

## **Open Concerns for Young Witness of Store Hold-Up**

***A defense lawyer and the Crown refer a juvenile offender convicted in an attempted robbery of a store to participate in MRJC's Restorative Dialogue process, and to meet with the 12-year-old girl who witnessed the crime.***

***Scenario:*** Just think of the impact on a 12 year-old-girl who witnesses a store being robbed by a young woman. Questions like “Why did she do it?,” “Was she caught by the police?,” and “What’s going to happen to her next?” and more, are reeling through this girl’s mind.

Rachel, the juvenile offender who attempted to rob the store, is caught and charged by the police. She has some cognitive impairment and lacks impulse control, so her ability to make sound and rational decisions is often compromised. Her motivation to rob the store is to get money to buy Christmas presents for her friends and family. Her very bad decision leads to serious consequences for Rachel herself, for Sarah, and for the community impacted by Rachel’s choice.

In court, Rachel’s defense lawyer and the Crown concur that setting up a Restorative Dialogue between Sarah and her family, Rachel and MRJC is necessary to help Sarah to get some answers about this dramatically impacting event in her young life. This much-needed clarity, it turns out, is especially important for Sarah as she doesn’t handle stress well. She is plagued by intense headaches when in stressful situations.

As a result of the robbery, Rachel is assigned 24/7 care from a guardian caregiver. Through a series of preparation meetings and conversations, MRJC arranges for Rachel to meet face-to-face with Sarah, mom Joanne, and her stepfather Steve, in a Restorative Dialogue. The main purpose of the dialogue is to have some of Sarah’s questions answered, to get a better idea of how and why the robbery took place, and for Sarah to understand how this attempted robbery will affect Rachel’s life.

***MRJC’s Restorative Dialogue Team Gets Involved:*** The one-hour Restorative Dialogue that ensues is kept short because of the attention span and abilities of the young people involved. Everyone shares insights and feelings about what happened and the effects of the robbery. Sarah now has a clear picture of Rachel, the challenges that she faces, and a much better understanding of how Rachel’s life is impacted as a result of the attempted robbery. She also knows what has been done to prevent Rachel from committing another crime such as this. All of this really helps Sarah to restore some of the harm experienced by being a witness of this crime.

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Sarah's parents are very pleased with the "closure" that the Restorative Dialogue provides for Sarah. Rachel feels that participation in the dialogue gives her a better idea of herself and a clear understanding of how her actions have impacted others. She is very concerned about the impact of her crime on the impressionable 12 year-old girl Sarah, and feels better about helping to set the record straight with her. Rachel shares with Sarah how happy she is to have the support of a guardian and caregiver, and feels, with this support, that she will make better choices in the future. Hearing this puts Sarah's mind at ease and helps to take away some of those intense headaches.

MRJC has extensive experience in bringing victims and offenders of crimes together for a facilitated Restorative Dialogue in a safe and nurturing environment. These intensive dialogues are led by our trained and experienced Restorative Justice Facilitators.

**MRJC invests countless hours helping people like Sarah to overcome the impact of crimes that they have witnessed and/or those where they have been the victim. In the Restorative Dialogue process, the offender fully accepts responsibility for the offence committed, and better understands the impact of their crime on the victim and the community as a whole.**

***To find out more about MRJC's Restorative Dialogue process, please call us at 780.423.0896.***