

**Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon Listening Project**

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## **Introduction**

During the fall of 2014, the coordinating committee members of the Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon (RJCO) approached Dr. Rachel Cunliffe and asked her to assist them with an evaluation of the needs of Restorative Justice (RJ) practitioners in the state of Oregon. Dr. Cunliffe organized and oversaw Chris Saucier and Jean Knutson, graduate students in the Conflict Resolution program at Portland State University, who attempted to contact and assess the self-reported needs of individuals working in the field of RJ. Chris and Jean developed and distributed a survey and then conducted three focus groups. The following report outlines our evaluation process, presents our findings, and offers our recommendations for future research.

## **Procedure**

A survey was created by the research team using Qualtrics online survey software in order to gain a better understanding of how a professional organization could serve the needs of RJ practitioners in Oregon. The survey contained six questions. The first four questions collected basic demographic information in order to develop a better sense of where and how practitioners are working in the field of RJ and what populations they are serving. The final two questions asked the respondents what they wanted from a professional organization and asked them to describe barriers that they face while working in the field. Both questions had several potential predetermined responses to choose from as well as an option to write in one's own response. At the

end of the survey the respondents were given the option to participate in a future focus group (FG). (See Appendix I – Survey Results, Table 1.1-1.3).

Initially, the research team had planned to obtain each of the coordinating committee member's professional email contacts, control for duplicates and distribute the survey themselves. However, due to privacy concerns, the survey was sent to the RJCO coordinating committee members who then sent the survey out to their individual list of professional contacts. As a result, the team was unable to determine how many individuals received the survey, or ensure that individuals did not take the survey more than once. There were 75 respondents to the survey. However due to the limitations imposed by the method of distribution we do are unable to determine what proportion this 75 comprises of those who received the survey, so we cannot provide a response rate.

Of the 75, 24 individuals expressed an interest in participating in a focus group (FG). Some of the respondents who expressed interest in participating in the focus group did so through the survey and others communicated their interest through a series of emails sent by some of the RJCO coordinating committee members.

Due to the substantial interest in the FGs, and the large geographical area being covered, it was decided that three focus groups would be conducted in different locations (Portland, Oregon City, and Eugene). The option of using Skype or conference calls was offered to the participants who were unable to attend in person. A number of participants could not make it to the focus groups because of scheduling conflicts. Others who had planned to come had something come up at the last minute and did not

attend. Of the twenty-four potential participants, only 8 were able to attend one of the three focus groups (3 in Portland, 4 in Oregon City, and 1 in Eugene).

Each of the focus groups followed a general outline, but was largely conducted in an informal manner. The goal of the FGs was to allow the practitioners to talk about the issues and topics that they deemed important. A list of questions was generated by the research team beforehand (see Appendix II – Focus Group Questions), and these questions were posted on the wall during each of the FGs. Each of the questions was used to initiate discussion, but ultimately the research team allowed the participants to lead the discussion.

Each of the focus groups started with introductions and an explanation regarding the purpose of the focus group. This was followed by simple demographic questions (see Appendix III – Focus Group Findings, Table 2.1-2.3). The participants were asked if the focus group could be recorded (permission was given by all the participants). Questions five and six were presented to the groups (as they were presented in the survey), along with the “Other” answers that were given in the initial survey (see tables 1.2 and 1.3 in Appendix I). “Other” answers were omitted if it was difficult to interpret the exact meaning of the answer, or if the answer did not extend the conversation into new territory. For example, one answer from the “Other” category was “just about all of the above.” Since this answer did not move the conversation forward, we did not introduce it. Participants were then asked if there was anything else they felt should be added to the list. After the questions and answers were understood and finalized, the participants were given three post-it notes with the numbers 1-3 on them. They were then asked to rank their answers (in order of importance, see results Table 2.2 and Table 2.3 in

Appendix III). After this task was completed by the participants, the FG discussed their choices.

Each of the FGs helped to further refine the themes that came out of the survey results allowing the research team to gain a better understanding of the data. The recordings from each of the FGs were used to make detailed notes regarding the discussions. Similar ideas found in the notes across all FGs were grouped and distilled into important emerging themes.

### **Findings**

During the FGs several themes emerged in the concerns that were raised by practitioners. Two were particularly prominent:

#### **The need for education and advocacy with the general public**

The most widely held concern was the lack of understanding and “buy-in” from the wider community regarding the RJ principles and practices. The participants felt that knowledge of RJ principles is insufficient among the general public; communities/cultures need to have knowledge of, and to believe in RJ for practitioners to have the impact they are looking to achieve. This buy-in is also necessary for the expansion and growth of the RJ field. Even if buy-in does occur, it can be complicated by systemic issues. For example, one practitioner mentioned that even if teachers are trained in RJ practices and wish to implement such practices, the school system may have different priorities. So “buy-in” needs to happen on many different levels.

