

Summer of Peace 2013™

“Youth In Action: Restorative Justice Practices for and by Teens, Communities, and their Schools”

with Laura Snider (Sep 12)

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Molly: Hello and welcome, everyone, to the Summer of Peace where we're celebrating our common humanity. This is your host Molly Rowan Leach of the ongoing track "Restorative Justice on the Rise." We're really honored to be a part of the Summer of Peace this summer and as we build up to the International Day of Peace -- of course, we know that everyday is a day for peace -- we're just delighted to be here for another couple of weeks as we celebrate the Summer of Peace, and then also invite you to get connected with all the global events happening during that International Day of Peace which is September 21st. You can check out the Summer of Peace website at summit.summerofpeace.net.

There's also a UN High Forum for a global Culture of Peace event that's happening that you might want to check out, and that's on webcast as well as of course at the UN and New York City. You can get more information about that by googling "The UN Forum for Culture of Peace/Building a Culture of Peace."

Just a few words about our ongoing weekly series, Restorative Justice on the Rise, which is a production of The Peace Alliance and has been in motion for two years now, featuring over 100 archives with so many incredible voices and people; practitioners, academics, community members, stakeholders, law enforcement officials, corrections officers and beyond, both as guest speakers and as participants in this series. We'll be unveiling our new fall schedule here shortly and continuing on throughout the rest of this year and beyond, so we welcome you to get back engaged with our regular season starting in October. You can find out more and access the archives at thepeacealliance.org, or at restorativejusticeontherise.com which is the about-to-be-completed podcast site for this series. We're really excited about that.

So without further ado, today's focus and conversation is really, first and foremost, an honor of our youth, and all of the incredible

work that these particular youth and their coach and guide, or co-guide, are doing in the community of Longmont, Colorado -- and perhaps even beyond in the State of Colorado -- as ambassadors for restorative justice practices in schools and in school communities.

So today with us are three representatives of the programs that are linked with the Longmont Community Justice Partnership. We've had some great conversations over the years with various representatives from the Longmont community and it's an honor today to be talking with Laura Snider who is the Restorative Practices in Schools program manager. She's also the coach of the Student Restorative Justice Team.

We'll be talking also with Priscilla who is a senior and in her second year a member of the Student RJ Team. She's bilingual and is a trained youth community member, a restorative mediator, a circle facilitator as well as an advanced facilitator. She was also the summer 2013 intern at LCJP and she's a part of the youth training.

Finally, and not lastly or leastly, we're going to be speaking today with Peter who's a sophomore, and he's in his first year as a member of the Student Restorative Justice Team. He has served as youth trainer for both peers and adults and is a member of the youth training team. He's trained as a youth community member, a restorative mediator, and circle facilitator. Whew! That's a lot of tools in your belt there.

So given that we've got three wonderful folks with us today, let's start out as we normally do with just talking a little bit about what brought us to this work. Anything you'd like to share about your experience, your life, whether it's personal or professional? Let's go ahead and start with one of our youth leaders. Priscilla, would you like to start today? And just again, a warm welcome.

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Priscilla: Yeah, of course I'd like to start. So like you were saying, my name is Priscilla. I'm a senior. What pretty much brought me to Restorative Justice is I was involved in a case as a referred student, and after the pre-conference -- I've never met Laura in my life before, and all of a sudden at the end of the pre-conference she was like, "I think you'd be a really great team member on our team," and I was

like, "What team?" She's like, "The Restorative Justice Team. I want you to take consideration to join."

That kind of shocked me and surprised me after doing an offense against someone, that she would just look at me that way, that I'd be good for her, like I would be a good service. So I took it into consideration and I decided to join the team. So my real first initial, I guess you could say, start of RJ was the retreat, and it was a couple of days when school ended. It was for one whole day. We went up to the mountain and I had a lot of fun. I really connected with all the kids, and from then I knew that I really wanted to be a part of this team.

So that's how I was brought into Restorative Justice, and since then I've been given so many opportunities by Laura and by all my student team members, and being able to be trained that summer as well. I just love it. It's something I fell in love with. So that's how I got in to do this.

Molly: It's very interesting too that you've seen both sides then of the process so maybe we can talk a little bit more about that when we get into the middle of our conversation. So again, welcome, Priscilla. Let's go over to you, Peter. Welcome.

Peter: Yeah, hi. Like you said, my name is Peter. I'm a sophomore like you said. I got into RJ because just like Priscilla, I was actually -- I sat in one of the processes as a referred student and harmed party. Now, and just after the whole thing, Laura decided to recruit me and from there on I just kind of excelled in RJ and I thought, "Oh, wow! This is actually a really good..." What would you call it? Program? But...

Laura: And so Peter, since joining the program, how has it affected who you are and what you want to do with your life?

