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THOMAS A. TURCO, III  
 Secretary

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**Date:** April 13, 2021

**Time:** 11:00AM-1:00PM

**Microsoft Teams Virtual Location:** [Click here to join the meeting](#)

**Or call in (audio only) 857-327-9245 Phone Conference ID:** 340 146 417#

**Agenda Items:**

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Andrew Peck at 11:05am.

		Video/Call	Absent
1	Chair-Andrew Peck	X	
2	Scott Taberner	X	
3	Derek Keenan (*)	X	
4	Sen. James Eldridge	X	
5	Becky Michaels	X	
6	Allison S. Cartwright	X	
7	John Millett	X	
8	Ret. Chief Fred Ryan	X	
9	Diane Coffey	X	
10	Mary Quinn	X	
11	Judge Rosemary Minehan	X	
12	Kara Hayes	X	
13	Carolyn Boyes-Watson	X	
14	Erin Freeborn	X	
15	Cheis Garrus		X
16	Susan Jeghelian		X
17	Strong Oak Lefebvre	X	

(\*) Designee for Rep. Sean Garballey

**EOPSS Staff:** Anjeza Xhemollari, Arielle Mullaney and EOPSS interns Katie Queally and Bethany VanAntwerp

**Others in attendance:** Over 80+ members of the public attend the open meeting.

## **2. Welcome**

Chairman Andrew Peck welcomed all committee members and attendance was taken.

## **3. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 9, 2021**

Roll call was taken to approve the meeting minutes. All present members voted in favor to accept the meeting minutes. Motion passed unanimously.

## **4. The Leadership Team/The Restorative Justice Program of MCI Norfolk**

### **Restorative Justice Leadership Team:**

Jason Aquino  
Walter Clare  
Peter Contos  
Thomas Koonce  
Ronald Leftwich

### **Catalyst for restorative programming at MCI Norfolk:**

(Thomas Koonce)

There was an outbreak of violence on Christmas eve in 2010. Current and former leaders in the community approached members of their Boston University program to begin to implement principles of restorative justice within the MCI Norfolk Community.

### **Underlying Values of the Work at MCI Norfolk** (as described by the collective leadership team)

At Norfolk, restorative justice is about telling your story truthfully, taking responsibility, and holding oneself accountable. Within the Norfolk community restorative justice is about a journey shared between survivors and the men responsible for our most violent crimes. Some of us have done the unthinkable, inflicted wounds and harm that cannot be taken back, but we don't give up. Those that want to change and demonstrate their courage to change.

For the group, restorative justice is more than a philosophy, more than a practice - it is a way of life. When a crime is committed, a person has been harmed, people have been harmed. They have found that sitting in these spaces with mothers of homicide victims and community members is empowering and creates a space for growth. The leadership team described in their remarks that once you are aware of your trauma and adverse childhood experiences "there is not going back to what you were before- you don't see yourself the same".

The group promotes accountability and taking responsibility. They see it as a responsibility of leadership to model what accountability looks like to their community, particularly to young members. A final point was made about the Norfolk Community: they recognize the intrinsic human values of all those involved. It was explained that this calls for a little bit of "radical acceptance" about the point that everybody matters, and no person is left behind.

### **Why do they do the Work?**

(as described by the collective leadership team)

The group has many reasons for devoting themselves to restorative practices. They all described the work as personally fulfilling, life-changing and personally important. Sitting in circle with mothers of homicide victims and community members was described as "empowering" and a place of ongoing growth. Understanding personal and collective trauma and the journey of personal responsibility was described as "life changing". They described finding purpose and meaning in the work. Collectively, they understand you cannot undo the past but that they can help people and by doing so it allows them to give back and balance some of the harm they've caused. They recognized that despite their incarceration that facilitating change and taking action are universal responsibilities.

Ronald Leftwich described the groups ethos when he described experiencing his first retreat in 2014:

*“My life has not been the same ever since. I heard survivors talk about the pain they suffered as a result of violent crimes that I committed, and others committed. Once you hear someone else's pain, it is very difficult to turn away from that. That was the beginning. The other thing that happened was I got to listen to men from the inside talk about their offenses in a truthful way. They took responsibility and accountability, and I did not know it was possible for a man to look other people in the eye and say, this is what I did, this is why I did it, and this is how it makes me feel. My life has not been the same”.*

## **Programming**

### *Two Day Retreat (described by Peter Contos)*

Restorative justice process at MCI Norfolk begins with the annual two-day retreat weekend that is open to the entire community. The retreat brings together members of the public, members of the Norfolk community and survivors of violence for a mixture of small circles and larger presentations. The feedback over the last years is the process is inspiring and motivating- with moments of both laughter and tears as the external and internal community learn and grow together. The retreats offer both forgiveness and hope, which others in the DOC do not have it's a process very unique to Norfolk.

### *Reading Program: (described by Thomas Koonce)*

8-week reading group. A good introduction to restorative justice philosophy and harms in your life. How that harm and trauma has impacted the decision, you have made in your life. But also stresses the aspects of accountability and responsibility. These men get to speak in their authentic voice. They get to speak about things they never felt safe about. If you listen to a man's story, I can find a connecting thread to everyone else in one way or another. But we address that and figure out how that has impacted their life. About 155 men that have completed the reading group. This group is co-facilitated by DOC Volunteers trained by the Insight Prison Project.

