



Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI): Celebrating 20 Years of Community Partnerships

Celebrating
20
Years
1998-2018

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Introduction

Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) is a not-for-profit organization that has brought restorative practices to the people of Western New York since 1998. From its origins as a grassroots community group, to its present day partnerships with schools, community organizations, and the criminal justice system, PiRI's ability to adapt to changing circumstances has enabled it to grow and thrive over time, despite challenges.



Former Education Director Jeanne Carlivati (right) with Board and volunteers



Successes and Challenges

Successes:

- School districts/charters that have received services: 27
- Libraries hosting volunteer-led Talking Circles: 7
- Ongoing local and regional community partnerships
- Restorative processes used in criminal justice cases
- Conferences and international visitors
- Active Board committees in the areas of Community, Education, and Criminal Justice

Challenges:

- Changing the culture of organizations and systems
- Leadership turnover
- Ebbs and flows in funding

"You never know when you start something how it will turn out—and how many people you will impact."

— PiRI Founder, Wil Bontrager



Founder Wil Bontrager with Kay Pranis in 2018

Lessons Learned

- **Maintain a focus on our core philosophy and mission.** Community partners recognize PiRI's "personality" with its focus on mindfulness, slowing down, and taking time to build relationships. Letting our partners know who we are sets the foundation for a partnership based on honesty and integrity.
- **Shared vision.** Projects function smoothly when the goals are discussed, documented, and revisited over time. Taking time to listen to the strengths, needs, goals, and values of our partners is worth the investment to maximize long-term success.
- **It's all about people.** Professional partnerships are most successful when they are built on strong, ongoing individual relationships. Members of PiRI and community partners have formed personal bonds over the years that they have relied on for social support during times of personal transition and challenge.
- **The only constant in life is change.** Shifting personnel, funding, priority areas, and political climate makes it necessary to be flexible and adaptable when it comes to sustaining partnerships.
- **Talk it out.** A responsive approach means that everyone involved is included and valued. When shared decision-making is not possible, clear explanations and expectations can ensure that we uphold our values for honesty and transparency. Communication is key.



PiRI with members of the Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition

Looking Forward

To meet the challenges of the future, PiRI will focus on our goals to:

- Increase racial/cultural diversity of our Board and training staff to reflect the populations we serve
- Update training content to meet the changing needs and interests of our constituents
- Publish reports to inform policy and practice
- Expand local, state, and national partnerships to effectively engage in policy conversations around the future of restorative practices

Key Milestones in our History

- 1998: Founder Will Bontrager brought Howard Zehr to speak with members of Rochester nonprofits, government agencies, victim advocacy groups and others to explore bringing restorative justice to the region; the Judicial Process Commission donated office space for committee meetings
- 2000: Incorporated as the Finger Lakes Restorative Justice Center
- 2002: Received status as a 501(c)(3) organization
- 2005: Kay Pranis led 4 day trainings in peacemaking circles; PiRI began offering circle trainings for Rochester and Avon schools
- 2007: Moved to current space in the Rochester Mennonite Fellowship building
- 2007: Received \$30,000 Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant
- 2008: Received funding from the Hope Grant and changed name to Partners in Restorative Initiatives
- 2010: Restorative Rochester, a voluntary association of organizations and individuals, was formed in order to create a restorative community in and around Rochester
- 2013: Received \$75,000 3-year Challenge Grant to create a part-time Executive Director position
- 2015: Developed training contract with Rochester City School District; Transitioned from volunteer to paid facilitators and trainers
- 2018: Hired first full-time Executive Director