Peter: Well, it's affecting me in a way that I kind of see kids in school that I know who went through the process or are part of my team, I see them as different individuals as I would without RJ. It changed my goals for my job and after high school and I want to be like a -- I want to major in Psych or something like that; but before, I wanted to do something different, something that's sports, but now it's kind of changed in that way.

Molly: Interesting. Well, welcome, Peter. It's great to have you here with us and we'll get back to you here in the conversation in a moment. Just wanting to welcome you again, Laura. Laura Snider, of course.

Laura: Thank you, Molly.

Molly: Yeah, it's great to have you here.

Laura: It's great to be here. I'm really excited.

Molly: So tell us a little bit about you and anything you like. What brought you into this line of work?

Laura: Yeah, that's a really great question. I think that a lot of it stems from my mom. My mom got her Master's degree in International Peace Studies when I was ten years old, and so at that point I said, "I don't want to go to middle school. I want to go to graduate school." So I decided right then and there that I was going to get my Master's degree in International Peace Studies as well, and several years later, that's exactly what I did.

So I came to LCJP through the Master's Program of International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and in that I got a lot of conflict resolution skills and the ability to really look at interpersonal conflicts and look at structural violence, and to think about how our system is set up to basically punish people and to put them away rather than rehabilitating, rather than restoring, rather than bringing people together and rebuilding relationships.

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Then I had the opportunity to interview for a position at LCJP working with these students, and so I jumped at that opportunity because my passion in life is youth empowerment. I spent some time working in the mental health field, and this gives me the best of both worlds that gives me students who are struggling to make good choices, and it also really gives me access to students who are wanting to learn, wanting to grow, wanting to be leaders in their youth community and beyond.

Molly: Wow. You're so eloquent. I love how you really lined it up in such a short amount of sharing there. You covered a lot of ground there, and one of the things that I know I was excited to talk to you about

-- and with all of you about -- today were some of the aspects of how restorative practices provide something, whereas old systemic models, punitive models, are really missing something. They say that they are built to rehabilitate and correct, and yet we all know -- I don't think anybody is really fooled anymore. Even people on both sides of the political spectrum these days really are getting very clear that the system is not working. It's broken and it's expensive, and it's profit-motivated in many ways.

So I want to talk for a minute about this piece and then go into some ground-level stuff about your programs, because I think that it's really interesting to think about restorative practices as a daily practice, as a life practice, and how, like you said, it empowers us in a way that might be even surprising to some people, and that they're resisting it first but then they become really surprised at the efficacy.

Laura: Yeah, it's true.

Molly: So let's go around the circle with the general question of how does restorative justice and practices, RJP -- whether it's in schools or communities or wherever -- what does it do that is so special and unique that punishment-oriented systems can't? I'll let it be organic in this one. Whoever is ready to answer, please step forward.

Peter: All right. Well --

Molly: Go ahead, Peter.

Peter: So with RJ and RJ practices, it's a really good alternative from the court justice system, and it's just really great for the community and for kids in school and anybody that really just -- that doesn't think through their actions before they do it. So instead of us punishing them, we think about them...

Laura: As whole people, as complete individuals who make mistakes and we separate their behavior, their choice from who they are.

Peter: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, and so instead of us giving them what we call "disciplines," we want them to own up to their mistakes and want them to realize that what they did was wrong, and then we want them to feel like they're not branded as a thief if they stole, or anything along those lines. It just helps create a better community.

It helps kids and minors, and adults even, just feel more aware of what they do and wanted help -- or I would say help themselves with that opportunity.

Molly: I like what you say, or rather I appreciate what you say about the awareness piece. Tell me a little bit more about cause and effect and restorative justice. What's involved there? What have you witnessed?

Laura: So what I've really witnessed -- and this is Laura -- what I've really witnessed as far as cause and effect is that oftentimes that cause-and-effect thinking isn't there, and so a lot of times we have this idea that we can assign [0:15:00] [Audio Glitch] to someone, that we understand what their intention was before we've heard the whole story.

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So one of the things that restorative justice does and restorative practices do is to really focus on making sure that everybody has equal voice, that the story is told, and that we're hitting all of the kind of legs of our triangle. We've got the person who's most impacted, the victim or the harmed party, and we really want to uphold and honor their experiences of being harmed and figure out the best way to make things right there.

Then we've got the referred students and we want to make sure that that student isn't, like Peter said, brain-dead or labeled permanently, that there is reintegration that happens and that we're bringing them back in and helping them make better future decisions, and also empowering them to make the decision to take responsibility and to make things right once they recognize that they have repairs to make.

Then there's that crucial third leg that is often missing which is that of the community, and so making sure that the ripple effect is known about restorative justice and restorative practices, that every incident, crime or conflict, or incident between two people isn't just limited to those two people. It affects family and friends and the youth community and the adult community and our city and our state. It's the butterfly effect on the human scale. So that cause and effect is so important to think about as far as understanding the real true impact of these crimes and conflicts.

