

THE RESTORATIVE REVIEW



The monthly newsletter of the Hartford Community Restorative Justice Center



The CJC garden is at peak greenery this month.

WHAT'S NEW

UPCOMING EVENTS

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SUPPORT SPOTLIGHT

.....

CENTER UPDATES

.....

THANK YOU

Quote of the Month

“For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?”

- bell hooks -

Upcoming Events

Goodbye Party

4:30pm, Thursday the 15th
The Community Garden, 459
South Main St, WRJ

As many of us know, Mads will be leaving the CJC on August 16th. We are having a party for her on August 15th, in the afternoon, at the HCRJC garden she helped install at 459 S. Main Street, WRJ. All invited!

Community Block Party

October 18th

Lyman Point Park, WRJ

The July Block Party was canceled due to the heatwave we experienced. It has been rescheduled to October 18th. Put it on your calendar and join our staff at the table!

Round II of t-shirts has just arrived. Come grab one!

Support Spotlight

We'd like to give a huge thank you to a friend of the center, John Fenley. John has done a lot for the CJC: he helped build the picnic table at our community garden, supervised the garden itself, and assisted folks in our housing. This past week John went above and beyond and spent the morning deep-cleaning our office carpets. They look amazing and we are beyond grateful for his kindness.



Center Updates: CLiF

The Children's Literacy Foundation promotes children's literacy in Vermont. They have been piloting programming geared towards incarcerated parents and their children. The Justice Center and Hartford Dismas House are partnering with CLiF to explore how we can bring this programming to our program participants and their children. This will be kicking off with an event this coming week at Hartford Dismas House.

Committees

Reminder that the committees that guide our work here at the center are looking for volunteer support. Explore the list below and consider joining one!

**Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion**

Housing

**Marketing &
Development**

Thank You

A Letter From the Editor

Writing a goodbye is difficult. Writing a goodbye that reflects on your own work without sounding gratuitous and self-important is even harder. With that said, I'm going to give it a go. We love a heartfelt attempt here at the Justice Center, even when the end result falls short of perfection.

Many of you know that I will be leaving the Center in just two short weeks. Rarely does life offer such bittersweet moments of opportunity (or if it does, don't tell me! Let the irony play out). Before I go, I think it's important that I reflect on my time here. After all, reflection is at the core of the work we do.

I don't think it will come as a surprise to any of you that the need for community tops my list of reflections. The Vermont restorative justice system is framed in a way that assumes a certain level of community can be identified and engaged with by our participants. Yet, so often the question of broader impact is one of the hardest pieces for our folks to grapple with. They don't feel connected to people outside of their familial or romantic circles. Every day at the Justice Center we are doing the work of community building, *and* we need to reflect on how we build a sense of community beyond our office walls. Do we chat with the person at the gas pump next to us? Do we get to know the cashier who always rings out our groceries? These people whose lives are orbiting around ours, occasionally overlapping - they are our community. If we don't start building relationships with them until they're involved with the criminal legal system then we're making a mistake.

I hop up on my “community” soapbox because one of the greatest lessons I learned in my time here is that change is relational. Meaningful change is neither bullied nor coerced. I recall a panel where the first session ended with the participant walking out in tears. Over the course of four months, deep mutual respect was cultivated between them and their panelists. One day we sat down together to have a particularly difficult conversation and they said, “I know I’m not going to like what you’re about to say. But I know I’m going to think about it later. I know it’s probably right”. I have seen program participants make changes they were adamantly against in the first session, because of a growing sense of trust and vulnerability between them and their panelists. I’ve seen people choose rehab, choose therapy, choose to give a heartfelt apology, even though when they walked into this office for the first time that was the scariest thing in the world. The relationships we build make that possible. They are the very core of our work.

That leads me to my final reflection and the one that is closest to my heart. This work, my role, and these reflections are all possible because we have cultivated such a talented, empathetic, gracious team of people here at the center. We have created a space where that level of openness and that level of self-reflection is possible. You should all be so deeply proud of what we’ve built.

I’m sitting here, trying to convey a resounding gratitude that goes beyond the depths of what a piece in a newsletter can offer. So... thank you for the connection. Thank you for your patience. Thank you for the gentle feedback. Thank you for cups of coffee. Thank you for the lively UNO games. Thank you for allowing me to learn.

Much love to you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Mads

