RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILES
CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE MAYOR AND YOUTH OF OAKLAND

A Project

Presented to the faculty of the Division of Social Work
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK

by
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SPRING
2016
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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

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Nefertiti Khemet

The Restorative Justice model provides practitioners with guidelines for being with youth and solutions for meeting their needs. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the needs of youth through group conversations. Eight Restorative Justice circles with approximately ten youth were conducted in eight schools in Oakland. Participants confirmed the need for Restorative Justice programs city wide and throughout the justice systems. The youth verbalized their needs and some suggested solutions to those problems. Respondents asked for support, respect, and that their community build the bond between community members. The strongest theme from the responses was that of collaboration between the community and the youth. The participants not only desired change within the community itself, but also commented that they would like to be part of the community and have a hand in creating the change they desired.

______________________
Teiahsha Bankhead, Ph.D.

Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to acknowledge Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth for obtaining the data and providing the data to the researcher for analysis. Their work to improve the lives of youth in Oakland is respected and appreciated.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Jane Addams was a social activist social worker who believed in the importance of adults, especially the communities’ leaders and educators, having an understanding of adolescence (McCormack, 1998). Human beings have a need and desire for adventure and pleasure that, if unmet, can be expressed in ways challenging to their culture and are often misunderstood. Addams felt that the greatest need of adolescents was in finding their purpose in something important or vital (McCormack, 1998). Adolescents, just like young children, act in extreme ways in order to announce their presence, individuality, and their humanity. In her book *The Spirit of Youth and The City Streets*, Jane Addams states that “the only possible basis for progress, at all that keeps life from growing unprofitably stale and repetitious” is reaching for individuality or breaking away from societal normal standards (Addams, 1912, pp. 8-9). Jane Addams’ beliefs lead one to the understanding that a child’s needs not being met cause behavior that is considered culturally difficult and antisocial. With this information, adolescent antisocial behavior can be put into perspective of need for belonging and purpose rather than criminality.

Jane Addams and the women of Hull House created the juvenile court in Chicago in 1899 when the Juvenile Court Act, that they spurred the creation of, was drafted and signed (Richmond, 1995). They recognized the need for a juvenile justice system apart from the condemning and confining adult jail system. Before the Juvenile Court Act, children over 10 years old were held at police stations, charged in adult courts, and fined
which put a strain on the children’s parents. If the fine was not paid, the children were sent to adult prisons (Addams, 1935). With their innovation, a new system was created that adjudicated youth in a way that addressed their needs and rehabilitated youth rather than purely sentencing them to multiple harsh punishments, including but not limited to incarceration in adult prisons (Addams, 1935). The Hull House system of addressing delinquent behavior differed from the traditional criminal justice system in that the child was not defended against nor prosecuted. Another difference between the current model of juvenile justice and the Hull House versions was that the judge sat on the same level as the youth and all others present at the court hearing, thus physically reducing their position of power. Everyone present was concerned with how to best to meet the youth’s needs (Addams, 1935, p. 137).

Jane Addams envisioned the judge of the juvenile court acting in the best interest of the youth brought before the court as a caring and devoted father would (Addams, 1935). The juvenile court was supposed to determine the best way of redirecting and healing the maladjusted youth; not to accuse and punish the child, but put them in a caring place with the tools they would need for rehabilitation. The mission that Jane Addams and the other women of Hull House had envisioned for juvenile court is not being carried out today. The term juvenile delinquent is defined as such; delinquent refers to the failure to do something that is required and juvenile to someone who is malleable, not yet fixed in his or her ways, subject to change and being molded. Youth are treated as though they are fixed in their ways, as hardened criminals without the
capacity to grow and change (Addams, 1935). The goal of The Hull House was to not just to cure the child, but also to teach them and help them change their condition.

To Jane Addams, the recidivism of youth posed a problem. In her own words, “the same children could be in and out of various police stations an indefinite number of times, more hardened and more skillful with each experience”, further solidifying youth into a life of crime (Addams, 1935, pp. 132-133). This statement provides information to support the fact that the juvenile justice system should support the reformation of youth more often than pure incarceration. While the Juvenile Justice system is a better alternative to adjudication in criminal courts and incarceration in adult jails, today the needs of youth are still not met through the Juvenile Justice system. In recent years from 2005 with *Roper V. Simmons* until 2016 with *Montgomery V. Louisiana*, the Juvenile Life Without Parole Act was created, eliminating Juvenile Life Without Parole and Death Row sentences as minimums and required that these be given on a case-by-case basis (Rovner, 2016). This act also called upon judges and officers to take into consideration mitigating factors during sentencing in future cases.