Molly: Priscilla, turning to you, did you want to comment or respond to any part of this piece right now or shall we move on?

Priscilla: I guess the only thing I really want to add on is that it really changes everyone's perspective in the circle. It doesn't just focus on one person's perspective but on everyone's, and including the people that aren't in the circle like your stereotypes, your genders, what Laura was saying, all that stuff. It just gives you a broader, more open perspective. People open up more during these processes and I've seen it in almost every single process I've sat in. So I just really want to highlight on that point.

Laura: I think that your initial question was how are restorative justice practices so effective, and I think that part of it is the success of the program. I think that you talked with Chief Butler previously who talked about the 96% completion rate and the 95+ percent satisfaction rate, and the reduction in court referrals and in the school's program expulsions and suspensions, which are really phenomenal statistics.

Molly: And the 10% recidivism.

Laura: Yeah, 10% recidivism, exactly. I think that all of that is a stand-alone topic and as a compliment to that, it's also something that develops student leadership that really aids social and emotional learning, that increases school bonding and the experience of being connected there, and that it helps to provide equal voice and that youth empowerment that we were talking about. I think that that is also a stand-alone as far as success is and what makes it effective.

Molly: Tell me a little bit about some of your greatest challenges, whether it's during the process, or what do you see out there in the field right now or in your own immediate day-to-day work and service? What are some of the biggest challenges that you're seeing?

Laura: Well, I think that for me, some of the biggest challenges of course are funding. There's always a funding challenge. I think on top of that, there is some of that resistance that you were talking about that's melting away on both sides of the aisle, but there is this sense that we're very set in that punitive mindset. People are so overwhelmed by the idea of revamping a system or acknowledging

that our system is broken, that it feels really overwhelming to take that on.

I think restorative practices and restorative justice offer a complement to address the system that really bolsters our ability for a community to solve its own problems and resolve its issues. I don't think that it's necessarily a replacement for that system, but I do think that they work hand-in-hand really well. I think that that's evidenced by these incredible partnerships that we have with police departments, with school districts, with the City of Longmont, with our St. Vrain Valley School District, and the Longmont Police Department. They're incredible allies and partners in this and they're really champions of restorative justice.

Molly: Peter, do you have any response to some of the challenges that you're seeing in particular? Anything to add there?

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Peter: The only thing I would add is that when we're sitting in a pre-conference, sometimes the parent is sitting in there with us for the kid, and sometimes that doesn't go well for the kid because in RJ, what we try and do is get them to take responsibility for what they did and own up to their part of the problem that they caused. Sometimes they can just get to the point where the parent is so ready just to defend their child because they think that they're just going to get some discipline or a court referral, and really, it's not. We're not trying to, like I said, "discipline" the kid, and sometimes the kids just don't want to take responsibility because their parents are there. So that's one of the only things that I'd add.

Molly: Interesting. That's a new one to me to hear, and I can see how that would probably add an element of perhaps making it more difficult for some youth to feel like they're able to share everything, and safe enough to do that. Not to say that parent-student relationships aren't one of the best grounds for truth-telling, but in some situations, just having the student there may be an easier route for them to be able to really divulge and be accountable. I'm not the expert on this, though. You guys are.

So Priscilla, a response from you, my dear. Do you have any further things to add to the element of challenge? Anything that you're seeing?

Priscilla: Of course there's always going to be a challenge. It could be minor. It could be a major challenge. For me, what I've experienced as a challenge is not getting the responsibility part through the referred student. It's always difficult to gear them in and have them take responsibility, and sometimes it doesn't work. We don't see that as a failure but we see that as we have to approach a different way with them for them to see. Maybe the youth community member will help them realize that taking responsibility is the next step to repairing that harm.

So there's always that challenge, and what Peter was saying, the parents, you're going to get some -- you'll run into some parents who are, "No, my kid's fine. They'll do great things. They didn't do anything wrong," and all that good stuff. So that's always a challenge. Yeah, that's what I've run into so far.

Laura: I would also add that because the students are facilitating 80+ percent of the processes in our RPS Program, Restorative Practices in Schools, we have a lot of old people who don't really trust that teenagers can be the ones to hold space for this process, that they have the skill level to manage that. I think that the majority of all of that concern gets cleared up when they see them in action, but I think that there are a lot of stereotypes about what teenagers are actually capable of and the capacity of young people to do that. So I think that that is one of the challenges that these students face on a daily basis with people questioning their abilities.

Molly: Is that something that -- like before you even go into a process where perhaps older participants, adults might be there that might have those preconceptions, is there anything that you do in a pre-process kind of informative way to convey the abilities and just the competency really of these amazing youth who really do know what they're doing, and in fact may be even better than some of us adults do?

