police association, or a designee; 1 of whom shall be the executive director of the Massachusetts office for victim assistance or a designee; 1 of whom shall be the executive director of the Massachusetts sheriff’s association, or a designee; and 7 of whom shall be appointed by the governor, 1 of whom shall be a retired trial court judge and 6 of whom shall be representatives of community-based restorative justice programs or a member of the public with expertise in restorative justice. Each member of the advisory committee shall serve a 6-year term.”

Section 202 of the Criminal Justice Reform Act charges the RJAC with the following obligations:

“The advisory committee may monitor and assist all community-based restorative justice programs to which a juvenile or adult defendant may be diverted pursuant to this chapter.”

“The advisory committee shall track the use of community-based restorative justice programs through a partnership with an educational institution and may make legislative, policy and regulatory recommendations to aid in the use of community-based restorative justice programs including, but not limited to: (i) qualitative and quantitative outcomes for participants; (ii) recidivism rates of responsible parties; (iii) criteria for youth involvement and training; (iv) cost savings for the commonwealth; (v) training guidelines for restorative justice facilitators; (vi) data on gender, racial socioeconomic and geographic disparities in the use of community-based restorative justice programs; (vii) guidelines for restorative justice best practices; and (viii) appropriate training for community-based restorative programs.”

“The advisory committee shall annually, not later than December 31, submit a report with findings and recommendations to the governor, the clerks of the house of representatives and senate and the house and senate chairs of the joint committees on the judiciary and public safety and homeland security.”

RJAC Mission, Vision, Values

The mission of the RJAC is to promote and expand restorative justice education, practices, and programming statewide in collaboration with practitioners, participants, sponsors, stakeholders, and the general public, for the purpose of fostering healing for people and communities impacted

by harm and systemic/structural violence and with an aim towards promoting public safety and accountability.

The vision of the RJAC is a Commonwealth where community accountability for harm is based on healing and not on retribution, and where effective restorative practices are embedded within schools, public institutions, and communities and supported by public policy, programming, funding, and infrastructure.

The RJAC has adopted the following restorative justice values:

- Victim-centered
- Trauma-informed
- Public safety-oriented
- Accountability and healing for all
- Meaningful dialogue

Year in Review

In 2025, the RJAC advanced its mission by forming a subcommittee dedicated to supporting communities in the RJAC space, known as the Guidelines Subcommittee. Chaired by RJAC member, Kara Hayes, this subcommittee was established to create a clear pathway for the development of community-based restorative justice programs in the Commonwealth. More information on the Subcommittee can be found below.

Additionally, RJAC commemorated Victims' Rights Week with a presentation by Kara Hayes and Delinda Passas emphasizing the importance of a victim-centered approach to restorative justice and exploring its historical roots. The central theme of the presentation focused on identifying best practices to ensure survivor safety within restorative justice organizations and promoting meaningful restitution through accountability.

The Guidelines Subcommittee

The Guidelines Subcommittee was established in 2025 to advance the development of clear, consistent, and values-aligned guidance for restorative justice practice across the Commonwealth. Chaired by Kara Hayes (joined by RJAC Members Samuel Williams, Delinda Passas, Lisa McCue, and Kristin Graves), the subcommittee brings together practitioners and system stakeholders committed to strengthening the integrity, safety, and accessibility of restorative justice processes.

The creation of this subcommittee reflects the RJAC's statutory responsibility to develop training guidelines, best practices, and recommendations that support the effective use of community-based restorative justice programs statewide.

Core Areas of Focus

The subcommittee's work centers on several key priorities:

- Facilitator Standards: Developing statewide guidance that articulates the core competencies, ethical responsibilities, and practice expectations of restorative justice facilitators.
- Safety and Integrity: Ensuring that restorative processes are trauma-informed, victim-centered, and grounded in practices that prioritize both participant safety and meaningful accountability.
- Alignment with National and Emerging Practices: Conducting a literature review of standards and frameworks from other jurisdictions to inform Massachusetts-specific recommendations.
- Accessibility and Equity: Supporting pathways for community-based practitioners to engage in restorative justice practices while maintaining rigor without creating unnecessary barriers to entry.

2025 Activities and Contributions

In 2025, the subcommittee:

- Presented an initial framework for Facilitator Standards for Massachusetts to the full RJAC.
- Conducted and shared a comparative literature review examining how other states and jurisdictions approach restorative justice standards and guidelines.
- Initiated discussions on how to balance standardization with community-based flexibility, ensuring that restorative justice practices remain responsive to local context while upholding shared values.