A study in 2006, found that not until at least 15 years old did these youth show signs of productive and organized behaviors, while some continued to improve into young adulthood (Mayzer et al., 2009). According to Steinberg (2003), a juvenile’s brain does not fully develop the systems that encourage maturity until they are in their late adolescence. The inherent lack of development, or immaturity, of juveniles lowers a juvenile's culpability (Rovner, 2016). Along with youths’ heightened capacity for influence by external pressures and influences, and their increased capacity to be
reformed, it was determined that certain mitigating factors like transient rashness, proclivity for risk, and inability to assess consequences” should be taken into account upon sentencing (Rovner, 2016, p. 3). Montgomery V. Louisiana mandated in 2016 that constitutionally, children are less culpable than adults, and that only those youth who prove to be hardened and immovable should be sentenced to Life Without Parole or the death sentence (Montgomery, n.d.).

Young people are an important part of our society and should be treated as such. Today, and historically, youth have been seen only in terms of their delinquent behaviors, failing to take into account a youth’s circumstances; their reality. Youth face adverse situations and they are often not fully capable of overcoming these difficulties without support from responsible adults around them. By nature however, youth are inherently resilient and intelligent beings. When these positive abilities are nurtured, youth go on to further create and develop their nature as positive, self-sustaining, and socially productive people. Speaking with youth themselves, it becomes evident that they would much rather be successful individuals with goals and accomplishments that build up and support their community than causing pain and destruction with their actions.

**Pillars of Restorative Justice**

Restorative Justice (RJ) is a set of principles, or a group of “guiding questions” around a non-criminal way of viewing offenses (Zehr, 2002, Pg. 3). These questions include, but are not limited to: “Who has been hurt, what are their needs, and whose obligations are these?” This view of offensive behavior is based on a healing basis rather than a punitive basis and the idea that offenses are most often a result of dissonance
within relationships. The healing that RJ promotes includes the healing of all affected by
the offense, including the offender and the community. In other words, “crime is a
violation of people and of interpersonal relationships, violations create obligations, and
the central obligation is to put right the wrongs” (Zehr, 2002, Pg. 17). The message here
is of unity and solidarity; what hurts one goes on to hurt another and all member of the
society have an obligation to the healing of their fellow being.

These principles are categorized into the three pillars of RJ: (1) A focus on
harms done and the needs of all parties involved, (2) an obligation to put right the
wrongs, and (3) the engagement of stakeholders (Zehr, 2002). Once it is determined
what harm has been done, the obligation to put right the wrong is enacted. This
obligation puts emphasis on the accountability of the offender in the healing process.
Participation of the families of the victim and the offender, the identified victim, the
offender, and community members in the justice process is the third pillar of RJ,
engagement. These pillars are what make RJ’s view of criminality and juvenile
delinquency different from that of the criminal and juvenile justice systems (Zehr, 2002).
RJ’s view of offending focuses on the needs of the victim and the responsibility of the
offender to repair what was done, whereas the criminal justice system focuses on
offenders getting what they deserve. RJ takes a more humanistic view and is more likely
to produce positive outcomes from justice involvement (Zehr, 2002). There are many
ways of implementing these principles and practices into the JJ system.
Juvenile Justice Practices That Employ Restorative Justice

The Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) of 1998, is an alternative approach to treating the symptoms of delinquency (Antonopoulos & Winterdyk, 2003). This approach, rather than punishing youth for the crime committed, recognizes that youth should be incarcerated as little as possible and provides alternatives to incarceration before commitment is adjudicated. Youth are given three warnings before they are diverted to the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). RJ prescribes a healing rather than punitive approach to offending. The use of warnings, reparations, inclusion of the victim(s) and in the justice process, RJ inspired penalties, and involvement of YOTs and parents of the offenders in the justice system are prescribed by the CDA and are evidence of the possibility of an RJ inspired JJ system (Antonopoulos & Winterdyk, 2003). The CDA led to the creation and implementation of YOTs in 2000.