Laura: Absolutely. Yes, I spend a lot of time in my intake calls explaining that the students are the ones who are going to be leading the process, why it's important for students to be leading the process, how that increases the sense of responsibility, how that increases our completion rate as well. I mean, it's one thing for adults to tell a teenager, "Don't do that," or "That's not cool," or whatever it is, but the traction isn't there from adults to youth. The traction really

is that youth-to-youth, that peer-to-peer connection, and that's the value added of these students being in this process.

So we do prep work, and I would say the majority of the time, the people who are coming into process because they've been prepped come in with this sense of, "Hmm, we'll see," kind of put-your-money-where-your-mouth-is type of thing, or they get really excited about it. Those are the two responses that I've really had.

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It's the people who haven't been through process, who haven't been through that prep who are just judging from the outside and don't know that I put these students through a 40-hour training every summer, that they have ongoing two-hour trainings once a month, plus we debrief after every single process. They have a peer-to-peer debrief after every single pre-conference, every single circle, every single restorative mediation everytime. So it's the people who don't have that experience who don't trust in their capacities as much.

Molly: And there's been a lot of movement, too. You kind of touched on it for a moment there around -- well, first of all, the aspect of relationship and relationships being such an important aspect of restorative practices and the recognition that it really is a foundation. If we don't have relationships we really don't have much, and even if we don't have relationships, we can rebuild them.

So it seems like having youth facilitators and mediators and circle process, it lends to that sense of being on kind of an equal playing ground with fellow youths as well as the added aspect of leveraging positive peer pressure, which that's an aspect of conversations that we've had here in this series with the folks around the world actually in regards to leveraging that, that we all know that during these precious years that you, Priscilla and Peter, are in, that there is a lot brewing for you all at that age and that peer pressure is a part of that. So how do we leverage that powerful energy in a direction that really helps people to be heard and seen and also to hold themselves responsible for decisions?

So I just want to pause here. If you're just joining us, it's great to have you with us. This is Molly Rowan Leach. I'm your host for

"Restorative Justice on the Rise" during the Summer of Peace. We're about to wind down celebrating the International Day of Peace, September 21st, and today we're just enjoying a great conversation here with the Longmont Community Justice Partnership's youth programs, Restorative Practices in Schools. We're talking with Laura Snider and two youths, Priscilla and Peter, from those programs. You can find out more about LCJP at LCJP.org. They're also on Facebook and on Twitter. They're based in Longmont, Colorado.

So I'd like to turn our conversation in the direction of talking more deeply about specifics of the program, and to do that, I'd like us to do sort of a step-by-step through of a particular case. If you could choose one, Laura, that comes to your mind, and then we can have each of us speak, meaning you, Priscilla and Peter. Hopefully a case that will involve some aspect of both of you and your work. Let's just step it through as to how it went, what were the particulars, what were the successes of it or the challenges -- which could also be successes in the end -- so we get a better feel about who's involved and how it works.

Laura: Sure. I'll start that off. One of the things that we do is we have schools from around the district call us for restorative practices, and one of the cases that came up last year -- unfortunately, Peter was not involved, but Priscilla facilitated this case -- was that we had a student who had been caught for the third time with the possession of marijuana at school. She was looking at expulsion. She had already been to court. She'd already been suspended. She'd already switched schools, and they tried changing friend groups and they tried all of those things, all those interventions, and it didn't work. It wasn't working.

So what happened was we actually -- we got the case and it was an expulsion-level case. They were going to kick her out for an entire school year unless she can produce her agreement. So when I got the phone call, Priscilla was my first choice as far as student facilitator. It was a bilingual case.

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So we went through kind of the intake process. We spoke with her parents, we spoke with the girl, we spoke with the officer, with the school administrator and all of that, like what happened before Priscilla really got on board. As soon as Priscilla got on board we

set a pre-conference, and I'm going to let Priscilla take it from there.

Molly: Go ahead, Priscilla.

Priscilla: All right. So I was actually just a community member in that case.

Laura: My brain is foggy.

Priscilla: It's okay. So when I started sitting in that case, I saw this girl and she was sitting across from me. When she started to speak, she really had that emotion in her that she was just tired of all these expulsions, all these criminal actions towards her, and the court system, and getting expelled, and then another expulsion brought upon her, and so I think she really realized that it was a time for change that -- and she was really concerned about her little brother, because she pretty much explained that it really hurt her brother of finding out that, well, her sister brought marijuana to school.

So I think after that, she really wanted to step up and take responsibility not only for the past situations but this incident particularly. I think she wanted to show her brother that she didn't want him to see her as a bad kid and that she wants him to make right choices, and she really wanted to be that role model for him. Yeah, you could see that when she was talking, and her emotions, and she was just tired of it all, so I really thought that she made a change in that process. She was really like, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to follow through and I'm going to..." Just that good-feel attitude that will bring her up back instead of bringing her down to another expulsion or another whatever -- another case or something.