This work is grounded in the RJAC’s commitment to restorative justice principles, including being victim-centered, trauma-informed, and accountability-driven, while promoting meaningful dialogue and public safety.

Subcommittee Next Steps

The Guidelines Subcommittee will continue to refine and expand its recommendations with the goal of:

- Developing a comprehensive standards and guidelines framework for restorative justice practice in Massachusetts
- Supporting training and implementation across both community-based and system-based programs
- Contributing to broader policy discussions on the role of restorative justice in advancing healing, accountability, and equitable outcomes

Through this work, the subcommittee seeks to strengthen the foundation of restorative justice across the Commonwealth while preserving the relational and community-driven nature of the practice.

RJAC Looking Forward

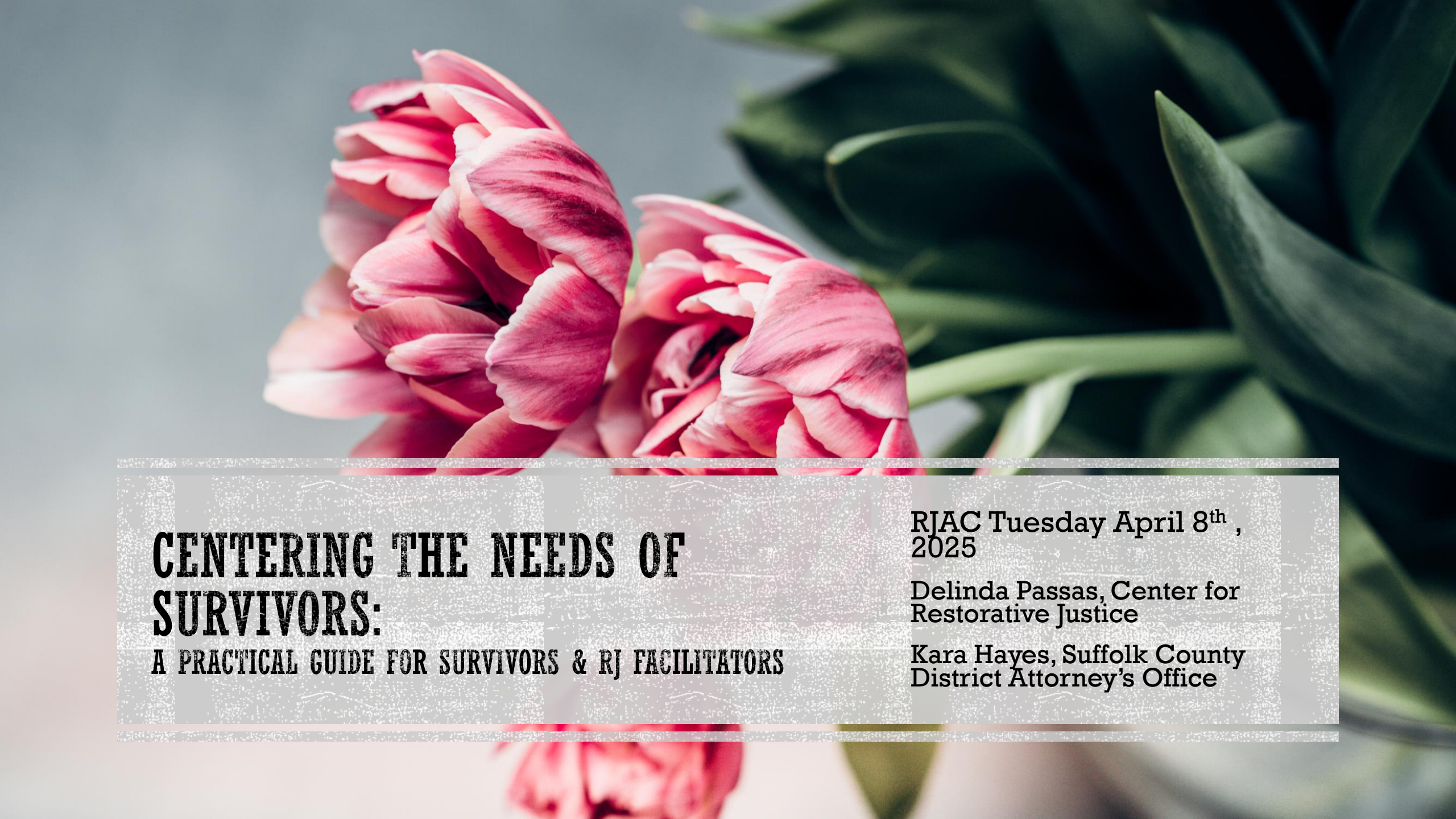
The RJAC remains dedicated to promoting healing and accountability through restorative practices and anticipates continued collaboration with stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth.