These interagency teams include staff members in the offices of education, law enforcement, and health and social services. They assess youth with severe and complex mental health concerns, provide interventions to them, as well as provide preventative efforts within each of their individual scopes (Callaghan, Young, Pace, & Vostanis, 2003). YOTs’ focus on fulfilling mental health needs in response to delinquency falls under the concept of focusing on the healing of the offender that is prescribed by RJ. In other words, this response to needs fulfills the objective of YOTs to treat disturbances that cause or perpetuate the offending behavior. The inclusion of multiple parties in the response to an offense reflects the RJ concept of unity and solidarity between the community and the individual (Callaghan, Young, Pace, & Vostanis, 2003). One of RJ’s
pillars, the obligation to put right the wrong, is embodied in the YOT objective of helping the individual take responsibility for their actions. The successful completion of these objectives, allows for the elimination of participation in criminal behavior and the participation in activities that contribute to society and the individual’s community (Callaghan, Young, Pace, & Vostanis, 2003).

Another JJ practice that employs RJ principles, is the type of education provided within the Juvenile Detention Facilities (JDFs) system. Education can be provided in a way that promotes fulfillment of the RJ objectives and builds upon the outcomes already produced by practices that may be in used within the JJ system as a whole (Toews, 2013). RJ practices within education provide opportunities for youth to share their stories, their experiences with personal growth and change, and their aspirations to promote and participate in activities that promote community advancement. In this way, youth’s uniqueness is affirmed, their creative solutions to life problems are offered, and a place that is safe for students to be heard and respected creates a safe environment that is created through student teacher collaboration. This pedagogy provides an open dialogue between the students and teachers, allowing exposure to positive experiences, and allowing for constructive criticism of both parties (Toews, 2013).

Statement of the Research Problem

With a focus on sentencing for misbehavior, the Juvenile Justice system ends up corralling youth rather than rehabilitating them into prosocial life and activities that support the individual and their community. The needs of youth are neglected by the JJ system. Not having needs met, causes youth to act in rash ways in order to meet that
The major tenants of Restorative Justice are centered on the concept of meeting the needs of the client. A Restorative Justice model of care would be best suited for providing positive outcomes from youth involvement in the justice system. The problem is that as a society we are moving further away from the Restorative Justice Model of the JJ system that was proposed and implemented by Jane Addams and her colleagues. The data that this research will be analyzing will give insight into the issues that are not being addressed by the community and the JJ system.

**Study Purpose**

Adults rarely take the time to really listen to what youth have to say and it is unfortunate, because youth can provide insight into effective methods of repairing the harm done to them and methods of meeting their needs. This study aims to gather and disseminate information that outlines the needs of youth and how the community can fulfill those needs. The secondary purpose for this research study is to provide support for the implementation of RJ on a wide scale basis and provide justification for the institutionalization of RJ in the JJ system in order to reduce re-offense rates of juveniles. Reducing the recidivism rate of youth is important to the community because youth have a lot to offer the community in the way of human resources, but these resources are not nurtured and therefore lost. The research project was conducted to qualitatively affirm that there are problems that youth face on a daily basis that have yet to be met by the system that is charged with providing support to reduce the frequency of delinquent and antisocial behaviors.
The way that progress towards the goals previously stated is assessed is by reviewing youth recidivism rates to determine if youths’ needs are being met in a substantial way. If youths’ needs are met, they are participating in more prosocial activities more often, spending more time at school, and spending more time at home, with family, and pro-social friends. They are also getting good grades, not using substances, keeping up with duties at home and school, and are not having angry, disrespectful, or otherwise disruptive behavioral outbursts. If RJ is the theoretical basis of JJ practices and programs, these changes are confirmed by low JJ youth involvement and lower recidivism rates.

**Theoretical Framework**

What is proposed in this project by the researcher can be understood through the framework of Systems Theory, Social Constructionism, CBT, the Strengths Perspective, Positive Youth Development, and the concept of resilience. These theories and concepts are most aligned with the understanding of the needs, abilities, and processes of prosocial youth development. Systems Theory is a basic framework that is the basis of social work practice. The term “system” is a general term to describe an entity, whether that is an organization, community, or individual. The theory proposes that every system affects change in multiple other systems; they have a symbiotic relationship (Robbins, Chaterjee & Canda, 2006). In this case, the conclusion can be drawn, that human beings and their environment are continuously changing due to changes made by the other.

