



# Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development

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## **Pilot Evaluation of “Repairing Harm”**

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## Executive Summary

Restorative justice practices have become increasingly popular in recent decades as alternatives to traditional criminal justice forms.<sup>1</sup> With their focus on accountability and taking responsibility for harm caused, implementation of restorative justice programs represents an opportunity for individual transformation as well as potentially at community levels.

This research documents key elements of a restorative justice program (“Repairing Harm”) currently implemented at three Massachusetts correctional institutions through a partnership with Concord Prison Outreach (CPO). Based on interviews conducted with inmates and institution administrators at two of these institutions, the research points to impacts of the “Repairing Harm” program as well as salient *mechanisms*, or aspects of program implementation, that led to these impacts. Importantly, the current study includes interviews only with former “Repairing Harm” participants who were still incarcerated at the time of the interview; thus, it cannot speak to the program’s impact on recidivism or other post-release behaviors. However, this research points to the effectiveness of the “Repairing Harm” program in relation to the following areas:

- ◆ **Increased self-reflection among participants.** Interviewees cited greater awareness of the harm caused by their crimes, as well as a better understanding of how past circumstances shaped their actions.
- ◆ **Reduced behavioral issues.** Interviewees frequently mentioned increased ability to refrain from reacting to provocations and in general to “think before you act” when aggravated.
- ◆ **Improved relationships.** “Repairing Harm” participants noted that the program had brought them closer to family and loved ones by creating a space for directly engaging issues that had not ever been discussed previously. Participants also noted the positive relationships developed with others in the program.
- ◆ **Interest in restorative justice.** Administrators at both institutions noted an increased interest in programming around restorative justice by men not involved with “Repairing Harm.”

The positive impact of “Repairing Harm” can be attributed to several program elements mentioned by participants:

- ◆ **A humanizing and trust-building environment.** Participants noted the importance of this environment for developing comfort in sharing, creating a sense of community, and helping them see themselves in positive ways.
- ◆ **Specific exercises.** Participants pointed to two exercises in particular that were especially significant: “Who’s That Boy,” an exercise requiring them to reflect on their childhoods, and “Accountability Circles,” where they retold, and were questioned about, the narrative of their crime. These exercises were perceived as central to understanding the link between past circumstances and present actions, and developing a sense of accountability for criminal behavior.
- ◆ **Victim panels.** Bringing victims of crimes similar to those committed by “Repairing Harm” participants, into contact with program participants, allowed them to experience forgiveness and better understand the impact of their actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonta, J., Wallace-Capretta, S., Rooney, J., & McAnoy, K. (2002). An outcome evaluation of a restorative justice alternative to incarceration. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 5(4), 319.

- ◆ **Facilitators.** Nearly half of “Repairing Harm” participants interviewed spoke about the important role that program facilitators played in creating a positive environment and helping them feel like they can change and create change.

Participants also noted potential areas of change in the program, with an emphasis on:

- ◆ **Increasing time.** Nearly 30% of participants noted that “Repairing Harm” should be longer (more than 2 hours a week) or meet more often (more than once per week).
- ◆ **Increasing seriousness of participation.** Several participants noted that others in their group did not take the program seriously and thus limited its effectiveness for other participants.

Based on the data collected and the positive perceptions shared with interviewers, recommendations for “Repairing Harm” include:

- ◆ **Expanding the scope** of “Repairing Harm” to additional institutions and larger groups within institutions where it is already implemented;
- ◆ **Capacity-building** for existing and potential facilitators, to ensure program quality;
- ◆ **Funding** “Repairing Harm” to ensure sustainability and program quality; and
- ◆ **Creating a follow-up** program to be implemented as a pre-release program for men who have already participated in “Repairing Harm”.

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## I. Background

Restorative justice has become increasingly popular as an alternative to traditional disciplinary and criminal justice approaches. Used in school-based settings and as diversion programs for first-time offenders, restorative justice programs have also entered prison settings in recent years with the goal of enabling prisoners to take responsibility for their actions and help repair the losses they have caused.<sup>2</sup> The range of practices linked to restorative justice includes victim-offender dialogues (bringing together individuals who have caused harm with those to whom harm has been caused); restitution to victims; and peace-making circles. It is based on the goals of addressing harm or “putting right;” addressing the *causes* or underlying roots of harm; and exploring the harms that offenders themselves have experienced (in other words, learning to see offenders as victims, as well).<sup>3</sup>

In this context, “Repairing Harm,” the restorative justice program evaluated here, was developed as a prison-based program drawing on restorative principles and peace-making circles as the basis for developing accountability, responsibility, and empathy among incarcerated men. Through a partnership with Concord Prison Outreach (CPO), “Repairing Harm” has been implemented since Fall 2016 at MCI Concord and the Northeast Correctional Center (NECC). The program initially consisted of two 12-week phases or semesters, where completion of phase one was a pre-requisite for phase two eligibility. Based on recommendations from the Restorative Justice Working Group (RJWG) at MCI Concord (a group of incarcerated men who after completing the “Repairing Harm” program, formed a group that advises on curriculum development and overall program enhancement and implementation), the curriculum has been expanded to 33 weeks. The curriculum is run consecutively at MCI Concord (and since Fall 2018, at MCI Shirley) and in two phases at NECC.

This pilot evaluation provides an initial picture of the strengths and weaknesses of “Repairing Harm” as it concludes its first 3 years of implementation at NECC and MCI Concord. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, the evaluation focuses primarily on the experiences of MCI Concord and NECC participants in the restorative justice program, with additional context provided through interviews with administrators at both institutions, curricular materials, and materials written by men in the program as part of their participation. In particular, the evaluation focuses on the way former participants in the program described the *characteristics and significant elements* of the restorative justice program, and the way they described *transformation resulting from participation in the restorative justice program*. Also described here are changes former participants feel could be made in order to further strengthen “Repairing Harm”.