So I really liked that case and I really liked her, and I liked that she completed her contract as well, too. So it was overall a good process, I think, and she's just a good kid, and you could see that through the process and there was a really great change. It just shows how the process can really -- that perspective piece, that changing the whole idea of what they want to do and the future in their life.

Molly: Thank you, Priscilla. Laura, do you have something to add to that? because I wanted to also ask about -- and let Peter have a chance

to talk -- about contracts and community members. Who are the people that are in the room, that sort of thing? But go ahead, please.

Laura: Sure, yeah. I was just going to say one of the things that I also really liked about that case was that her agreement or the contract that she fulfilled was incredibly multi-faceted. So there was an educational component to it about credit recovery and getting her back on track at school. There was a behavior modification component that involved her going to some group classes and individual therapy so that she could get exactly what she need. There was another kind of like outreach educational component about what effects does marijuana have on the teenage brain and teenage body.

There was a relationship-building component of that about making a four-year plan about how she was going to be successful in school, and what classes she needed to take, and who she needed to connect with to make sure that that happened and she stayed on track. There was repair with her mom made at that point because there was a lot of parental and familial damage, and she wrote a letter to her brother. She did all of these things. It had all of these dimensions of repair and it really addressed that ripple effect of harm as opposed to just paying a fine or community service or something that she might have been assigned. She chose all of those things, and then --

Molly: Did she choose those on her own or was there a group process that is involved in creating a contract?

Laura: Yeah, there's a group process that's involved in creating a contract and I'm going to let Peter actually talk about that.

Molly: Yeah, Peter, please. Go ahead. Tell us about contracts and how those work. I also want to have you share, if you would please, specific to how they are tracked. First of all, who is involved in creating the contract? Do those contracts often have direct relationship to the harm? And then how are they tracked and how are they sustained and kept accountable for the person working towards that repair.

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Laura: Those three questions all at once, right?

Molly: Yup, that's a long list, and we can all come back to those if you want, but Peter, please --

Laura: Yeah, why don't we let Peter talk about how those agreements are created?

Peter: All right. So the agreement phase, that's when we congregate in the circle. What we do is -- so sitting in a circle, we'll have two youth community members -- or just community members, depending on the case -- but those community members will think of creative ideas for the referred student, and what will happen is just we'll create a long list and the co-facilitator will read off what we got, and the [0:36:17] [Indiscernible] party -- either one can go first; it doesn't matter -- but they each pick three to five things from that list that they want to do, and it's all up to them. We do stuff from community service to -- like they're into sports, they write something on their -- like a football or a baseball or a basketball to remind them how to keep calm or what not to do in a situation. The agreement items really vary for each case. I think that's all.

Laura: So I do want to reframe one thing that Peter said. We have a number of people who are in the room. We've got representatives from the school. We've got hopefully the school resource officer; and our school resource officers participate in 85+ percent of the cases that they refer. We've got our youth community members, we've got the harmed party, the person most affected by what happened, the referred student themselves, and then our youth community members.

So during that time, all of those people, with the exception of the facilitators in the room, they're generating ideas that are based on people's strengths. So the referred student spends time talking with the facilitation team about things that they're good at, things that they have that could contribute towards building community or rebuilding relationships or repairing harm. Then from that list, the co-facilitator actually reads the summary of what they're good at and who that person is in the circle process. So once again, instead of just focusing on this student or this kiddo as a person who has done harm, we recognize them as an entire person, and the idea is that their strengths and capacities are used to make things right.

So to sum that, everybody generates a list of ideas about what could be done, and we try and take into consideration obviously the person who's been most affected, their families and friends, the school community, and then also the referred student themselves because when an act of harm happens, referred students are also affected; and so making sure their reputation is restored, that there's support there for them to make better future decisions.

So it becomes this organic process of consensus building where we're working to make things right. It's not about getting those three to five items necessarily. It's not about checking things off a list. It really is about figuring out what actions can be taken to make things right for everybody in that process. They're all stakeholders to the agreement so every single person in there has an opportunity to say, "This is what I need, and this is what could happen," and so by removing barriers and allowing that creative process to happen, we're really able to tap into the deep needs of the people and meet them in a way that most other processes don't offer. So a lot of that becomes direct repair, and we don't like to put things on an agreement that doesn't directly repair harm. So if we can't tie the action on the agreement into one of the harms that has been done, it doesn't go in the agreement.

Molly: Wow, that's really neat. Thanks for making that link.

Laura: Yeah, absolutely.

Molly: That's a direct link that I actually hadn't heard from anyone as of yet. That really makes sense.

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Laura: Well, and that, I think, is the big difference between the punitive mindset of, "Something needs to be done. These people must be punished," versus what is needed to make things right, and if it's not moving towards making things right or repairing harm, it doesn't belong in restorative justice.