The RJAC expresses its sincere appreciation to all members, community representatives, and stakeholders for their commitment and valuable contributions to this important work.

Looking ahead, the RJAC will continue advancing the work of the Guidelines Subcommittee, focusing on the development of clear, consistent, and values-aligned guidance for restorative justice practices across the Commonwealth. The RJAC will also work to support accessible and equitable implementation, contribute to training and policy development, and promote a cohesive framework that upholds the integrity, safety, and community-driven nature of restorative justice.

Appendix

Victim's Rights PowerPoint Presentation

A close-up photograph of several pink tulips in bloom, with green leaves visible in the background. The flowers are the central focus of the image.

CENTERING THE NEEDS OF SURVIVORS:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS & RJ FACILITATORS

**RJAC Tuesday April 8th,
2025**

**Delinda Passas, Center for
Restorative Justice**

**Kara Hayes, Suffolk County
District Attorney's Office**

OUR OBJECTIVES:

1

Understand the inherent victim-centeredness of RJ

2

Identify best practices for ensuring survivor safety, agency, & restitution

3

Learn '*the Signposts of Victim Involvement*'



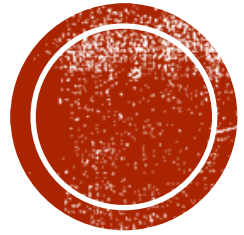


THE 'SECOND INJURY'

The legal system is designed to protect men from the superior power of the state but not to protect women or children from the superior power of men. It therefore provides strong guarantees for the rights of the accused but essentially no guarantees for the rights of the victim.

If one set out by design to devise a system for provoking intrusive post-traumatic symptoms, one could not do better than a court of law."

— Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

'...A compass, not a map': moving in the direction of survivor needs



WHAT IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

What is Restorative Justice?

Do a Google search for the phrase “restorative justice” and you will get over a million “hits” – & this for a term that was virtually non-existent 30 years ago.

Ask what it means, & you may get a variety of answers.

A good guideline:

The underlying principle of RJ is always the repair of harms.

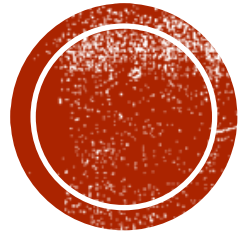


ADA PECOS MELTON ON INDIGENOUS PEACEMAKING

“Restorative principles refer to the mending process needed to renew damaged personal & communal relationships.

The victim is the focal point, & the goal is to heal & renew the victim’s physical emotional mental & spiritual well-being.”





RESTITUTION

...The first call of justice, then, ought to be restitution & healing for victims. Healing for victims does not imply that one can or should forget or minimize the violation. Rather it implies a sense of recovery, a sense of a degree of closure. Zehr: Changing Lenses (1990)

RESTITUTION AS REPARATION WHY IT MATTERS:

Restitution is a Form of Accountability

1. It offers a tangible way for offenders to take responsibility for the harm they caused & it affirms the offender's obligation to the victim rather than merely to the state.
2. As Zehr & Mika articulate in *Listening to Victims a Critique of RJ*, RJ prioritizes "*offender obligations to make things right as much as possible*," with restitution taking precedence over other sanctions such as fines or punitive measures, where appropriate.



“START WHERE THE HARM HAPPENED”

“The safety of the victims is an immediate priority”: Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses*” (1990)





MOST RJ IS OFFENDER-CENTRIC:

Survivor Feedback:

From the *Zehr Institute Listening Project*: RJ practices, after two decades of growth, lean toward offender-centric services even when the language of victim orientation or victim centeredness is present in program literature;

Survivors expressed feelings of injustice, disrespect, exclusion, lack of empathy, & irrelevance because of RJ processes.

Survivors shared that, although survivor input & collaboration are said to be central to RJ practices, the voices of survivors are not present at the creation of the process & in many instances, during the process itself.

WHERE ARE RJ PROGRAMS LACKING?

1

Lack of inclusion:

RJ programs are implemented without consulting survivors or victim service agencies.