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<sup>2</sup> Insight Prison Project, “What is Restorative Justice?” Accessed March 19, 2019. <http://www.insightprisonproject.org/a-restorative-justice-agency.html>

<sup>3</sup> Zehr, H. (2015). *The little book of restorative justice*. New York: Good Books.

## II. Methodology

Preparations for evaluating “Repairing Harm” began with a series of meetings between the Principal Investigator (PI) and program director in early 2016, as the program was getting underway. To better understand the program and its approach, the PI co-facilitated phase I of “Repairing Harm” at one institution (NECC) in Fall 2016; at this point, it was decided that the form of the evaluation should follow the principles of restorative justice, in particular in terms of offering participants in the program an opportunity to take responsibility for how it was assessed. This led to the development of a *participatory framework* for the evaluation.

In line with the principles of participatory research, the design for this evaluation was developed collaboratively between the principal investigator (PI), the “Repairing Harm” program director, and a working group of 5 men, all of whom participated in the 2016-2017 “Repairing Harm” program at NECC. Over the course of a series of meetings in May-July 2017, this group met to determine goals for the evaluation, design the research, and develop interview questions to be asked of program participants, correctional institution administrators, and others.

Approval from the UMASS Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the MA Department of Corrections (DOC) was obtained in Fall 2017. Following the approval process, the PI and a doctoral student at UMASS Boston met with the restorative justice working group at MCI Concord in order to finalize the evaluation approach. In Spring and Summer 2018, the PI and doctoral student conducted interviews with 3 DOC administrators (2 at NECC, 1 at MCI Concord) and with 21 former participants in the “Repairing Harm” program (3 men who participated while at NECC; and 18 who participated while at MCI (see **Appendix I: Interview Protocols**). (One individual was interviewed at NECC following his transfer from MCI Concord but participated in the program prior to this transfer). Each interviewee received and signed an informed consent form (approved by the UMB IRB and the DOC) prior to the interview taking place. (See **Appendix II: Informed Consent Form**).

Interviews ranged from approximately 15-45 minutes and were conducted with only the interviewer and interviewee present. Each interview was recorded with an approved audio recording device and transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality, interview recordings and transcriptions were named with the name of the institution, interview number, date, and initials of the interviewer (e.g. MCI Interview 5 June 5 2018 KR). With the exception of facilitators who were mentioned in some interviews, no names were included in the substance of any interview recording or transcript.

Following transcription, all interviews were analyzed by the Principal Investigator, with a focus on key themes emerging across interviews. The following pages discuss those themes in relation to three overarching categories:

- ◆ characteristics and significant elements of the restorative justice program
- ◆ transformation resulting from the restorative justice program
- ◆ potential areas for change in the restorative justice program

### III. Implementation of “Repairing Harm”

#### a. Program overview<sup>4</sup>

“Repairing Harm” is a program currently implemented over the course of 33 weeks (24 weeks at the time when the participants interviewed for this evaluation experienced it). The program meets once a week for a period of between 2 hours and 2.5 hours depending on the institution. The curriculum begins by introducing participants to the principles and practices of restorative justice, including traditional restorative circle practices like the use of a “talking piece,” a “centerpiece,” the “grounding,” and an opening and closing for each session. Participants use the circle format that is followed throughout the curriculum.

The curriculum is divided into two phases (implemented consecutively at MCI Concord and MCI Shirley, and as separate phases at NECC). During Phase One, participants explore their past traumas, victimization, and the pain that underlies the impulse to engage in deviant or criminal behavior. The areas explored during Phase One are based on the “domains” or “need areas” that predict criminal behavior (Family Circumstances/Parenting, Education/Employment, Peer Relations, Substance Abuse, Leisure/Recreation, Personality/Behavior, and Attitudes/Orientation).<sup>5</sup> Weakness or lack of support in these needs areas predicts offense in youth across national populations and diverse demographics; these areas have been used to inform case management for youth diversion programs throughout the juvenile criminal justice system nationally.

Phase One is divided into four parts (Introduction, Looking Inward, Making Amends and Repairing Harm) and culminates in the first “Victim Dialogue.” During Part One (*Introduction*), participants explore the tenets of restorative justice, coming up with a unique definition based on their understanding of Howard Zehr’s *Little Book of Restorative Justice*, as well as participants’ individual experiences. During the second session, participants develop a set of Group Agreements by articulating what they need from the facilitators and from one another in order to develop a trusting environment that allows them to be vulnerable in a group setting. Part Two (*Looking Inward*) uses the notions developed by psychiatrist Ken Hardy in his renowned work *Teens Who Hurt*<sup>6</sup>, and allows participants to explore their pasts through the lenses of “devaluation, “dehumanization of loss,” and “disruption of community.”<sup>7</sup> Written exercises (“My Story”) and group dialogue assist participants in understanding the connection between both societal and individual trauma and criminal behavior, and in particular, becoming conscious of the hidden motives and impulses that can lead to violence. During Part Three (*Making Amends*), participants explore harm they experienced before the age of 18, as well as harm they caused, through written exercises (“Amend Letter – Heal Me” and “Amend Letter – Heal You”) and narrative group circles.

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<sup>4</sup> Synthesized from: Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development. (2019). “*Repairing Harm*” *Course Description*. UMASS Boston: CPDD.

<sup>5</sup> See Hoge, R.D. & Andrews, D.A. (2011). *YLS/CMI: Youth Level of Services/Case Management Inventory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. North Tonawanda, NY, MHS Assessments.

<sup>6</sup> *Teens Who Hurt* and the other book used in “Repairing Harm,” *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Howard Zehr), are both purchased for “Repairing Harm” participants by Concord Prison Outreach (CPO).

