



Restorative Denver Overview

Restorative Denver is a partnership between the Denver District Attorney's Office and The Conflict Center, offering a community-based restorative justice alternative for adults referred through the program.

Included in packet:

- Letter from participant
- 2020 Year-End Report
- Restorative Denver Demographics vs. Overall Misdemeanors
- Denver Post article featuring Restorative Denver, January 10, 2021

POST PROCESS THANK YOU LETTER

From Person Who Caused Harm (Offender) after completing Restorative Denver

My name is Regina C. I am writing this letter in hopes that everyone who played a role in the decision-making that lead me to be directed to The Conflict Center's Restorative Justice Program, will see, and understand how this experience changed my life. I would like to first start off by saying thank you for even considering me for this program. Having never been in any sort of legal trouble before, I was petrified the whole way through. That being said, everyone was so kind and non-judgmental. It was an easy environment to walk right into, and I really appreciated the way everyone was able to make it feel so effortless, yet still effective to join.

The next point I would like to bring up, is how strongly I encourage and recommend this program, or one similar for other individuals like myself. I feel as though this program did bring attention to the harm caused by my actions, and made sure that I, myself understood the harms completely, but I was also given an opportunity to express the negative effects that came my way as well. The ones that a lot of people don't often think about, or care to understand. I think it's extremely important that people have the opportunity to express their hurts and regrets caused from the situation as well as to take accountability for your actions and try to make them right.

One of the things that stood out most about the program, was just that. The attention was mainly focused on ways to make it right. I know not everybody would agree, but serving extended amounts of jail time, or paying large amounts of money doesn't fix the problem a lot of the time although it may help in some cases. At the conflict center, we came up with several realistic and relevant ways to actually fix the problem and the harm it caused. That's tremendously important with all issues. And, although it wouldn't be perfect for every scenario, I do think it should be used more often or at least considered. Since my experience, I've taken a huge interest in the justice system, and even applied to be a community member at the conflict center myself. I am currently looking for all the ways possible, that I could be a part of a system that helps other people the way that I was helped! In conclusion, I say all this to say thank you to everybody involved. I say thank you to the District Attorney, thank you to The Honorable Judge, and thank you to the wonderful team at The Conflict Center. I greatly appreciate being given an opportunity to fix what harm I've caused. I feel tremendous gratitude to have been introduced to so many wonderful people. I hope to hear of more people who had the same experience as I did, and hope that I can be a part of that experience. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I wish everybody well!

Respectfully submitted,

Regina



Restorative Denver Annual Report

December 2020

Restorative Denver addresses crime, harm, and public safety through a victim-centered, community-based restorative justice program. Restorative Justice is a response to crime that focuses on addressing and repairing the harm caused by a criminal offense. Restorative Justice helps crime victims feel supported and empowered, and allows defendants to understand the impact of their actions and repair the harm they caused to the greatest extent possible. Restorative Justice focuses on making things right for the victim and reintegrating defendants back into the community with the skills and awareness to prevent future crime.

The model of restorative justice used by Restorative Denver is called community group conferencing. After preparation, trained facilitators bring together the victim, defendant, community members, and support people to discuss what happened, the resulting harm, who was impacted, and how the defendant can repair the harm.



Restorative Denver is a partnership between the Denver District Attorney's Office and the community-based nonprofit organization, The Conflict Center. Eligible cases are screened by the DA's Office and then referred to The Conflict Center to be handled through a restorative justice process that is entirely community-based. Restorative Denver began accepting cases in October 2019 and the first year of the program has been very successful.

As of November 16, 2020:

65 people have been referred to Restorative Denver
35 people have successfully completed the program
24 people are currently participating in Restorative Denver
6 people withdrew from the program

It is important to note that the participants who withdrew did so after being screened for the program, but before beginning any Restorative Denver programming. The reasons for withdrawing were that participants either decided to take their case to trial or lost contact with both their attorney and the program.

Restorative Denver accepts all misdemeanor charges, except for domestic violence, and has recently expanded to begin accepting felony charges as well. Currently, there have been two felony cases referred to Restorative Denver – a burglary case and a menacing case.

The most common charges referred in the first year of the program have been:

1. Third-degree assault
2. Misdemeanor child abuse
3. Misdemeanor theft
4. Careless driving causing injury

Demographics:

Restorative Denver strives to ensure that all defendants receive an equitable opportunity to participate in the program.