2

Lack of supports:

programs can have *'more talk than walk'* regarding actual supports & follow-ups for survivors.

3

Lack of sensitivity:

language & initial communications to survivors may lack sensitivity to their needs.

4

Lack of flexibility:

Models may be too limited to constructively serve all referred survivors.



PARALLEL JUSTICE

Centering Survivors: the Work of Susan Herman



WHY I DIDN'T REPORT



PARALLEL JUSTICE

‘We must meet our obligation to victims, not just because we are a compassionate society but because helping victims rebuild their lives is an essential component of justice’.

Susan Herman, *Parallel Justice for Victims of Crime*



WHAT IS PARALLEL JUSTICE?

“A separate path to justice for victims of crime that operates independently from the criminal justice system and focuses solely on addressing victims’ needs—whether or not an offender is caught or held accountable.”

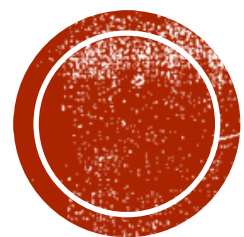
Parallel Justice ensures that survivors still receive support, resources, & restitution. It operates on 3 core principles:

- **Victims are Recognized & Respected** – They should be acknowledged by the community & institutions as individuals who have suffered harm & have the right to safety, dignity, & support.
- **Society is Obligated to Help Victims Recover** – Independent of criminal justice proceedings, victims should receive practical assistance such as medical care, financial support, housing, emotional support, & community validation.
- **Community Responsibility** – Communities should mobilize to repair harm, support victims, & prevent future victimization through services & public policies that prioritize victim well-being. This perspective challenges traditional justice models that link survivor support solely to offender accountability & instead frames justice as providing immediate & ongoing care to victims, regardless of legal outcomes.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Justice requires helping victims of crime rebuild their lives.
- All victims of crime deserve justice.
- All victims should be presumed credible unless there is reason to believe otherwise.
- Victims' safety should be a top priority.
- Victims should experience no further harm.
- Victims' rights should be implemented & enforced.
- Victims should have opportunities to talk about their experiences & their needs.
- Victims should be told what happened to them was wrong, & that every effort will be made to help them rebuild their lives.
- Victims' needs should be addressed through a comprehensive, communal response.
- Decisions about how to address victims' needs should be based on sound information & research.



SUPPORTIVE KEEPING

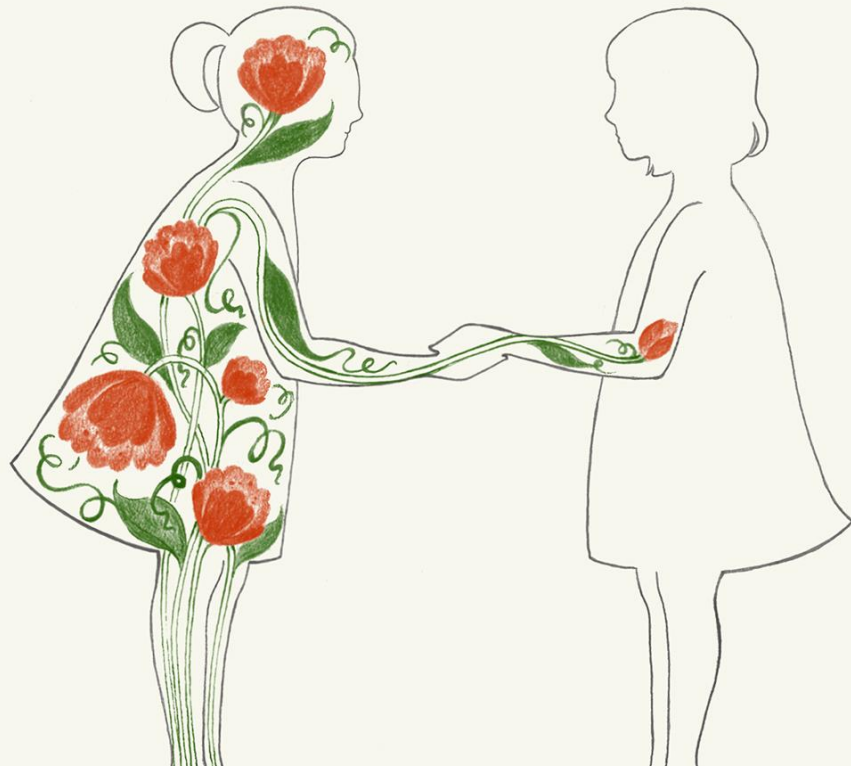
Facilitators shape outcomes for Survivors