The Social Constructionism paradigm states that people are a product of their environment (Robbins, Chaterjee & Canda, 2006). Building on the Systems Theory
concept, Social Constructionism holds that individuals build their reality based on second
hand experiences they receive. It is then very important, in order to form a healthy reality,
to pick and choose what is allowed into the space one occupies. This means that rather
than only allowing the most readily available experiences into one’s life, one should
explore further experiences that strengthen who they are as a unique individual. When
faced with a youth, it is important to understand that they can create a reality different
from what they know, but they need guidance and knowledge in order to start to make
that change. Youth who only have adults who put them down in their life, or are not
couraged to reach for greatness, flounder and act in ways that get the attention of adults
in an unconscious effort to receive attention that promotes empowerment.

Strengths Perspective and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) are both ways of
seeing the client, being with the client, and creating a space where they can see a new
method of thinking and behaving that is more empowering than their old ways of
thinking and being (Merlo, 2010). CBT treats psychological disturbances through
discussion of the feelings, behaviors, and thoughts that come up during those moments of
disturbance (Jackson, Nissenson, & Cloitre, 2009). These thoughts, feelings, and
behaviors that are associated with the symptoms that are being treated are analyzed with
the client and alternative patterns are developed. Once these new patterns have been
agreed upon, the client puts them in place, and their success is monitored and may be
altered. The Strengths Perspective takes focus off of the origination of the disturbance
being treated, and instead focuses on the strengths the individual intrinsically has to cope
with and reduce the symptoms (Saleeby, 2002). Internal Motivation is a highly influential form of motivation due to its reliance on the individual rather than others.

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach was developed to treat a group of symptoms that interfere with the positive development of youth (Bonell, 2016). This group of symptoms includes substance abuse, poor school performance, angry or violent outbursts, and destructive and disruptive behaviors. This intervention is a voluntary educational activity that encourages positive youth development in areas of behaviors, but also of skills, attitudes, relationships, and identities (Bonell, 2016). Integral to this modality, is that it not only treats the symptoms of delinquency, but also promotes empowerment, resilience, social and emotional well being, skills for future oriented goals, and promotes pro-social behavior and involvement (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). Resilience, the concept of persistence, hope for one’s future, motivation, and confidence in one’s abilities, is another important concept to apply to working with this population (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014).

Resilience allows an individual to be something they never thought was possible. This ability to persevere is built upon experiences that are acknowledged by the individual as moments of strength in the face of adversity rather than of upsetting or demeaning experiences. As youth, they are limited by their experiences, which are few and limited to their environment. When youth are exposed to possibilities outside of their realm of knowledge and empowered, through acknowledgement of their capabilities, to accomplish their personal goals, they are more likely to be motivated to participate in pro-social activities and behaviors. Positive Youth Development, like Restorative
Justice, is a perfect intersection of these concepts of practices that are used to treat the symptoms associated with delinquency.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In life many people can be a role model for youth to live an innocent and noble life, but without that role model often times a child will be taken into the juvenile justice system. Restorative Justice (RJ) Programs were created in an effort to work in an integrated way to reduce or eliminate youth incarceration. The goal for RJ programs is to meet the underlying needs of all parties involved in the wrongdoing. These programs help to discourage youth from continuing on a path that will lead to incarceration in the future. Through evaluation of programs, we can better understand what these youth face that lead them to requiring these services, how their future is affected by their circumstances, and what it is that they truly need to receive while in the charge of these programs to help encourage and support them to live with dignity and integrity. By reforming RJ programs, juvenile incarceration rates can be further reduced, recidivism rates further decreased, and a new generation of pro-social, productive youth can be promoted. Youth will also receive support through these programs similar to the support they might receive from a positive role model. What follows, is a summary of the literature on Restorative Justice Programs and reasons that such programs are needed in the community.
Restorative Justice Principles

When RJ was created it was intended to be an alternative to the current criminal justice system. It is noted in Tsui (2014) that RJ addresses issues surrounding crimes committed by youth that are not addressed during incarceration (Marshall, 1999). RJ practices are those that focus, rather than on punishment in criminal and non-criminal cases, on rebuilding relationships between parties and restoring power to the victims, offenders and their communities (Tsui, 2014; Zehr, 2002). In comparison to the criminal justice system, RJ is built on the understanding of wrongdoing as, “a violation of people and of interpersonal relationships, violations of obligations, and the central obligation is to put right the wrongs” (Zehr, 2002, p 17). Another focus of RJ is on healing for all parties involved from the results of a crime, the results being the damaging of relationships which can also be the catalyst for the commission of a crime (Zehr, 2002; Marshall, 1999).