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, K. H. & Laszloffy, T.A. (2006). *Teens who hurt: Clinical interventions to break the cycle of adolescent violence*. NY: Guilford Press.



**Amend Letter – Heal Me**  
(Example Exercise)

*My Brother,*

*this letter is to let you know how I Really feel, and the only Reason you were able to hurt Me was Cause of My expectation I Reserved for you.*

*I don't know why but as I'm writing this, in My Mind's eye I'm having Visions of another Person too. Back to you, if you Remember, then Maybe you Can Relate to this. We grew up in the Projects. As time Passed, Karen and Sharon Moved, tommy and jimmy got killed, and then you Moved with your lady, then Mom Moved out of State. Karen and Sharon stay living in the Projects. So I was between houses, then I got hit with a No trespassing, and anyone who allowed Me in their home would be evicted, you will Remember this now. Well I started Crashing in the boiler Rooms, it was warm, then the housing Authority fixed the locks which didn't last long. But One time, I was out, Cold and had no place to go. So I Walked to your place, it was about 1:30/2am, you were sleeping. I was Wet, tired, Cold, Run-down, and hungry, the streets got me all f\_cked up. So I laid down in the hallway Right outside the door of your living Room. I wanted to Come inside but didn't Want to Knock on the door. So I purposely Made little Movement bangs on the door, like I Was Sleeping and didn't Mean to hit the door. I heard the lock turn from inside the house, it was the Kitchen door. I pretended to sleep, thinking that you and your wife will Come over and Wake Me up and tell Me to Come in, you f\_ucking dirt bag stopped your wife and told her to leave Me there, and you both went back in the house.*

*I just layed there and a few tears fell, Not Cause of you leaving Me there But because I Realize what I had become and where My life had went. I felt alone and you showed Me the Results of all My actions that brought Me to your hallway. I got up after a brief Reflection and Quietly left and Never Spoke about that to anyone, not even you, and you Probably thinking I never knew you seen Me laying on the floor outside your door. I ain't Mad at ya, Cause you taught Me a lesson, and prepared Me to better handle what Was to Come, which was a lot More Dramatic, then laying outside your door. But I guess I am feeling Someway Cause when I was faced with this Exercise, it brought Me to this event. But I ain't gonna send it. So you Can go on believing I was too f\_ucked up to know you Seen Me, and left Me there. you didn't even check to see if I Was Stabbed or Shot, which ironically happened. Me j.D. and joey got shot on Engle Street, 2 Streets over from where I just Was "your house." Again I don't Blame you, this shit, My Empire of Dirt, is all Me.*

*it says how Can you Make amends, you Can't, and why should you have to, again, this happened because of My expectations! lesson learned, Real People do Real things!*

Incarcerated Man-NECC-December 2018

In Part Four (*Repairing Harm*), participants focus on exercises aimed at understanding victim's

needs and developing awareness of re-victimization or re-traumatization of crime survivors. Part Four culminates in a “surrogate victim dialogue,” where victims of crimes similar to those committed by the participants join the circle to share their stories and dialogue with “Repairing Harm” participants.

Phase Two consists mainly of *Accountability Circles*, where participants use the restorative circle as a space for processing their individual crimes as well as discussing victims and other people they have hurt. The process used in Accountability Circles is based on John Braithwaite’s notion of “re-integrative shaming,” a criminal theory that distinguishes between “retributive” and “re-integrative” shame, where those who have caused harm are less likely to re-offend when they are offered a forum of care and support to take responsibility and are “re-integrated” into their community after acknowledging harm.<sup>8</sup>

These circles represent an attempt to “hold” participants while they reveal the details of their crimes, and to emphasize that even a horrific crime is not who you are but an act you committed. Through the process of the Accountability Circles, facilitators focus on humanizing the victims of these crimes and honoring their losses.

Participants and facilitators ask questions of the individuals at the center of the Accountability Circle, focusing on using “restorative language” that reflects responsibilities. This process enables participants to more deeply reflect and better understand their choices and the impact of their actions, and thus internalize feelings of responsibility for their crimes.

**ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLE EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS:**

In as much detail as possible, describe what happened during your crime and the events leading up to it. You will use the “restorative questions” below as a guide to your writing. Facilitators will process your answers in group during your accountability circle. During this exercise, the group is your “circle of support,” meaning that circle members are not here to judge you but to support you in taking responsibility.

- ✓ What happened?
- ✓ What were you thinking at the time of your crime?
- ✓ What have you thought about since committing the crime?
- ✓ Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- ✓ What do you think you need to do to make things right?

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<sup>8</sup> Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame and reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## b. Program significance

The significance of “Repairing Harm” can be divided into two primary elements: the *positive environment* discussed by participants and administrators, and *specific elements* of the program that participants found particularly impactful.

With respect to the former, “Repairing Harm” was described by institution administrators as a “good environment” and as a “safe zone” for participants, where they could “let their guard down” and “be vulnerable.” Administrators noted the significance of the program in terms of allowing participants to open up and articulate emotions that they otherwise would keep inside. This was significant, they stated, because of how much it contrasts with the prison environment as a whole.

Participants also emphasized the program’s **humanizing** effect, something that came up in six (6, 29%) of the interviews. Key for these participants was the way that “Repairing Harm” allowed them to feel like they were more than their crimes and that they were individuals with positive things to offer the world. As one participant stated,

...they force you to deal with the reality of the situation and, and deal with yourself as a person rather than just being like identified as, okay you’re a criminal, you killed somebody, or you’re this, you’re that. It’s like I’m a person. At the end of the day, I’m still a person.

Other participants noted that the program “makes you feel loved” and that it reinforced a sense of wanting to do better: “it’s for everybody, it’s to make everybody better”; “It holds you accountable, but at the same time, it helps you to forgive yourself,” one participant stated.