### *Victim Offender Education Group (described by Jason Aquino)*

The Victim Offender Education Group fosters empathy and responsibility through mutually compassionate conversations between survivors and the men and women in prison, based on the work of the Insight Prison Project. The group allows participant to have insight into their crime and get to have people sit in that process with us while we take responsibility. It is based on the work of the Insight Prison Project in California. These groups are facilitated with the assistance of DOC Volunteers trained in the VOEG Curriculum by the Insight Prison Project.

### *Young Men's Evolution (described by Walter Clare)*

Programming focused on younger members of the community that originates from identifying a gap between young men and older men. Young Men's Evolution allows young men in the community to connect with each other and forge relationships with older incarcerated people It creates mentorship and community.

### *The Walk of Peace (Jason Aquino)*

The group sponsors a community peace walk where they take donations from participants that are sent to a community victim-centered program. The walk and its process also help to build interest and momentum for the annual retreat.

### *Racial Justice Circles (Ronald Leftwich and Thomas Koonce)*

The RJ framework has allowed the group to discuss many difficult topics including in restorative justice, including Racial Justice. For many members of the community racism has caused trauma, rage and pain. us, we have walked around carrying a lot of range, anger, and there are traumatic and strong feelings about race and how we have been treated. This programming is done internally with the assistance of DOC volunteers.

### *Restorative Justice 101*

Restorative justice 101 seeks to get more interested. About making amends and being accountable but also about community. Additionally, we examine how we respond to harm and live our everyday restorative. It also seeks to educate everyone about the restorative justice program at Norfolk and to have some connection with every member of our community. This is a very important component of restorative justice. It has been very gratifying, and we appreciate the opportunity to educate them on the work they do. All the hats are taken off,

everyone is equal, and we all get a chance to talk about how we can heal through the p[rocess. Our goal is to reach out and really talk about those harms. There is a power in the restorative justice process. We look forward to working together

### *Trauma Informed Yoga*

In this trauma-informed group, participants learn about the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit while practicing yoga and engaging in facilitated conversations.

### **Comments from committee members**

Diane Coffey – who works for MOVA and is very proud of all the men who shared today. It has been an honor and privilege to listen to everything they have shared.

Senator Eldridge - He has sat in restorative justice circles and the reconciliation he has seen and heard is one of the most powerful things he has been a part of. He will continue to encourage his colleagues to attend the conference when it can happen again.

Strong Oak - She appreciates that these men came today. As a survivor of violence, she found it incredibly healing to be a part of this conversation. She hopes to hear from them more often.

Becky Michaels - She is also so thankful that they came today. She posed the question: how can this committee support the work that they are doing?

Erin Freeborn - She echoes what Becky said. She wants to put out an invitation for the subcommittee meetings.

Alison Cartwright - She is also very thankful that the men came to this meeting and were a part of it, they have done so much to advance restorative justice.

Undersecretary Peck - Also thanked the men, their work has had a tremendous impact on both him and others

### **5. Update from the Planning Subcommittee**

Erin Freeborn chaired the second meeting. Erin updated the full committee on the ongoing work of the subcommittee. Currently, the planning subcommittee is scheduled for the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month from 12:00pm-2:00pm. Meetings are held in a circle process and members of the public can participate. Erin provided a list of updates.

1. People were asking us to create a comprehensive list of current programs. We are starting to take strides on this with the survey.
2. Ways that we can help connect programs and practitioners. Support the advancement of restorative practices and support them in ways that they feel would be the most helpful. Really listen.
3. People were asking us to think about how to re-education by learning from those that have been impacted by the system.
4. People were asking us to educate the commonwealth about what restorative justice is
5. People were very adamant that they are not looking for regulations or restrictions but looking for support.
6. The group that we were listening to asked us to be in the community and learning from the community. They asked us to help identify a sustainable funding source.
7. Some requests to create a learning community.

### **6. Update from the Questionnaire Subcommittee**

Kara Hayes encouraged members of the committee to forward the survey and reminded members that this is a two-step process. She is also asking that the survey is left open because people deserve to know about it.

Anjeza Xhemollari indicated that the survey launched on March 22, 2021 and as of now there are only fifteen responses. There are more programs out there, so the survey needs to continue being forwarded to more people.

Carolyn Boyes-Watson stated that people usually need to be contacted three times before they respond, so keep sending the survey out.

Anjeza Xhemollari will edit the survey so it no longer has the April 9 deadline but also stresses that people respond as soon as possible

Chairman Peck reminded everyone that they need to leverage their networks to get this survey out to more people and programs.

## **7. Public Comment (10 minutes)**

Ms. Bonds asks if she can reach out to the men from Norfolk to share their experience and community interest with people she works with in Cambridge? And will there be this same format of discussion with the women at Framingham?

Jo-Ann Della-Giustina - As a survivor, she first became involved in restorative justice academically and then eventually realized that she was finding healing for the trauma she has experienced as well. The men who have done restorative justice in prison are valuable in doing reentry work.

Armand Coleman - He runs a nonprofit Transformational Prison Project and has worked in Norfolk for several years. Their goal is to expand the work of restorative justice. The men that spoke today are all serving life sentences, but they are still doing the work they do. He is only where he is today because of restorative justice work.

Eric Anderson - He wants to set up avenues for success when people get out of prison

## **8. Open Session for Topics not Reasonably Anticipated within 48 Hours of the Meeting**

N/A

## **9. Adjourn**

Meeting was adjourned at 1:04pm