Molly: Wonderful. If you are complete on that piece, I just want to hop back for just a quick moment to ask about the young woman and the case example that we just shared about a moment ago, if any of you might like to say about where she's at now. I don't think I

heard that yet, and it would be interesting to just hear how she is now and what's up for her.

Laura: Actually, one of the most exciting things -- well, she just completed yesterday. So she has completed everything that she agreed to and has actually gone above and beyond in addition to the things that were on her agreement. She actually wrote a letter -- it wasn't of apology, but it's kind of like a letter of learning that she included with all of her agreement items that wasn't required by her agreement.

She has transitioned back into a different school, and she had been going to an alternative school and she's transitioned back into her home school. The expulsion has been expunged from her record. She has actually joined the sports team, which she's really excited about, and is on track to graduate. When she came to our program she was three credits behind, and because of the credit recovery that we did as part of her agreement, she's actually on track to graduate on time.

Molly: Wow, that's wonderful.

Laura: It is. It's very exciting.

Molly: That's really wonderful to hear. I'm sure you have other examples that are similar to that, but there's another topic that I want to cover before we get closer to closing today and it has to do with bullying. It came to me that I really wanted to discuss this with you because it just seems like such a nationwide issue, and perhaps we could just discuss how restorative justice supports the removal of this being such an issue in schools, even upstream of conflict, perhaps. Laura, do you want to respond to that and share?

Laura: Yeah. I mean, I think --

Molly: Just in general, whatever you'd like to say about how restorative justice can help us with this bullying problem. Honestly, if you could share some of your wisdom about what you think bullying really is all about and how it can be addressed.

Laura: Oh, that is a two-hour topic in another session.

Molly: Yeah, I know.

Laura: I would say the first thing that comes to mind --

Molly: That's a whole other long session, course of conversation.

Laura: Yes, it is. Maybe it's a four-hour session. Who knows? The first thing that comes to mind about bullying is that there's an imbalance of power there, and so recognizing that we do not want to take cases of bullying where it would be harmful to the victim or to the harmed party to put them in the same process with a student who is doing bullying behaviors or acting in that manner.

However, I would say that right now because it's such a big buzz word, it becomes this umbrella term that everything falls under, and so mean behavior falls under the umbrella of bullying and harassment falls under the umbrella of bullying. I think that I work really hard in this program to distinguish what is actually a bullying behavior where there is an imbalance of power and intention to do harm, the roles never shift and change, that there's always one person who is on top versus the harassment behaviors. Neither one are acceptable behaviors and we work hard to distinguish those in our program.

Where I think that restorative practices can be most useful in that is on the prevention side of that spectrum, between prevention and intervention. I think that equipping students with the ability to resolve their own conflicts and giving them confidence and giving them a network to tap into where their peers are helping to resolve conflict, where there is the capacity for students to be the ones who have the power, who are empowered to not just fall into that either bully, victim, or bystander but to actually be empowered to do something about that and to have the skills to do it, I think that that is definitely a vision of the Restorative Practices program.

[0:45:05]

I also think that because the group of students that I have is made up of every part of the spectrum of the school -- if you were to take a cross-section of the high school that we work at, you would find that there is every single person represented there pretty much. We have people on the football team, and cheerleaders, and student council kids. We have students who have special needs. We have students who are foreign exchange students. We have all of

the different levels of society. We have the drama club kids, and the art club kids, and the flag -- what are those called, Priscilla?

Priscilla: The flag twirlers.

Laura: Yeah, the flag twirlers. There's the word for that. We have those representations from --

Molly: The drill team?

Laura: The what?

Molly: I think they call it "drill team" maybe? Yeah, well, that's good, though.

Laura: Possibly. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and so having that cross-section and having that ability to connect in a very deep way with students from every single background I think is one of the ways that the Restorative Practices in Schools program actually prevents bullying from happening, because if you have people that you are building strong relationships with; and if relationship is the center of everything that you do, and every crime or conflict you get as an offense against relationships, then that's not something that is going to be top on your list to do because you're going to recognize not just, "Oh, I have affected someone," but "I have affected Peter. I have affected Priscilla. I have affected Laura," and they become human. So I don't know, Priscilla, if you want to speak about the team and what that's done.

Priscilla: What do you mean it's been done? Like...

Laura: Like how has the team impacted the group of students that you interact with?

Priscilla: Okay. So this is Priscilla. The way the team has impacted me in being able to go out to high school and all these different social groups is really seeing the different perspectives. I mean, it's all about perspectives with me, like being open-minded. It helps me to treat others better, because I know I would judge the person in class who always goofs around or the person who is too shy to say anything or the person that's always mean, and ever since I joined the team it's always been like, "Oh, well, you know, maybe if I'd just

be friendly and talk to them it won't be so bad, and they're not bad people."