An additional, important element of the program overall was its emphasis on **building trust** among participants. The emphasis on trust-building within “Repairing Harm” was discussed by eleven (11, 52%) of the participants. Trust building was important, according to “Repairing Harm” participants, because it helped them feel comfortable letting their guard down and sharing within the program context - including, in some cases, criminal activity for which they had not been charged. Of particular importance, participants noted, was the fact that from the start “Repairing Harm” required them to share elements of their experiences with others in the group; doing so from the outset led to greater comfort: as one participant noted, “You kind of gain trust with people little by little, but you’re not realizing that because it’s just, you’re just doing the exercise.” By sharing *something* with others, participants said, they learned a bit about one another and thus gradually developed greater and greater degrees of comfort and, along with that, greater willingness to share.

Participants also spoke about developing a bond with other men who were part of their “Repairing Harm” groups. One participant described the group as “a little family,” adding that it was, “a circle of grown men that just knew about each other and related to each other.” Others spoke of *community* and *camaraderie* in describing the relationships among participants in “Repairing Harm” and noted that the support they received from other participants extended beyond the circle to other aspects of their daily lives within the prison.

In addition to the overall *positive environment* described by both “Repairing Harm” participants and institutional administration, several specific elements of the program were noted as especially significant. Three activities in particular were described as particularly impactful: “**Who’s that boy?**” (discussed in 12, 57%, of interviews); the **victim circle** (discussed by 14 participants, 66%); and the **accountability circles** (mentioned by 5 participants, 24%).

“**Who’s That Boy?**” is an exercise where “Repairing Harm” participants write a reflection in which they describe themselves at a younger age, from an outsider’s perspective. This “third person perspective” exercise assists participants to reflect on their past from an objective standpoint, empowering them to feel empathy for the “child” they are observing.

“Repairing Harm” participants noted that this was an important exercise for them because it allowed many of them to develop a better understanding of their life circumstances as young people and the formative nature of these circumstances: in the words of one participant, “it showed me more about the situations that maybe have shaped me and formed me.” Another participant

**WHO’S THAT BOY EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS:**

The exercise is simply this: See yourself objectively as a boy. Look from another set of eyes. See the boy you were. Describe him in third person (meaning as “he” not as “I”), not only what he looks like, but what he is doing in the moment. Don’t describe his feelings because you are an observer and you don’t know what he feels. You only see him. You can pick any moment to observe. You can choose many moments. **Who’s this boy?**

explained, “like it goes all the way back to your foundation and they help you understand why, I mean why you were doing the things that you were doing. And at the same time you can see the transformation too.” In other words, participants indicated that this exercise was central for understanding some of the reasons behind their life choices, and, as the quote above suggests, also allowed them, within the context of “Repairing Harm,” to see how they have grown and changed since making those choices.

**Who is this boy?**  
(Example exercise)

*I see this little boy who looks like he is around 4 years old. He seems very lonely as if he was an only child with no siblings. He is not smiling, not playing, which I find real odd being that he is 4 years old and most 4 year old boys are running around, happy, playing, enjoying life. This boy however, looks real hurt at such a young age. I couldn't really figure out why such a little boy looks so hurt and sad. His mother walks into the room and he suddenly gets up quick and runs to her to hug her with a smile on his face saying "mommy." That's when I notice the bruises all over his mother's arms, and although she made an attempt to cover her eyes with some large, dark sunglasses, I can still notice her right eye is swollen and purple.*

*This little boy is hugging his mother with all of his strength to the point where he looks like he doesn't want to let her go. Then a man walks into the room who seems to be his father because he yells to the little boy, "hey big head, go sit down." The little boy lets his mother go and runs fast to sit down. The boy stares at his father with rage in his eyes as he walks over to his mother and with an aggressive tone asks her, "where do you think you're going"? She seems very scared and so did the little boy. It is then that I realize that this little boy was in so much emotional and mental pain because of his father's abuse towards his mother. It is no wonder why when his mother walked into the room he hugged her so tight that he didn't want to let her go almost as if he was trying to protect her, shield her because that was his mother whom he loved.*

*This little boy, however, couldn't help or protect his mother. all he can do was sit by and watch his father beat his mother. And when it was too unbearable to watch his father beat his mother, he would run to his room and cover his ears in an attempt to minimize the loud sounds of items being thrown around the house and to block his mother's loud screams and cries. It was too much for this little boy to have to witness at such a young age. This gave me a better understanding to why he looked so hurt, sad, in pain, wasn't smiling, wasn't playing. This little boy had the weight of the world on his shoulders and he was only 4 years old. I can imagine that he felt hopeless and guilty that he couldn't help his mother in anyway. All he can do was cry and wait until it was all done, at least for that day or even for that moment. This is a boy who should be enjoying life, embracing his innocence and should be able to feel loved and protected by the people surrounding him but instead this little boy fears the world and what has yet to come.*

Incarcerated Man, NECC, Fall 2018

Similar statements were made about the significance of the **accountability circle** exercise, where "Repairing Harm" participants write down and then read out loud the details of their crime, followed by a period of responding to questions from other members of the group. Participants who spoke about the significance of the accountability circle noted that while it required them to

relieve the situation, this exercise was positive in the sense of requiring participants to “hold a mirror” to themselves and actively engage with emotions they had suppressed. More importantly, the accountability circles were described as the space that, more than anything else in the “Repairing Harm” program, required participants to take accountability for their actions and learn from them. For instance, one participant noted that the accountability circle “helped me recognize issues that I didn’t really know were a problem for me.” By going through this admittedly challenging experience, participants were thus able not only to recognize the consequences of their actions but also to reflect on how they could change as a result of having to confront this situation.