RJ is a set of principles that have been the basis for practices developed across the globe for providing better outcomes for the victims of a crime including the community and the one who caused the harm (Zehr, 2002). These principles are built upon the ancient traditions and principles of many cultures, including; the practice of communal meetings or “peacemaking” circles; and the principle of interconnectedness of all people and things, or ubuntu, shalom, whakappa, and hozho (Zehr, 2002). RJ is defined as a “set of principles, a philosophy, an alternate set of ‘guiding questions’” and an “alternative framework for thinking about wrongdoing” (Zehr, 2002, p. 3). RJ itself is not a program, rather it is a “compass” that guides individuals in creating programs that, alongside the
justice system, repair relationships and harm done, holds offenders responsible and accountable for repairing harm done, and includes all community members affected by the crime in the justice system process. RJ is centered on the harms done to the victim, the community, and the offender, and the violation of the needs of these three parties (Zehr, 2002). The philosophies of RJ are ones that facilitate the creation of a justice system that takes the focus from righting the harm done to the state, to harm done to the individuals involved.

The obligations, or responsibility, that the offenders have include assisting those harmed by their offense in feeling as though the wrong had been righted (Zehr, 2002). Victims and communities can ask that the offender provide physical reparations as well as symbolic reparations. It is not possible for the wrong to be erased completely, or even for things to be like they used to be before the offense took place, but something can be done to ease the pain of the victim (Zehr, 2002). Reparations also give the offender a chance to show that they understand how their actions affected others and that they are taking responsibility for their actions.

Along with the harm done, other considerations in RJ principles are to uproot some of the issues that fostered the wrongdoing without taking focus off the obligations of the offender (Zehr, 2002). This practice may cast the offender in the light of the victim, recognizing that the harm or perceived harm done to the offender played a part in their actions. A person’s gut reaction to being wronged is often, and unfortunately, to cause the same pain to someone else who they feel deserves that pain. With this consideration comes the recognition of the obligation of the community and the justice
system to the offender and to destabilizing a system that promotes the continuance of such violations. In this way RJ works to stop the cycle of pain and violation (Zehr, 2002). Any program based on the principles of RJ, should have this goal as the foundation for their mission and vision for the program.

According to Marshall, (1999) the main outcome desired under RJ is to fully meet the needs of the victims while preventing offenders from committing another offense and allowing them a chance to successfully integrate back into their community. This outcome would also support youth through the process of learning to take responsibility for their actions, an effect of this learning process would be that youth and communities could rebuild broken relationships and help support the youth through rehabilitation (Marshall, 1999). The above outlined outcomes would lead to a more communal and non-punitive juvenile justice system. Although this definition of RJ does not divert from the purpose of RJ, it is however, a different definition than outlined in Zehr’s *Little Book of Restorative Justice* (2002). Gelsthorpe & Morris (2002) state that it is a known fact that RJ can take on different meanings for everyone. It is also not clearly defined how RJ should be used in practice and what it should look like in the criminal justice system (Braithwaite, Van Ness, & Strong, 2002). This leaves those who practice RJ to modify and apply the model to various areas of need. This is wonderful, but it also begs the question of whether the model in each specific setting is providing the desired outcome.

Albert Eglash (1977) and Howard Zehr (1990) wanted to create a new environment for offenders. Eglash was primarily concerned with the offender restorative justice and restitution and Zehr with victim offender reconciliation (Palermo, 2013). RJ
programs have grown throughout the years because of the promise that RJ holds of increasing the community and victim participation during the justice process, having more case outcomes that are satisfying for both the victims and community, enhanced offender obedience with restitution, amplified opinions of procedural equality (Latimer, Dowden, & Muise, 2005; Sharpe, 1998), and with the unintentional benefit of causing a reduction in recidivism rates (McCold & Wachtel, 1998). Another important pillar of RJ is that it seeks to understand the impact of the crime on the community and seeks to diminish the role of the justice system and its employees (Leonard & Kenny, 2010). One author suggests that in RJ, facilitators work towards having “as few experts as we dare” (Christie, 1977, p. 12). In summary, RJ was created to bring the community together in an effort to restore the peace between all members of the community including the victim and the offender as well as the greater society.