Gender	Race	Age
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62%: Male • 38%: Female 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45%: White • 25%: Hispanic • 23%: Black • 4%: Asian • 3%: Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35%: 13-24 • 37%: 25-39 • 22%: 40-55 • 6%: 56 & over

Additionally, 57% of all participants were represented by the public defender, 28% were represented by private defense counsel, and 15% were pro se.

Funding & Capacity:

With its current level of funding, Restorative Denver can accept six case referrals per month. Demand has risen slowly and steadily over the first year of the program and we are now easily filling all six spots each month and the demand continues to grow. In year two, Restorative Denver hopes to secure stable, multi-year funding to continue expanding its capacity to keep up with the growing demand. Restorative Denver held its first annual virtual fundraiser on December 8, 2020 and raised over \$27,000 to support the program with the hopes of making this an annual fundraising event, though hopefully not virtual next year!

Testimonials:

CASE #1:

Defendant was a 55-year-old white male, security guard who was furloughed from his job due to COVID-19. He was struggling with making ends meet and was driving home one day behind another driver who was driving particularly slowly. The defendant was growing increasingly frustrated at the driver's slow

pace and when the driver went to make a left turn, the defendant pulled up next to him & lifted up a BB gun that he had in the car that looked to be real. The defendant was charged with menacing and because he had very limited criminal history, was given the opportunity to participate in Restorative Denver. The victim was terrified after this incident and also agreed to participate in the process. The defendant was extremely remorseful and took full accountability for how his anger and frustration caused him to act out of character and to cause the victim to be so terrified. At the conclusion of the program the defendant said: "I feel that I have brought some peace of mind to the person I harmed and his family. I feel that this process is also bringing closure to my family. The facilitators acted with compassion and fairness, and guided everyone in a non-judgmental way through the process."

CASE #2:

Defendant was a 24-year-old, Hispanic woman who struggled with depression and anxiety. She was charged with trespass to motor vehicle for being in a car with her boyfriend that she knew was stolen. Through Restorative Denver, the defendant learned the importance of her choices and spending time with people who were making good choices. She was able to work on increasing her self-confidence and positive connections in her life. During the program, she stated: "I am excited to be a part of this program and to see the outcome. Participating in this program has changed the way I feel about myself."

CASE #3:

Defendant was a 51-year-old Black woman who was living on the fringes of homelessness and poverty. She was working a cash register at Coors Field and when closing one day, shorted the cash register and took some money home. She was charged with theft and given the opportunity to participate in Restorative Denver. Through the program she was connected with job services to help her improve her chances of employment in the future, and also worked on ways to increase her self-image and self-confidence so she would be able to make better choices in the future. When asked about the program she stated, "what has changed for me is that I actually have really enjoyed completing the items on my contract and that has benefitted my general outlook on certain topics."

CASE #4:

Defendant was a 24-year-old Black woman who was a single mom of two, and working her way through college as a non-traditional student. She was working as a desk clerk at a hotel and one day accidentally charged his credit card while also accepting cash for the room. Embarrassed by her mistake, she didn't know what to do and asked a friend who told her to just keep the cash, so she did. She was charged with theft and given the opportunity to participate in Restorative Denver. Through the program she apologized to the hotel, paid back the money she took, and learned improved decision-making skills so that she could make better decisions in the future. When asked about Restorative Denver, she stated: "I feel different doing this program than court. I feel like I am not treated like a criminal. The facilitators gave me respect. This program was a great choice for me, this process was a great choice for me."

Questions:

If you have any questions or comments about Restorative Denver, please contact Chris Brown-Haugen, the District Attorney in charge of the program at christina.brown@denverda.org.

Restorative Denver Demographics Compared to Overall Denver Misdemeanor Filings:

	2019 Misdemeanors:	2020 Misdemeanors:	Restorative Denver:
Total Cases:	9,785	7,207	76
Gender:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% Male • 27% Female 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% Male • 25% Female 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 63% Male • 37% Female
Race: <i>(Misdemeanor Data doesn't separate ethnicity & race so white/Latino data is skewed)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% White • 23% Black • 3% Latinx • 2% Unidentified • 1% Asian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 72% White • 22% Black • 2% Latinx • 4% Unidentified • 1% Asian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46% White • 25% Black • 22% Latinx • 4% Asian • 3% Other
Age:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22%: 13-24 • 48%: 25-39 • 20%: 40-55 • 9%: 56 & over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22%: 13-24 • 49%: 25-39 • 22%: 40-55 • 7%: 56 & over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34%: 13-24 • 39%: 25-39 • 21%: 40-55 • 5%: 56 & over

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For people in Denver's restorative justice program, redemption came through picking up trash, reading books and making apologies

The Denver District Attorney's Office sent 65 minor cases through the program in its first year

By **SHELLY BRADBURY** | sbradbury@denverpost.com |

The Denver Post

January 10, 2021 at 6:00 a.m.