Advocacy, on many different levels, was seen as the means to support buy-in from the

wider community. Detailed discussion of how this advocacy might be shaped can be found in the table below.

**The need for definition of RJ and the development of standards and best practices.**

Another prominent theme which emerged was the need for the development of standards and/or best practices. The participants stated that standards and best practices would not only be a means to legitimize RJ, but also help to prevent others from tarnishing the reputation of RJ practices by those who call their approaches restorative justice when they are not. All participants agreed that if standards and/or best practices were to be developed, a professional organization should take the lead, but stressed that the process should be opened up to and include the voices of small grassroots organizations as well. Detailed discussion of how this process might be formed is set out in the table below.

Additional emerging themes are explored along with these two most commonly raised themes in the table` below

<b>Themes – Developed from FG Discussions</b>	
<b>“Buy-in”/Advocacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community “buy-in” and the need for advocacy was the most prominent theme discussed during the focus groups (FG). Advocacy was seen to support buy-in.</li> <li>▪ Advocacy can help...               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overcome the negative perceptions of RJ</li> <li>○ Promote the RJ culture in the wider community</li> <li>○ Promote a culture that looks at justice through a different lens.</li> <li>○ Promote different values and options to our current system.</li> <li>○ Create “buy-in” from the community and community partners. Knowledge is not enough, it doesn’t help if the community members are not buying into the process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Advocacy, who to target...               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There were a variety of opinions and ideas for how advocacy should be implemented. Everyone wished or was looking to achieve a similar goal</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

through advocacy, the promotion and acceptance (i.e. “buy-in”) of RJ and its principles in the larger community.

- Possible study or research needed in order to determine where and how advocacy can be the most effective.
- Both top-down and bottom-up approaches were suggested a number of times, although some participants do not think top-down approaches work.
  - Incentives may be needed for either approach.
- Bottom-up approaches could target...
  - Public/Communities
  - Education System/Schools was a strongly supported long term approach. That is, when young people understand and use RJ practices it can help shape the culture of the future.
  - Victims (can help get victims involved as well as buy into the process).
  - Recognition of professional stature (& compensation) was seen as a way to sell RJ to the larger community, and the “higher ups.”
  - Help Practitioners/Advocates get involved in community events to promote RJ principles (e.g. public forums, PTA meetings, legislation meetings, media campaign, news stories, series of community discussion nights, etc.). And/or providing resources to practitioners to help them advocate.
- Top-down approaches could target...
  - Government/Law Makers lobbying to help pass bills on the state level (with the hope of creating RJ practices within the criminal justice system).

#### **Development of standards, best practices, (and ethics; also accreditation/certification and recognition of professional stature).**

The development of standards and best practices appeared to be the second most important issue for FG participants. Development of standards and best practices was seen to provide legitimacy to RJ, as well as prevent damaging practices.

- The development of best practices was seen as something that RJCO should take the lead on.
- Possibly define the values and purpose of RJ as a way to define best practices—a place to “check-in” to see if individuals are practicing RJ.
- FG participants stressed caution about the development of best practices...
  - Too strict and people won’t join.
  - It was mentioned that RJCO might want to be more established in the community before attempting to implement standards. Trying to push standards on someone who has been practicing RJ for years may not like it too much.
  - There is a need to consider grassroots movements and what effect best practices, standards, ethics, etc. may have or say about their work. Where do best practices matter?
- Accreditation/certification were seen as important...
  - But only after the implementation of standards and best practices
  - Consider where accreditation matters. Likely very applicable in the criminal justice system, but not necessarily at the grassroots level.
  - Could accreditation be done on a national level?
- Recognition of professional stature was also deemed important to help get people paid for their services, which also leads to more jobs in the field.

### Needs Assessment

- Advocacy assessment – explained in under advocacy theme
- RJ community Assessment
  - Assessment of the RJ community, who is doing what, what is needed. Search for individuals practicing RJ who don't know it, it can help expand the field and scope within the state.
- Community assessment
  - Where to target RJ, since practitioners don't have a sense of the field
  - Attitudes towards RJ in the community, and the needs of the community since most people don't know about RJ principles
  - How to overcome the negative perceptions of RJ, e.g. "soft on crime."

### Funding

- Was seen to promote RJ principles and practices in a number of different areas.
- Advocacy and education in schools, prisons, government, lobbying, etc.
  - For victims
  - For programs and people on the ground, or polite programs, projects that could be expanded upon.
  - For individuals who can't afford services. Have funding for those people so practitioners can get paid.