A NEED FOR VICTIM- CENTERED PRACTICE:

From the Zehr Listening Project:

- Many RJ programs focus on offender rehabilitation;
- Victims can feel left out, unsafe, or pressured to participate;
- Facilitators impact victim experience;
- RJ should begin with victims' needs, safety, & well-being;
- Research shows facilitator limitations can lead to marginalization, unsafe spaces, & revictimization.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING



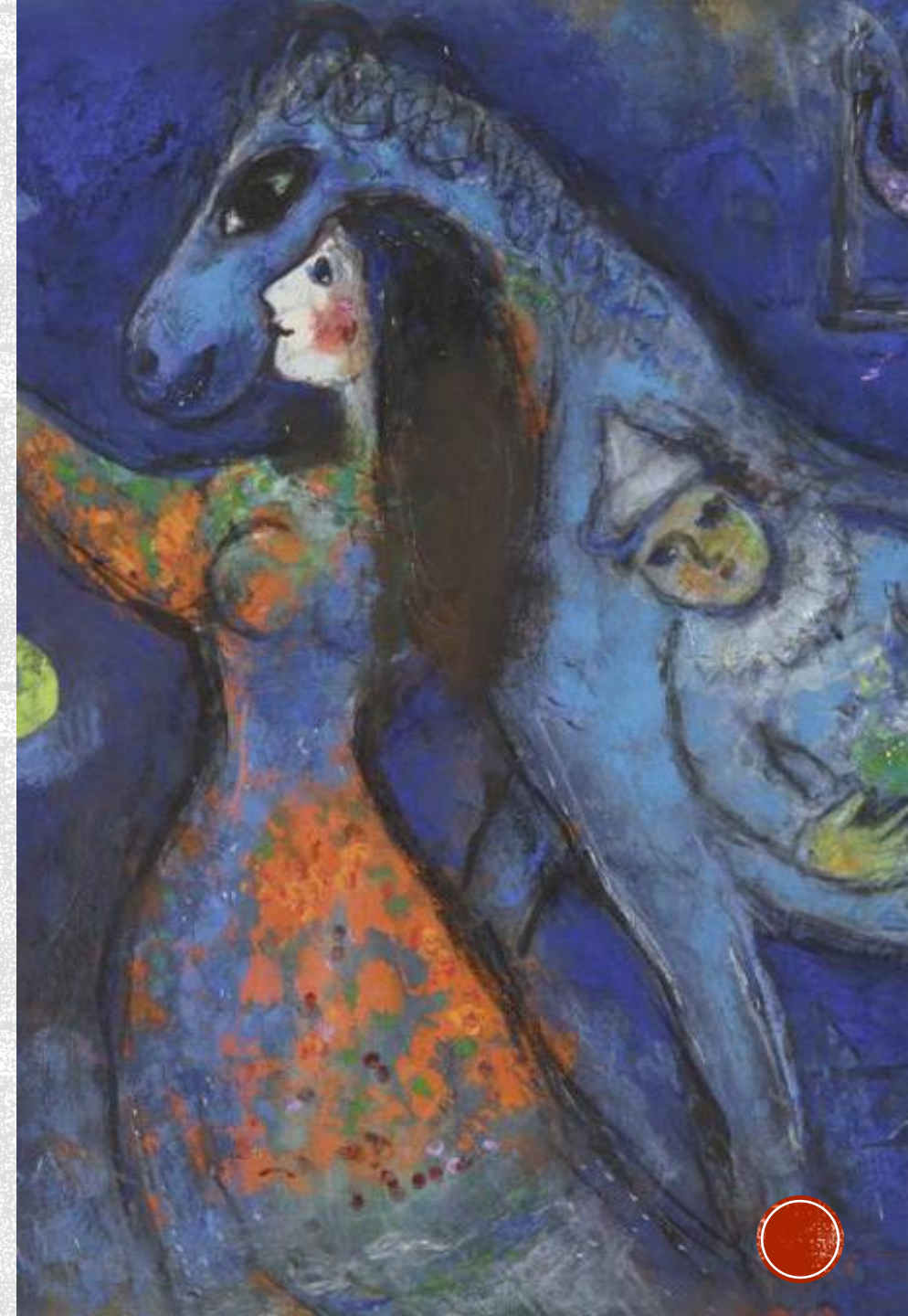
Training/Regulation/Experience with Accountability

- *Training:* We must train in trauma-informed care, RJ principles, & the dynamics of violence, power, & trauma. We must be well-versed in facilitating sensitive conversations that navigate complex emotions;
- *Emotional Regulation:* We must be skilled in recognizing signs of distress, emotional overwhelm, or trauma reactivation in participants (& ourselves!) & know how to intervene effectively, provide support or pause the process if needed.
- *Experience with Accountability:* It's critical that we have prior experience specifically with accountability-focused circles, as the stakes are higher when addressing harm & navigating intense emotions.