I just see them as humans just like I am, and I know I'm probably looked at as the girl who is annoying or something. I don't know what people would think of me, but it's definitely changed my perspective on my classmates and my peers and how I treat them. I feel like I've improved on treating them better, and I feel like I respect them more than I ever have now in my whole high school career.

Molly: Anything you'd like to add to that, Peter? It's okay, if not.

Laura: What have you noticed about how people have interacted on the team and how that's different from normal high school interactions?

Peter: Okay. That sounds easy. All right. So with the team interacting, we really focus on building connection -- or relationships, sorry -- relationships, and when we interact, we're just really nice, friendly. We can talk about what we want and we're not going to gossip about each other or just be plain mean, but in high school all it is is gossip, drama, and stuff you don't need to know about. In high school it's just all about judging people and just not really thinking that they're human, and really just labeling them of what you've heard about them, or anything on that line.

[0:49:50]

Molly: I really appreciate what you said just now, Peter. One of the things that I appreciate so much as an observer of this process that you're describing is really specific to youth, the great capacity that restorative practices have to answer to and leverage the aspects of peer pressure, but also again to answer to that great need that we have not only at this age but throughout our lives in needing to be seen and heard, and understanding that we do have value and worth and very valid contributions to make no matter whether we're on the drill team or a cheerleader or on the football team or in key club or science club or whoever we are. So that's what's so exciting to me about what I'm hearing from all of you today is that restorative justice and practices in schools really are answering to one of the most primal needs that we share, and especially at that age.

I'm wondering in kind of moving towards closing today -- it's gone by so fast -- if we could talk a bit about the aspect of if it's not already implemented, would you think that it would be helpful to implement a process of having talking circles or circles processes that are simply about sharing in the way that you're describing, Peter, where nobody has their defenses up, people are authentic with each other even when there's not conflict happening? I guess some people call that "upstream of the conflict." Are your programs doing anything like that? If not, do you think that that might be something for the future?

Laura: I think that our program is definitely built around making sure that relationships are the central part of all of that. So one of the things that we do is we have a process called "connection circles" and we open every single one of our team meetings with connection circles. Personnel is actually involved in going to another school, and the adults, the staff at the school opens their team meeting with connection circles. So we have the youth from the high school go to the middle school and lead connection circles there.

Peter was involved in training for an entire school staff where they were just wanting some of those lower-level interventions. They're not even interventions. They're relationship-building techniques. They're ways of helping people connect with each other. Peter actually helped to lead the connection circle and the opening of the training for half of the staff there. So we're using it with students, we're using it with adults.

I think, Molly, you really spoke about the primal need for connection and the wanting so badly to leverage our relationships and be heard and be seen for who we are, and I think people are hungry for that. I think that once given the opportunity to participate in that, at first people may or may not trust that but once really given the authentic opportunity to connect and to build relationship, there is a sense that they can start to trust that process, and then once that space is held, people will expand to fill that space and will step forward to support each other in that.

You were mentioning responding positively to peer pressure and I see that in these students all the time. It's no longer just about what happens in process. It's a way that they live their lives. We talk a lot about living by your principles, and so they have told me

stories where one of their student team members or somebody is in class and they're being disrespectful or they're kind of losing their head, and another team member turns to them and says, "Hey, it doesn't feel like you're living by your principles right now." That's enough of a reframe to help them get back in their bodies and say, "Well, that's not how I want to be in the world," and then to shift behavior, to shift language and to go back into that, "Okay, this is a practice and it's okay to mess up, but I take responsibility, I recognize that I've disrespected someone, I repair that relationship, and I come back into right relationships," and that's that reintegration piece.

Priscilla: In touching more base on connection circles, when Laura was talking about me going to the middle school, I really saw the adults bring out their inner childhood, like they brought out -- it was like they were building a lot of connections, a lot of relationships that it didn't seem at the beginning of the day, and so I got to see that more and more. I was like, "Wow! Adults really are loose and fun and not as big, mean and scary as they seem."

[0:55:04]

So I love connection circles. It's my favorite part of our meetings and just getting to know each other more and more. It's got to be a silly question like, "What's your favorite cartoon show?" or it could be something that's more relationships like -- I don't know, like, "How was your summer? Did you do anything interesting or fun?" It really depends on the question and I just love it. It's so fun.

Molly: It reminds me too of -- a lot of the elements of our conversation today actually made me think of some of our global indigenous practices, and it's worth mentioning -- and you guys probably already know about this -- the new PBS special hour show about "Fixing Juvie Justice" and it highlights programs in Baltimore, Maryland with the Community Conferencing Center headed up by the wonderful Lauren Abramson. That's actually something that people can tap into at the PBS website. It's again called "Fixing Juvie Justice" and in that hour program, they point to the practices of the Maori and of the "wharenui" -- which I'm probably not pronouncing correctly -- but that's the meeting hall where everybody comes together to do a lot of what we've been talking about today in many ways; community process and circle process.

