

Implementing Restorative Justice Training: A Pathway to Enhanced Communication and Conflict Resolution

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Introduction

Restorative justice practices offer effective tools for conflict resolution and community building in educational settings. Husson University sought to integrate these practices to foster a more supportive and collaborative environment among faculty and staff. The School of Pharmacy integrated these efforts to cohort the incoming freshmen (PrePharmacy) students and to support the transition to graduate school for first-year PharmD (P1) students.

The training program was organized through the Husson University's Office of the Provost and was inspired by the university's ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB).

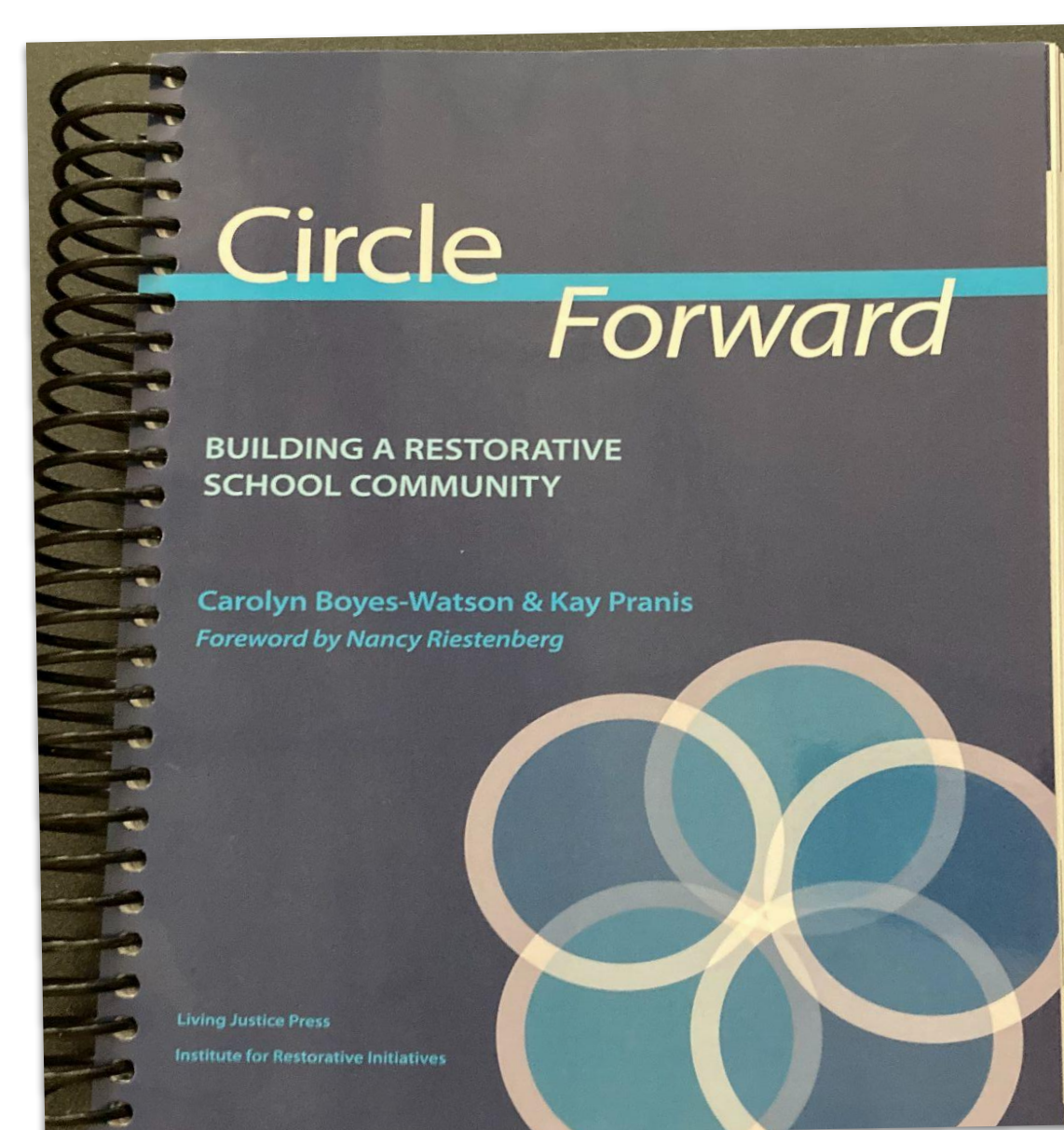
Background

The development of community within pharmacy schools may be intentionally promoted by the school or may occur organically through student, staff, and faculty member interactions.