CAREFUL SCREENING OF READINESS, WANTS & NEEDS:

- Survivors: Not all survivors are ready or willing to participate. Conversations are crucial to assess readiness & needs. We should ensure survivors understand the process, their role, & the ability to opt-out or withdraw if the process becomes too difficult.
- Offenders: Need preparation, too. They must have accepted responsibility for their actions & expressed a willingness to repair the harm caused. Without genuine accountability, the process can become retraumatizing for the survivor.
- Support Networks: Both survivors & those who caused harm should have access to support, counselors &/or advocates, who can provide emotional support before, during, & after the process.





NON-COERCIVE SPACE

Survivor Choice Drives the Process:

- Survivors must have voice in the creation of the process;
- Survivors must have the option to stop the process without pressure or judgment. They should never feel obligated to continue if it becomes too painful or difficult;
- Pacing & Timing: Facilitators must check in with survivors & pace the conversation to match their emotional capacity;
- Offer breaks or pauses to process-emotions. This is critical for maintaining safety.



TRAUMA INFORMED CARE ASKS US TO:

Establish clear agreements for communication & behavior during the process. Boundaries & guidelines should be clearly stated & agreed upon, particularly for how harm will be discussed & how participants will respond to one another;

Ensure survivors have control over what they share & when. They must not feel pressured to speak or disclose more than they are comfortable with;

As facilitators we must protect a survivor's agency throughout the process.





PREPARATION TAKES TIME:

We must meet with participants one on one. In these meetings:

- Set Expectations: Clarify the goals of the process & what participants can expect, emphasizing the process is about accountability, safety, voice & healing;
- Emotional Readiness: Discuss the emotional impact of the process & ensure participants are ready to engage with what can be a very intense & emotionally charged experience;
- Safety Plans: Create safety plans for survivors, including exit strategies, breaks, or stopping the process if it becomes too overwhelming.
- Confidentiality: Reiterate the importance of confidentiality, especially for the survivor, & ensure all participants understand the responsibility to maintain a safe, private space. This is not just a guideline while in process; it is a conversation with all participants beforehand.





THE PROCESS IS JUST THE BEGINNING:

- Debrief: After the circle offer debriefing sessions to all participants. This allows them to process what occurred, discuss their feelings, & receive validation & support;
- Provide survivors with ongoing emotional & psychological support to help navigate any feelings of re-traumatization. Create follow-up plans for survivors & those who caused harm. For survivors, this may include additional counseling, trauma care, or engagement with a support network;
- For those who caused harm: continued accountability measures, such as support, following through on reparation agreements or continued engagement in restorative practices;
- Check-Ins: Schedule regular check-ins post-process to ensure the survivor's needs are being met & that the person who caused harm is continuing to engage with their accountability & healing process.



A CHECKLIST FOR SURVIVOR CARE:

Have survivors been informed of their rights & options?

Are their safety & emotional needs been assessed?

Is space given to express their needs?

Are power imbalances addressed & mitigated?

Are survivors receiving continued support & follow-up?

Are facilitators trained in handling trauma?

Are we the right person for this process?

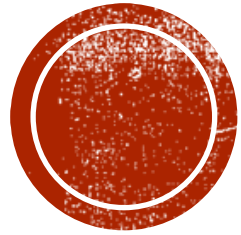
Can we, as facilitators, identify signs of trauma in participants?

Are we prepared to de-escalate survivor distress without coercion?

Are we aware of how power is moving in our space?

Has our training included scenarios where survivor needs are centered in our process?





PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

Navigating survivor-centered program design & implementation.

INVOLVE SURVIVORS & ADVOCATES IN RJ PLANNING

Challenge: Many RJ programs are designed without survivor input.

Best Practice:
Involve survivors, advocates, & victim services in program design.

Ask ourselves:
“What are the risks of RJ processes designed without survivor voices?”