Laura, earlier you were talking about really emphasizing, after addressing and claiming accountability for the harm done and for the conflict that was created, that there's also the aspect of really acknowledging the positive strengths that can be given back. In the Maori process, at the closing the elders sing a song to celebrate the lives of the youth that has just been through the process, and to celebrate their spirit and to bring it to a level of equanimity and shared lightness even, humor. That's just, I think, a delightful way to acknowledge the full essence and the uniqueness that each of us have, and that again our youth are really calling for that and hungry for that. It's a shared human trait, too. I think we're all hungry for that. So I just wanted to point that out, that that's a part of that process. So maybe the three of you have seen that documentary, but --

Laura: I haven't seen the documentary, but I think what you're talking about really touches on the idea of whether we're harkening back to indigenous practices, which is what restorative practices are based upon, or whether we're talking about its kind of modern-day adoration. What we're acknowledging is that nobody is a throw-away person. Nobody is expendable and so we don't throw people out of our community. So instead of that, we bring them in and when they're in trouble, we come in together. We come into circle and we deal with that, and we don't sweep it under the rug and move on. We really have to engage with people and bring them closer so that those relationship networks are restored.

Molly: Laura, I'd like to just go into closing comments today for all of our wonderful participants, listeners. Whether you're in the United States or beyond in our world, just thank you for being a part of this series and this discussion, and to just welcome the three of you to make any closing comments you'd like to starting with you, Laura. Then we'll go into announcements in closing for this hour.

Laura: I think what comes up for me is incredible opportunity that I've had to work with students like Peter and Priscilla. It really, really is -- I mean, they're the backbone of LCJP. They're the backbone of the Restorative Practices in Schools program. They're the next coordinators. They're the next people who will be passing laws about restorative practices, and they're the ones who will grow up to be our schoolteachers and our school administrators and our school resource officers who have the ability to equip them with these tools to be deployed when they need it.

[1:00:02]

So seeing the incredible capacity that these students have not just to affect people in process but they are taking it home, they are taking it to their team, they are taking it to their siblings, and they become the banner carriers for this. So that's incredibly inspiring for me to see that when we set the bar high for our youth, they rise and they meet and they exceed our expectations on a regular basis.

Molly: And it's so exciting to think of -- I get the image of the inter-generational passage moving forward. We're paying it forward with this work that we're doing and it'll be passed along. It's such an honor to have you with us, Laura, today and to have had you in the circle today.

Peter and Priscilla, any closing comments?

Priscilla: I just want to say that restorative justice really has changed my life in a more positive way. I just love the program and I love the work and I love my team, I love Laura, I love everyone who's a part of me in this whole process, family, friends. It just really changed my outlooks in my life and I think it's a wonderful thing. I hope that it spreads and I hope that it becomes something bigger, something more, something that people will want to come into and just really expand.

Another thing is it's opened up a lot of opportunities for me as a senior this year, which is quite surprising because I didn't know that I could -- Laura's telling me that I could get scholarships, a full ride to a college in the United States, USC or CSU. I mean, it's opened a lot of opportunities and a lot of windows for me. I was luckily able to be the summer intern here at LCJP house which is a great opportunity for me, and really has, I feel, matured me in a different level than it has before. I feel like I just keep growing and growing with this program, and college next year, I hope I can bring that with me.

I know there's some colleges that put restorative justice into practice in their own way and hopefully I can get into that and that I can expand my restorative practices and my skills, and to become a very, very good facilitator and be able to take that with me to

college, and beyond life and my career as well. So I'm just really excited and in love with this program.

Molly: Well, thank you so much for being with us today. It's been just a pleasure to have you.

Priscilla: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Molly: Peter, any closing comments?

Peter: I just wanted to say that joining RJ was a great turning point in my life today. I was just one of those regular, run-of-the-mill people in high school just on doing my classes, on gossiping in some ways, and I just really like helping people through RJ. It makes me feel good. It's kind of like what you would say my "natural high," I guess. I can't wait until I can get those community hours, just get them to go up and up for -- help me with job applications. I mean, either -- even college, like Priscilla's talking about. So I think that's all.

Molly: So again, it's just been great to have you, Peter and Priscilla, and Laura Snider from the Longmont Community Justice Partnership programs, Restorative Practices in Schools, acronym is RPS. If you want to know more about Restorative Practices in Schools and LCJP, make sure to go to LCJP.org. They're also on Facebook and on Twitter.

For more information about the Summer of Peace which is going through International Day of Peace, September 21st, just go to summit.summerofpeace.net. This is Molly Rowan Leach, and on behalf of the Peace Alliance, who is co-sponsor of Restorative Justice on the Rise, and the host of the Summer of Peace, The Shift Network, it's been great to chat with you all and we'll see you next week on Restorative Justice on the Rise.

Laura: Thank you so much, Molly.

Priscilla: Thank you.

[1:04:59] End of Audio

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