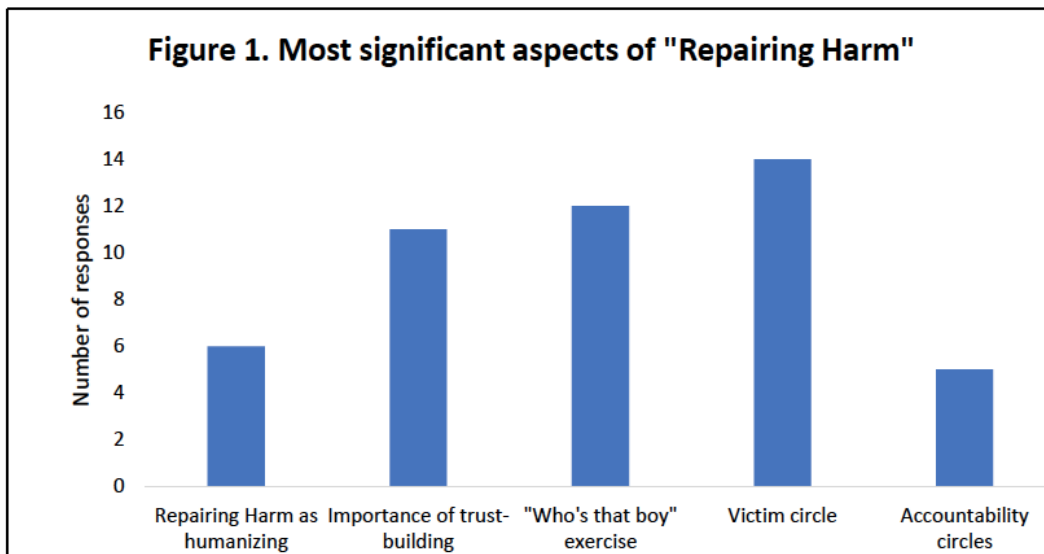
In contrast with the self-reflection described in relation to accountability circles and the “Who’s That Boy” exercise, participants spoke about the **victim dialogues**, where victims of similar crimes as those committed by “Repairing Harm” participants join the group and participate in a dialogue with the men, as powerful in terms of the emotions raised. Participants used terms like “pain,” “hit hard,” “remorse,” and “hurt” to describe their *own* emotions at hearing about the pain experienced by those who joined them. One participant explained,

Me, I've been affected by crime, but it's expected for me living in the streets and doing what needed to be done. You know what I mean. The path I chose, the gangs I ran with and everything. That's obviously got me accustomed to seeing it. You know what I mean? So watching somebody like you, a civilian who just goes to work – does their thing- you know what I mean, tries to stay out of trouble, who's actually been impacted by the streets that I roll in. Somebody innocent. We all try to keep innocence out of it. You know, so when innocence does get brought into it...It could be your brother who had beef with me- we got into a fight and he died. You're an innocent. But we don't see that part. We only see he was part of the street, and I handled what I had to handle. And then have somebody like you come in and speak and say, the streets took my brother or my father, or my cousin, or something like that. To see that. It opens your eyes to something different, like. There's a lot more to what meets the eye. When you actually see somebody, it's not who you put your hands on, but it's somebody who was impacted by somebody who you did put your hands on. It's impactful. And it makes you rethink. So a lot of the guys, you can see it changed in their face, listening to her stories.

The other particularly salient element of the victim panel was the *forgiveness* offered by victims to the “Repairing Harm” participants, which many indicated also was an important humanizing element. One participant stated, “It helps us to be human,” both because of the forgiveness offered and the emotions that hearing victims’ stories created. Participants explained that feeling that sense of forgiveness, and understanding the pain caused by actions like the ones they took, were what made them want to work to be someone better.

Finally, nine participants (9, 43%) noted how important “Repairing Harm” **facilitators** are to the program and its success. Several spoke about the facilitators helping participants feel, in the words of one participant, “like somebody cares, like we’re not just lost causes,” and contributing to a sense of comfort within the group. Likewise, participants spoke about the lack of judgment on the part of facilitators and the sense that, “they were in there with us, they were locked with us, and they made us feel...like we’re here with you.” This sense of togetherness that participants received from the facilitators was also noted as important in helping men feel comfortable and

enabling them to open up. Others spoke about the fact that facilitators gave participants in the program responsibility: “they didn’t like, demand things out of you but they wanted participation out of you, if that makes sense. You know? Where it’s like, OK here is an assignment or here is a class activity, you guys figure out how you guys want to do it, you know what I’m saying?” By doing this, the facilitators provided participants with “power over their own participation,” which was important in creating a greater sense of investment in the program as a whole. The positive views of facilitators not only shaped the program itself but also the motivations of participants: one explicitly spoke about wanting to “pass forward” what he received from the facilitators, stating that based on his interactions with them, “I set goals to be a better person in a sense of helping others.”



#### IV. Program impact: Transformation due to the program

Participants in this program described a number of ways that “Repairing Harm” led to change. These can be divided into three categories of change: individual, relational, and community.

##### a. Individual change

At an **individual** level, “Repairing Harm” participants noted shifts in terms of their self-understanding and in terms of their behaviors. With respect to self-understanding, perhaps most notable were comments made about new understandings about the impact of their previous actions and crimes. One noted, “I harmed a lot of people in my life. Not just physically. Emotionally...I was selfish. And I realize that now.” Another spoke about having to deal with his crime and discuss it during the second phase of the program, and how “going and dealing with that part right there started getting me to understand my actions so far more.” Others spoke about letting go of negative energy and reflecting on ways of *resolving* rather than *exacerbating* conflict. One participant explained this awareness in terms of being able to separate his crime from the punishment he received from the DA and understand how hurt *he* had felt was then transferred to his victims:

I was punished by the DA, I don't care, but the whole time, the victim never came in, played a part, so restorative justice kind of helped me...separate that little bit, I really understand, listen it's not about me, the DA, or the time, it's about the victim's family, the hurt, I have caused. And I think to self, looking at myself a little bit, it kind of help me because...like I came to realize too that same hurt that losing a friend, the same hurt that caused me, I did to the next family, and that played a part in a lot of why I reacted a certain way and I never really thought about, I just reacted, you know what I mean?