With this definition of RJ, a community gathers to heal the pain, and prevent injustice from reoccurring. The approaches their communities take have been created out of the needs of the community as a whole, and have been proven to work within that community (Zehr, 2002). Therefore these practices that employ RJ principles vary in structure, purpose and population. Thusly, many RJ practices have very infrequently been empirically evaluated. There is a need for a meta-analysis of some of the major types of restorative practices. Unintentionally, RJ has reduced recidivism rates however, studies that report on the relationship between recidivism rates and RJ involvement have not proved a clear reduction of recidivism rates (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013).
Bergseth & Bouffard, (2013) studied the relationship between RJ and recidivism rates. In this study the purpose of the research was to explore whether the effects of RJ programs for delinquent youth were felt by youth of all types. The sample included 352 youth referred by the courts to a single RJ program and 353 youth who were referred to the traditional juvenile justice system (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013). The youth were referred between the years of 1999 and 2005. The comparison group was selected by the researcher in an effort to include youth with similar offenses to the youth in the RJ referred group. Multiple regression analysis was completed in order to numerically compare the demographic groups to determine if there were any groups with significantly higher risk of hazard. In all but one group of youth, the survival rate (lower risk of hazard) was higher for the youth who participated in RJ programs rather than the comparison group that did not (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013).

**Restorative Justice Programs**

The various programs that employ RJ principles fulfill the intended goal of RJ by not focusing on punishment of the offender, rather they provide the opportunity to repair relationships between the victim, the offender, and the community they live in while also restoring justice (Tsui, 2014). These programs include: Juvenile Arbitration Programs (JAP), Sentencing Circles, Family Group Counseling (FGC) or Family Group Decision Making meetings (FGDM), Victim Offender Mediation (VOM), victim impact-panels, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), and Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAS). Along with desirable consequences for the offender, RJ recognizes the importance of the victim and the victim’s concerns as legitimate (Tsui, 2014). Because RJ practices take
into account the concerns of all individuals affected by the conflict, the desired outcome can be reached for all parties thus repairing faith in the justice system, the community, and repairing broken relationships. RJ practices have been used as the basis of many other programs that have the same goal of repairing relationships and restoring justice for all parties involved.

**Restorative Justice Circles**

RJ programs typically have a “Peacemaking” Circle component to them. The circle brings together multiple parties that are involved in the conflict including the offender, the victim, and other individuals that can provide unhindered information in regards to the presenting situation (Coates, R., Umbreit, M., & Vos, B., 2003). The RJ facilitator assists the individuals in coming together to discuss the events surrounding the offense and other pertinent information regarding the character of the individuals involved. The purpose of these circles is to resolve the conflict, repair relationships, repair the harm done, and assist crime victims (Coates, et al., 2003). The community is employed in the justice process, including the sentencing, prevention, and aftercare of the offender (Coates, et al., 2003). The pure nature of the individuals sitting in a circle is a therapeutic part of the discussion. Circles are, as Kelly notes, “secure and enclosing” (2009, p. 19). Circles have the capacity of representing the formative early years of human experience where attachment to parents and other loved ones is created (Kelly, 2009). The embrace of loved ones can be powerfully healing and in this way, so are restorative circles.
The circle process is transformative in terms of human development as well as in time of crisis, due to a circle’s natural ability to gather up and envelope (Kelly, 2009). It is rare that victims and offenders even sit in the same room while in conflict, and rarer still that they have a discussion in regards to the offense and with the intention of creating peace between the parties. When these circles are completed, all parties are heard, understood, and their concerns are addressed in a civil manner. One of the main perceived results of Circles in the Coates, et al. (2003) study was that 40% of participants felt that the offender was held accountable for their actions and they also took responsibility for their actions (Coates, et al., 2003). This study was conducted by interviewing 62 individuals who participated in 13 of such circles, with the purpose of qualitatively evaluating the perception of participants as to the use of circles; including their impact on themselves, the community, and the formal justice system (Coates, et al., 2003).