### Miscellaneous

- RJCO to take the lead where practitioners can't, focus on the bigger picture that covers everyone.
- List of practitioners, where potential clients could find professionals. And where volunteers can find work.
  - A practitioner mentioned they would pay for professional services but not as a volunteer.
- Volunteer coordination
- Connect professionals who are looking for work, referral sources (this was number one priority for one practitioner).
- A forum to allow for easy communication between practitioners.
- It was mentioned that technical assistance already exists, perhaps RJCO could direct professionals to those services.
- Needs awareness of the various RJ disciplines.
- Access to resources that can help with program evaluation (since that is generally a thing that most programs struggle with).
- Examine the process that mediators have gone through, it was mentioned they went through a similar process.
- Continuation of conferences because they act as a networking and education piece in RJ circles.
- Sponsor lunch-ins, for those working alone, to help as a reminder. Maybe something put on by students, short presentation, could RJCO support that? Happy-hour discussions, a hub for people to meet up and discuss RJ. Keep it hopeful, fun, and moving. A number of participants mentioned how fun it was to be part of the focus groups, to meet others, and discuss issues that were important to them.

### **Limitations**

While the survey and FG participants combined to provide a variety of ideas about how a professional organization could support the needs of RJ practitioners, there are a number of limitations to this data. Upon close examination of the survey after the fact, the research team discovered several flaws in the survey's construction which may contribute to the data being both invalid and unreliable. For example, the first question in the survey asks if practitioners work at either an urban or rural worksite without both being an option. Therefore, we may not have been able to gather a true sense of the types of work locations which people are doing RJ. When gathering the same demographic information during the FG, 50% of the participants said they work in both an urban and rural setting. Also, the fourth question specifically targets those who work in the criminal justice system, with 61 people responding to this question. From the first three questions it appears that approximately 75 people took the survey; indicating approximately 83% work within the criminal justice system. However, the third question specifically asks respondents about their primary work setting, and only 43% (32 people) said they worked within the criminal justice system. So, this is a confusing result.

Finally, as was mentioned in the section on procedure, the research team is also unable to estimate the numbers of people practicing, or really derive any firm theories about their demographics due to the lack of control we were able to exert over, and the lack of knowledge we therefore have of to whom the survey was distributed. Since the

team was unable to find an adequate solution to the privacy concerns which arose, there is no way to know how many individuals received the survey, and of that number, how many responded.

### **Discussion/Recommendations**

Due to the small number of participants, our research findings cannot be generalized for the entire population of RJ practitioners in Oregon. Therefore our findings of the concerns of practitioners should in no way be considered a mandate for RJCO. However, the eight FG participants were able to provide a number of ideas and functions that a professional organization such as RJCO, can provide RJ practitioners. The FG participants made it clear that, in their views, there is a need for the larger community to be educated on what RJ is and how it can be applied in both the justice and educational systems. Secondly, the participants expressed a strong desire for there to be a set of standards or best practices for RJ practitioners.

**Appendices**

**Appendix I - Survey Results**

Table 1.1 – Survey Demographic Questions		
Answer	Response #	%
<b>1: Please note whether your worksite is urban or rural</b>		
Urban	49	66%
Rural	25	34%
Total	74	
<b>2: Are your clientele primarily juveniles or adults?</b>		
Juveniles	44	59%
Adults	17	23%
Both	14	19%
Total	75	
<b>3: What is your primary work setting?</b>		
Schools/educational settings	18	24%
Community	25	33%
Criminal Justice	32	43%
Total	75	
<b>4: If you work within the criminal justice system who do you work with primarily?</b>		
Victims	3	5%
Offenders	27	44%
Both	31	51%
Total	61	

Table 1.2 – Survey Question #5 (Answers given verbatim)
<b>5: What are the most valuable functions for a professional association serving the restorative justice community? (choose all that apply)</b>

Answer	Response	%
Advocacy	59	77%
Accreditation/certification	15	19%
Technical assistance	22	29%
Creation/distribution of professional journal	12	16%
Providing RJ educational opportunities to larger public	51	66%
Organization of regional conferences and trainings	41	53%
Lobbying/fundraising	24	31%
Networking	39	51%
Events organization	18	23%
Connecting with other RJ organizations	38	49%
Development of professional standards, codes of ethics, or best practices	45	58%
Other	7	9%
<b>Other</b>		
Curriculum Creation/Facilitation		
Ensuring that the growing trend towards the professionalization of RJ could negatively impact ensuring the restorative practices are driven by those most impacted.		
Listing of RV Professionals		
Support in volunteer recruitment		
Just about all of the above thus requiring sufficient resources.		
Training		
Crate curriculum & scholarships for RJ training programs at college and post-grad level		