Other participants spoke about becoming more thoughtful and helpful through the program. As one said: “I was very selfish” (before participating in “Repairing Harm”), but explained that due to the program’s focus on asking questions of one another, this has changed: “Being able to talk to people, open up to people, that actually makes you wonder their thoughts, you know.”

“Repairing harm” participants also spoke about how the awareness they gained through the program changed the way they interact with others in their current surroundings. Some spoke about this within the framework of changed approaches to communication. One participated noted, “I think I am a pretty good communicator but um, I am a lot more patient. A lot more patient, like I am a lot more... willing to allow a person to, say their piece.” Another explained that he developed better awareness of his own emotions through the program and now is able to speak with others about problems or concerns and address misunderstandings through communication, where previously he would have simply let himself get angry.

Overwhelmingly, however, behavioral changes were described in terms of having changed the ways that they react to situations around them. A common example described was making the choice to “think before you act” and not to act on aggravations in an aggressive way. As one participant stated:



Every day I want, every day I want to hurt somebody, for the dumbest things. I'm waiting on my life decision right now, I'm waiting on my parole decision. I've been waiting for almost a year now for a decision. So as everyday goes forward it's like the smallest things aggravate you. Some things that, know what I would have [unclear] somebody into the cell or did something stupid or had somebody beat this person up, I say, Yo what's the ripple effect?...The first thing is I play scenarios out. Before I never had to do that.

Or, as another “Repairing Harm” participant explained, he realized that if he ever gets into a fight, “I affect a lot of other people” and thus has learned to control his emotions much more. In the words of another participant: “That was like the one thing that pushed me to, like, listen, you got kids, you got a wife out there and so you actually need to start doing things for them instead of, you know, keeping on to mess up for yourself, you know...” Many participants spoke about developing an awareness of the ripple effect of their actions and this helping them make the choice not to act when previously they may have initiated or responded to a physical provocation. Others framed this in terms of being able to now “catch themselves” getting worked up and therefore be able to control their emotions before they led to a confrontation. One participant noted that he had gotten into a fight during the period while he was participating in “Repairing Harm,” but he felt so badly about this that he went to speak to mental health professionals and then apologized to the individual with whom he had fought.

One other key quote came from a participant who said that before the program, he broke the rules at the institution constantly:

I ran around here broke every rule didn't care what the consequences was, you know. And cuz of the program made me change. Like every day on Tuesday at the end of the class I used to say, hopefully I could make it here for next week and be here for next class. And I did that for weeks and weeks, and then I didn't have to say that no more cuz I changed. And the police don't harass me no more or look for me as a troublemaker. They all say, ‘I lost money, I lost money on you’ cuz they thought I'd be gone already, you know what I mean. And cuz the program is the reason that I changed

He continued, noting that he no longer wakes up to break the rules but instead focuses on “what I’m going to do to *not* get in trouble.” As for others, this change was linked to an awareness gained through the program about ripple effects of actions and a desire for changed relationships. As he noted, “This can’t be it...I want to get out there [outside of the prison] and know my grandkids.”

Several participants also spoke about “Repairing Harm” motivating them to want to help others and prevent additional violence in their communities. One noted, “I am going to share my stories with kids, with multitudes...if I can be a conduit for these young guys or even guys my age, alright, they’ll behave.” Another also noted, “I feel like I can reach [younger inmates and younger siblings], through some of the pieces I got from restorative justice.” One inmate explicitly talked about wanting to work with youth after being released, in order to give back to and help change his community.

Finally, administrators also described seeing significant changes in “Repairing Harm” participants. One noted, “I think they carry themselves differently...than other offenders. They

are more knowledgeable on what they did. How it got them to where they are now.” He explained, “I think they’re just more in tune with themselves...They’re more respectful. They’re more, easy to communicate with.” Another administrator emphasized how significant it was to watch “some pretty big muscle heads” get “stripped down into human beings again, like, people with feelings and emotions and sadness.”

### **b. Relational change**

A second area of change that participants noted were changes in **relationships** that they attributed to participation in “Repairing Harm.” Many of these changes were directly linked to exercises in the “Repairing Harm” curriculum. For example, one participant noted that participation in the program “brought my family closer” and explained that he wrote letters to his parents where he brought up issues that “we never talked about” previously. As he stated, “Having the conversation out there, it kind of, like, it made it better, the whole time I was thinking it was going to make things worse but it actually made things better. It brought my family together.” Another participant spoke about how he changed the way he spoke with his siblings.

Many participants also noted that their relationships with others in the institution and especially within the “Repairing Harm” program had changed as well. This was best encapsulated by the participant who noted, “Before [the program]. I would not even speak to most of the people...But me learning from them, and listening to their stories, now when we see each other it's, ‘how you doing?’ you know what I mean. We have more respect for each other than before this program.”

### **c. Community change**

Given the short amount of time “Repairing Harm” was implemented prior to these interviews, **community level** transformation is fledgling at best. However, it is important to note that administrators at both institutions where these evaluations were conducted described subtle, but important, changes. For instance, an administrator at one of the institutions stated,

Like I said, the biggest, the biggest telltale sign for me, because it’s kind of tough to get a real pulse of, if they’ve changed, you know, just by their eagerness, is, how many times a guy might ask me, is restorative justice going to get offered again? So that’s how I gauge the interest, because I look at it as, out of those core group of guys, they’re definitely impacting others, or at least the others are kind of seeing, what it’s doing for those guys who are involved, so when I, you know, and some of the guys do a really good job, like I said before, kind of, promoting the class, just internally. So, when I hear a lot of buzz about a particular class or guys start to approach me, hey, you’re going to offer that class again, or, when is it going to get offered again? That, that’s the cue for me, like, ok, well obviously, word’s getting around that this was a good program, these guys who might not necessarily be program-involved are lucky to get into this program.