The aim of intentionally including circle practice from Restorative Justice in the School of Pharmacy was to increase interaction and understanding between students of diverse backgrounds and to enhance community belonging when challenges arise.

Restorative Justice through circle practice, with its indigenous roots, provides a path to develop community and when needed, to restore individuals who have caused harm to others.

The publication, *Circle Forward - Building a Restorative School Community*, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis provides a comprehensive guide for applying circle practice in an educational setting.



The training encompassed principles of restorative justice, communication skills, and practical applications in community building and conflict resolution. Three tiers of training were offered:

Tier 1: Circle Training and Introduction to Restorative Practices

- Cohort A: May 2022
- Cohort B: December 2022

Tier 2: Addressing Conflict and Harm Using Restorative Practices

- Cohort A & B: May 2023

Tier 3: Restorative Conferencing for Discipline

- Cohort A & B: May 2024

Methods

Husson University partnered with the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University to provide training in circle practice for community building and restorative justice. Sessions were led by Director, Susan Maze-Rothstein, Esq. and colleagues and were attended by Husson University faculty, staff, and students.



More than 40 faculty and staff university-wide participated in Tier 1 training over the past several years, including six faculty/administrators from the School of Pharmacy. Three pharmacy faculty/administrators also attended Tier 2 training, and two pharmacy faculty/administrators completed Tier 3 training.

Results

Here are two examples of how this training has been utilized to promote community in our pre-pharmacy and pharmacy students:

1. Faculty integrated the circle practice component of Restorative Justice into a pre-pharmacy section of a freshman orientation course, Husson Experience in Fall 2022. While all sections of the course covered topics such as study skills, time management, and grit, students in the pre-pharmacy section were seated in a circle and were encouraged to build community and healthy communication by checking in and discussing issues and experiences relevant to their success.
2. Faculty incorporated the circle practice component of Restorative Justice in first-year PharmD orientation sessions for P1 student in Fall 2023. Many of these sessions also included time for circle practice in order to cohort these students.
 - 88% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to the statement that “I feel like part of the P1 cohort.”

Discussion

The Coordinator of DEI at Husson University provided Tier 1 training sessions in circle practice to multiple faculty members, administrators and students between Summer 2022 and Summer 2023. Six (6) faculty/administrators from the School of Pharmacy completed at least one tier, and two (2) faculty/ administrators continued to participate in two additional tiers of the training provided by Suffolk University.

Tier 1 training focused on community building, while Tiers 2 and 3 focused on addressing conflict and restorative practices. As the presence/development of community is an important part of the foundation of circle practice, community-building elements from this training were implemented in Husson University's pre-pharmacy and pharmacy programming.

Sessions have been generally well-received and have provided an opportunity for participants to build closer connections among faculty, administrators and (pharmacy and pre-pharmacy) students. The implementation of circle practice from Restorative Justice for the pre-pharmacy students has been especially important as we begin to cohort them during their first semester of college. One challenge has been to achieve student buy-in for participating in the practice. Among the P1 cohort, most students were receptive to the process of using circle practice from Restorative Justice to create cohesion among the cohort as they face the demands of transitioning from pre-pharmacy to graduate level rigor.

Acknowledgements and References

Sarah Dyer, PhD, former Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer for Husson University

Lynne Coy-Ogan, EdD, President and former Provost of Husson University

Susan Maze-Rothstein, Esq., Director for the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University

Circle Forward - Building a Restorative School Community; Boyes-Watson, C. and Pranis K., Living Justice Press, 2015.

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