



Volunteers Needed for Restorative Justice Program



Andrew Peltz, Restorative Justice Coordinator

What is Restorative Justice? It is a fundamental change in approach when working to repair damages caused from crimes or wrongdoings within a community. This philosophy sees these misdeeds as a violation of both the law and the relationships that were impacted by the incident and works to repair the relationships harmed in these situations.

What is a Circle? A circle is an intentional way of gathering people for organizing effective group communication, building relationships, establishing accountability, and healthy decision making. People come together and meet in a literal circle where everyone is given an opportunity to share their perspective and work together to find solutions. As a group, circle members work with the family or individual to determine what they can do to repair the harm they have caused by the offenses that brought them to circle.

What does a Circle look like? There are four to five volunteers within each circle, a facilitator, and the participants. Currently, there are a total of four groups being facilitated within Renville County, with a majority of groups starting at noon and 5:30pm on Mondays and Tuesdays, meeting every other week for two hours each. Each group begins with a small meal, prior to sitting in circle. Andrew Peltz, Restorative Justice Coordinator, shared, *"When in circle, we begin the night by checking in on how everyone is doing. Each circle can look very different; but in general terms, we discuss what's going well, what isn't going so good, and what thing could potentially be done to take another step in the right direction. By sharing our own life experiences and by telling our stories, participants begin to open up to the group which establishes trust; and through these relationships that are formed, healthy changes begin to unfold."*

What have participants said?

"I know there's always a place for mental health testing and different things; but at the end of the day, there is a great need for human connection and more relationships."
- Youth Participant

"I appreciate everything. This is why I wanted this for you kids to see it from others' eyes. We are getting things done as a group now. That's what this circle has done. Help us move forward as a unit and not individuals. Being here three times has changed us three times over. As a family, we used to take three steps forward and four backwards. I needed this group. A lot of stuff has changed for the better in two months. This is a big thing for us that has really paid off."

- Parent Participant

What have community volunteers said?

- "Being part of this group rekindled in me a faith in the people of our community that believe we can have, and are willing to work for a better world. With Restorative Justice Circles, there is hope for a better world." - Volunteer

Potential referrals from Human Services, Probation, County Attorney's Office, and Public Health

From the words seen above by both volunteers and community members, there is a great need for community connection, support, and accountability within our small towns in Renville County. In conversation with staff and supervisors from all of the department names above, if the program had more volunteers, and had the capacity to hold more circles, there are at least 30 potential referrals that could be approached to see if the families would consider trying out the program. The reality here is that the number of youth, young adults, and families in crisis that are in need of support is certainly not declining.

Volunteers are needed

With the high need and want to get more families and youth involved in the program, more volunteers are needed in order to make this happen. **If you are interested in volunteering to support individuals and families in your community or have questions, please contact Andrew Peltz at 320-522-1573 or email andrewp@renvillecountymn.com.**