At the other institution, the Director of Treatment stated, “I will say that a lot of offenders that

are not involved in the program- they hear about it. They know about it- They want to get involved.” This indicates that at least in terms of *increasing interest in restorative justice programming*, “Repairing Harm” has had effects beyond the group of participants who were part of the first two cohorts.

Finally, in an indication of success outside of the institutions themselves, one “Repairing Harm” participant indicated that a significant aspect of the program was that it had an effect on crime in Boston communities the previous summer. As he told me, “It could have been way worse last summer. Way worse.” He explained that men at the correctional institutions are leaders or “impact players” who can influence youth in their communities, and that men who had participated in “Repairing Harm” were influential in trying to diffuse tensions across neighborhoods.

## V. Potential areas for change<sup>9</sup>

Notably, of the 21 participants in the “Repairing Harm” project, nine (9, 43%) explicitly stated that they do not feel anything about the program needs to change. When asked about change, these men instead described things they saw as positive about the program and emphasized that all aspects of the program, in tandem, make it an entirely positive experience. One participant said, “If you try to take one piece out, everything else is going to fall down.” Another explained, “[The facilitators] brought everything that. Was supposed to be brought and everything was good. I don’t think that anything should be added or taken away.”

Among the other “Repairing Harm” participants, comments about potential areas of change fell into two main categories: *time-related changes* and *changes in who participates in the program*.

**Time** was discussed most often by participants recommending changes to the “Repairing Harm” program. Five (6; 29%) participants suggested that *more time* was needed in the program, either in the form of longer (more than 2 hour) sessions, or possibly in the form of multiple sessions per week. As one participant stated,

Sometimes I used to say that I wish it was a little more. Like because it used to be just once a week. And it was short. Well it wasn't that short. But you're listening to one story, one story, one story, and you want to just keep adding on, you get so deep into it that you just want to stay there and keep going. So sometimes I wish there was another day. I wish we could come here tomorrow and keep talking about it

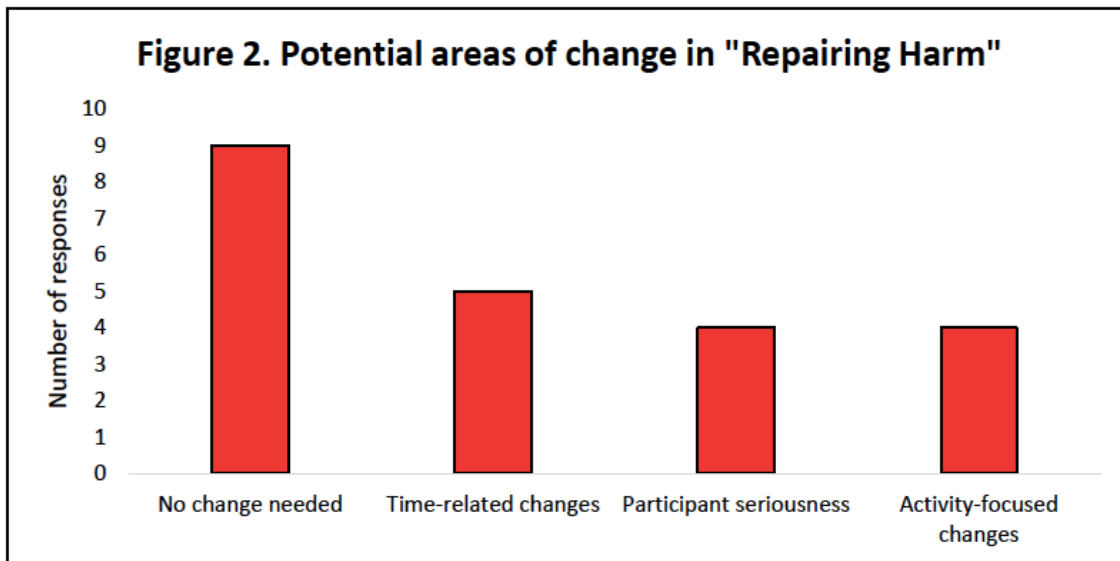
A few participants also talked about ensuring that **participants take the class seriously**. This was brought up in four (4; 19%) interviews. Men who spoke about this noted that there were some participants in their groups who were not serious about wanting to change and that this affected the rest of the group: “Because if you have a majority of the class that’s taking it seriously, and then you have one or two knuckleheads that just wanna be there just to be there, or they’re not giving the same thing everybody else is giving, it might make people a little more standoffish.” Another participant noted that having a group where everyone took the program seriously would engender deeper trust and more openness among group members. One participant suggested that this might be accomplished by *not* offering good time for the program; however, it’s worth noting that currently, good time is not offered across the board: at NECC, it is offered only for phase 2 participants. Moreover, during the first year of program implementation, *no* good time was offered.

Finally, participants had recommendations for change relating to specific activities or aspects of the program. Two participants felt that more explicit expectations should be set for accountability circles and what kinds of questions should be the focus of these activities. One participant suggested that a writing component should be enforced in more of the exercises and/or that volunteer facilitators (especially inside facilitators) should share written examples of

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that the Restorative Justice Working Group at MCI Concord has been working on revisions to the “Repairing Harm” curriculum over the past year and that some of the recommendations made here (by men who participated in the program during its first two years) may already have been implemented.

their own exercise responses. Lastly, one participant shared his belief that participants in the victim panel attend more than one class session.



## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

Discussions with both participants in “Repairing Harm” and administrators at NECC and MCI Concord who oversee its implementation suggest an overwhelmingly positive perception of the “Repairing Harm” program, both in terms of its implementation and its impact on participants. The positive perception of “Repairing Harm” is further illustrated by its expansion to a third institution, MCI Shirley, as of Fall 2018. Moreover, in the 2.5 years since the program began, restorative justice working groups have come together at both MCI Concord and MCI Shirley to take on initiatives beyond participation in the program itself, including facilitation training and revision of the curriculum [MCI Concord] and undertaking a full-day restorative justice workshop open to both inmates and members of the community [MCI Shirley]. Based on the data collected and the extraordinarily positive perceptions shared with interviewers, this study recommends **expanding the scope of “Repairing Harm,”** including broader program implementation to allow for larger numbers of men at these three institutions to participate.

Regardless of its success thus far, however, “Repairing Harm” is a relatively new program and therefore vulnerable, particularly if it continues to expand without sufficient attention to what is necessary to retain program quality. The major recommendation of this report, therefore, is to focus on ensuring continued **support for “Repairing Harm.”** In particular, the report recommends:

- ◆ **Capacity-building** for facilitators (both inside facilitators and those who volunteer come into the institutions where it is implemented), to ensure that those guiding participants through the “Repairing Harm” have the skills necessary for doing so; and
- ◆ **Funding** for the “Repairing Harm” program, which until now has functioned as a 100% voluntary effort on the part of the program director, facilitators, and all others involved. Funding is necessary to support facilitator training, travel costs on the part of volunteer facilitators, administrative costs, and the development of a systematic monitoring & evaluation framework as the program expands.

In addition, this report calls attention to the comments of many participants about the **length** of “Repairing Harm.” However, as noted earlier, the “Repairing Harm” curriculum has been revised and lengthened through the work of a restorative justice working group at MCI Concord and is now a 33-week rather than 24-week program. Thus, the report recommends **continued monitoring** of “Repairing Harm” and its perception among participants, in order to assess whether the longer curriculum is better meeting the needs of participants.

Finally, the discussion among many participants of their desire to work with others and promote restorative practices following release suggests that a **follow-up program**, targeted towards the pre-release phase, could provide additional training and skill-building for “Repairing Harm” participants that will help them prepare for doing restorative work once back in their communities.

## **Appendix I: Interview Protocols**

*Interview protocols were designed with the evaluation working group at NECC working in partnership with the PI.*

### **A. Participant Interview Protocol**

Sample questions to ask restorative justice program participants after phase I/phase II:

1. Before the program started, you talked about your goals for participating. Thinking back on the program over phase I/phase II, what are your thoughts on whether those goals were achieved?
2. I'd like to hear about what you felt was the most significant aspect of the restorative justice program for you. Can you describe a particular moment (or more than one) that you felt really changed the way you think about yourself or your crime?
3. In any program like this one, there are always aspects that work better for some participants than others. If you were to change any aspect of the restorative justice program, what would you do differently? Why?
4. Tell me about a situation where you felt that, as a result of participating in restorative justice, you reacted differently than you would have before the program.
5. How do you think that your community sees you and your crime?
  - a. How do you feel about this perception?
  - b. If you could change that perception, what would you like your community to say about you?
  - c. If a member of your community were to ask you why you did what you did, what would you say?
6. How do you think your decisions have influenced your community?
7. How do you think your community has influenced your decisions?
8. When you think about who you trust to help you achieve your goals, who comes to mind?
9. What does accountability mean to you? What does it mean to be accountable for your crime?
10. Who do you believe are the victims in your case?

### **B. Community Member Interview Protocol (used with DOC administrators)**

Sample questions to ask individuals interacting with participants in the restorative justice program:

1. What kind of interactions have you had with participants in the restorative justice program?
2. Can you tell me about any changes you have seen in these participants since the restorative justice program began?
3. Have you noticed or experienced any shifts among the community in the facility that you would attribute to the restorative justice program? How would you describe these?
4. Based on what you know about the restorative justice program, what benefits do you think it brings to the participants and to the community here? What challenges do you think it might create?

## **Appendix II: Informed Consent Form**

### **Understanding the Impact of Restorative Justice Informed Consent Form for Restorative Justice Participants**

#### **Introduction and Contact Information**

You are being asked to take part in a research project about the experiences of participating in restorative justice programs. This project is being led by Karen Ross, a professor of Conflict Resolution at UMASS Boston. If you have any questions later, Karen Ross will discuss these questions with you.

#### **Description of the Project:**

This study will focus on the experiences of participating in restorative justice circles and how the circles affected you. If you choose to be part of this study, you will be interviewed about your participation in restorative justice circles. If you participate in phase I and phase II of the restorative justice program, you will be interviewed after the end of each phase. Participation in the study will be approximately 20-40 minutes per interview (20-80 minutes total participation, depending on whether you participate in 1 or 2 interviews). Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. However, audio recording is optional. You do not have to agree to be recorded to participate in the study. In addition, written or artistic (drawing) exercises that you complete as part of the program may be used as part of the study.

#### **Risks and Benefits:**

The primary risk associated with this study is the emergence of negative or distressful feelings in taking part in the interview. You may speak with Karen Ross to discuss any negative feelings you have about study participation.

There are no direct benefits to participation in this study. The primary benefit of participation is a chance for you to honestly discuss your experiences as part of the restorative justice circles and any changes you have experienced since then. The information obtained from interviews will also help make the restorative justice circles better for future participants.

#### **Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

Your participation in this research is **confidential**. That means that the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be using password-protected files and only the research team will have access to the data.

Any written exercises submitted as part of participation will be copied as soon as consent is received and redacted to remove identifying information. Original copies submitted will be destroyed at the time that copies are made.

#### **Voluntary Participation:**

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you may tell Karen Ross or facilitators of the restorative justice