<b>Table 1.3 – Survey Question #6 (Answers given verbatim)</b>		
<b>6: Which barriers would a professional organization help you overcome? (choose all that apply)</b>		
Answer	Response	%
Lack of referrals	16	22%
Lack of understanding of RJ in community partners	44	59%
Staying up-to-date with the latest research	42	57%
Lack of access to online journals or databases	17	23%
Lack of knowledge of RJ in larger community	45	61%
Other	9	12%

Other
Lack of funding
Knowledge of scope and understanding of RJ work in the state
Technical support for streamlining systems that are often necessary when working within institutional settings
Since I am retired and now a volunteer, the professional part no longer affects me as much.
Dedicated staff IN the school who support and actively work for Restorative Justice principles.
Local big organizations not collaborating enough with other organizations.
Lack of recognition of professional stature & compensation of RJ professionals
Getting schools to understand the importance of restorative principals in their dealing with discipline issues
Lack of "buy in" from community and partners.

## Appendix II – Focus Group Questions

X refers to the topic that was chosen (see Table 2.2 for a list of topics).

- With respect to X, where do you see the greatest need?
- How does X support your RJ work?
- How do you see a professional organization providing X function?
- Thinking about other types of RJ work, would you still stick with your same choices? For instance, if you work within a school setting, do you think your choices would be the same if you worked in the criminal justice system?
- Is there anything on the list that you think should be removed? Or should not be considered?

X refers to the barrier they want to overcome (see Table 2.3 for a list of barriers).

- How does X barrier impact your work?
- How could a professional organization help you overcome X barrier?
- Do different RJ disciplines have to deal with different barriers? Would your choices change depending on your discipline of practice?

**Appendix III - Focus Group Findings**

<b>Table 2.1 – Focus group demographic questions (8 total participants)</b>	
<b>1: Did you take the initial survey that was sent out with regards to the RJCO listening project?</b>	
Yes	7
No	1
<b>2: What geographical areas do you work?</b>	
Urban	3
Rural	0
Both	4
<b>3: What age group(s) do you work with?</b>	
Juveniles	2
Adults	3
Both	2
<b>4: Which population(s) do you work with?</b>	
Victims	0
Offenders	1
Both	7
<i>Demographic questions were asked of the eight participants at the beginning of the FG's. The answers for questions two and three were missed from one of the participants because they were late.</i>	

<b>Table 2.2 – Number of focus group participants who selected a specific answer (ranked in order of importance from 1-3)</b>			
<b>5: What are the most valuable functions for a professional association serving the restorative justice community? (choose all that apply)</b>			
<b>Answers (ranked in order of importance from highest to lowest)</b>			
	1	2	3
Advocacy	1	2	3
Accreditation/certification			
Technical assistance			
Creation/distribution of professional journal		1	

Providing RJ educational opportunities to larger public	2	2	
Organization of regional conferences and trainings	1		1
Lobbying/fundraising	1		
Networking		1	2
Events organization			
Connecting with other RJ organizations			
Development of professional standards, codes of ethics, or best practices	2	2	
Curriculum creation			
Listing of RJ professionals	1		
Support for volunteer recruitment			1
Training			1
<i>FG participants ranked their answers in order of importance, from highest to lowest, one being highest and three being lowest. Values indicate the <b>number</b> of participants who picked a particular function and level of importance.</i>			

<b>Table 2.3 – Number of focus group participants who selected a specific answer (ranked in order of importance from 1-3)</b>			
<b>6: Which barriers would a professional organization help you overcome? (choose all that apply)</b>			
Answers (ranked in order of importance from highest to lowest)			
Lack of referrals	1	2	3
Lack of understanding of RJ in community partners		1	
Staying up-to-date with the latest research			
Lack of access to online journals or databases			
Lack of knowledge of RJ in larger community	2	2	
Lack of “buy in” from community and partners	3	1	
Knowledge of scope and understanding of RJ work in the state	1	1	2
Lack of recognition of professional stature and compensation of RJ practitioners	1		1
Lack of funding			3
Getting schools to understand the importance of RJ principles when dealing with discipline		1	1
Dedicated staff in schools who actively work for RJ principles		1	
Local big organizations not collaborating enough with other organizations.			1
<i>FG participants ranked their answers in order of importance from highest to lowest, one being highest and three being lowest. Values indicate the <b>number</b> of participants who picked a particular function and level of importance.</i>			