6

A man who accidentally fired a gun inside his apartment. A woman who was harassed by a man in an Uber. A person who vandalized a building.

Those are among the 65 minor criminal cases sent to the Denver district attorney's year-old restorative justice program — a hands-on alternative to the traditional court system that focuses on the people involved in the crime, the impact on the larger community and how offenders who take responsibility can repair the damage done by their actions.

Unlike the adversarial, largely punitive and often cookie-cutter approach in the regular court system, the restorative justice process creates deeply individualized responses to crimes through meetings between offenders, community members and sometimes victims.

Defendants are referred to the program by the district attorney's office, who so far during the first year have focused on people facing misdemeanor charges, those with only a single pending case against them and those who were not in jail.

If the participants successfully complete the restorative justice process, which typically takes between three and six months, then the district attorney's office dismisses the criminal charges against them.

The process is facilitated by The Conflict Center, a Denver nonprofit, which hosts a series of meetings with the defendants and, if they choose to participate, the victims of the crimes. The sessions culminate in a meeting between the defendant, victim, at least two community members and typically two neutral facilitators.

During that meeting, the defendant, victim and community members agree on steps the defendant must take to repair the harm caused by his or her actions. For the man who sexually harassed a woman in an Uber, that meant an hours-long discussion with the woman about the impact of his actions and reading a book on appropriate interactions between men and women, District Attorney Beth McCann said.

"If he'd gone through the regular criminal system, he would have probably pled to some lesser charge, and had probation, and the probation would have been minimal, at best, so he would have reported in maybe once a month and then the case would have been over," she said. "But this way, he actually presumably learned something, and she also got the satisfaction of knowing that he was hearing her, versus in court where she would have been told, 'Don't have anything to do with him,' and he would not have been allowed to have any conversation with her."

In other cases, defendants have agreed to attend parenting classes or therapy. One man who was charged with unlawful discharge after he unintentionally fired a gun and damaged the his apartment building agreed to clean and organize the messy trash area, said Christina Brown-Haugen, who is heading up the program for the district attorney's office.

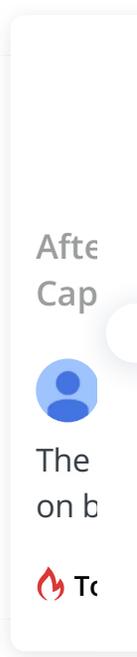
"It brings in voices that are not typically heard in our traditional justice system," said Patrick Howard, a volunteer facilitator. He said participants on all sides are often wary when they start, but usually open up as the process goes on.

So far the program most frequently has handled misdemeanor assault, child abuse and theft cases.

McCann hopes to expand the breadth of the restorative justice process and rely on it as a regular option for misdemeanor and felony cases in the future, she said. Of the 65 people referred to the program since it started last year, 35 finished successfully and 24 cases were still pending by mid-November. Another six people withdrew before beginning the process, some opting instead to fight their charges in court.

“In the broader context of the whole reimagining the police and reimagining the criminal justice system, or the prosecutor’s office, in my big scheme, the criminal justice system will evolve, so that it is inclusive of a lot of different options,” McCann said. “...Do we always need to go charge in court, have a trial, have a plea bargain? Or, maybe as we examine new ideas in criminal justice this is a way we move the system, the bigger system.”

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Shelly

Bradbury | Courts Reporter

Shelly Bradbury is the courts reporter at the Denver Post. She joined the paper in 2019 and previously worked as a crime reporter at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in Pennsylvania and the Chattanooga Times Free Press in Tennessee. She's been a reporter since 2012, focused on criminal justice. In Pittsburgh, she helped the newspaper earn the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for breaking news after a mass shooting at a local synagogue, and in 2020 she was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in local reporting for an investigation into child sexual abuse among Amish and Mennonite communities.

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