Shared values are respected in the circles and guide the session (Coates, et al., 2003). Each participant has equal space within the circle and equally guides the proceedings. In order to hold participants responsible for respectfully listening with their heart and mind open, a talking piece (a toy, pillow, or any other mundane random item or item of symbolic meaning) is used during the circle to signify who holds the floor, and to remind others that it is now time for giving the individual who is talking, the gift of being heard non-judgmentally (Coates, et al., 2003). The facilitator, or “Circle Keeper” is tasked with reminding anyone who forgets the role of the talking piece, reminding the group of the shared values, for opening the circle, guiding it throughout, terminating the
circle, being organized, focused, fair, and impartial. Circles are used in many different settings and take many forms including: Sentencing Circles, FGC, FGDMs, COSAs, and VOM (Gaarder & Hesselton, 2012).

**Sentencing Circles**

Circles conducted with the intention of determining a plan for sentencing the offender that is agreed upon by all participants are called Sentencing Circles. The participating individuals are those justice personnel involved with the case, the victim, victim supporters, offender, offender supporters, judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, police personnel, and other individuals as determined necessary (National Institute of Justice (NIH), 2007). Two goals of Sentencing Circles that should be noted are to promote the power and responsibility of the community and its individuals to resolve conflict with little to no help from the justice system, to address the underlying problem that led to criminal behavior, and to “promote and share community values” (NIH, 2007, p. 1). The circle process provides a format for the community to express their values, agree on appropriate values, and resolve the conflict in a way that is supportive of the goals of the community rather than satisfying the goals of the justice system (Stuart, 1997).

Other goals of Sentencing Circles, and the practice of running these types of circles, is done according to the restorative justice practices as outlined in the previous paragraphs. There are other circles conducted prior to the Sentencing Circle in preparation for the actual sentencing circle. These other circles are: (1) Circles to determine willingness on the part of the offender to be a participant in the process of
Sentencing Circles; (2) a victim healing circle; (3) an offender healing circle; (4) the
Sentencing Circle tasked with developing an agreed upon plan for sentencing the
individual and implementation strategies; and (5) monitoring circles that follow-up on the
offender’s progress in implementing the strategies outlined in the Sentencing Circle
(NIH, 2007, p. 1). Important in the success of Sentencing Circles is a working
relationship between the justice system and the community members and for all voluntary
members to work together towards reaching the shared goals of the group. Similar to
Sentencing Circles, FGCs and FGDMs use a similar structure to prepare the family,
community, and offender for the offender’s return to the community.

The media through its representation of fear in regards to children’s safety in
schools, by paralleling school shootings with acts of terrorism, has increased the public’s
reliance on the justice system. School shootings are terrible acts and are intolerable,
however they are rare (Altheide, 2009). In 1999 Littleton, Colorado experienced a tragic
school shooting that was swept up in the nation’s larger discourse of fear and terrorism.
Altheide (2009) conducted a qualitative research study of hundreds of news reports by
tracking the discourse of fear in relation to school shootings in general and specifically in
reference to the shooting at Columbine. The researcher reviewed the central themes that
were discovered between 15 news articles across the world. This study was conducted in
an effort to suggest that the link between the Columbine shooting and acts of terrorism
was highlighted through a lens of fear and national security. The public’s fearful
reactions, combined with high media coverage, to school shootings has led to permanent
police presence on school campuses (Altheide, 2009).
Police presence on campus has created an over reliance on the juvenile court system to resolve minor offenses that were normally handled by school personnel due to the increased number of school-based arrests (ACLU, n.d.). This has put a financial strain on the juvenile justice system and its ability to provide well thought out support and care for juveniles. Diversion of juveniles from the juvenile justice system to JAP allows youth the chance to understand the severity and consequences of their actions (Hazen, 2012). It also reduces the chances that they will be exposed to harm and violence, return to juvenile hall, and uses restorative justice practices to assess and respond to the needs of the community, victim, and offender. Without JAP juveniles are more likely to receive a criminal record for minor offenses and less likely to learn from their incarceration what they did wrong and the alternative actions they can take in the future (Hazen, 2012). JAP was created based on the principles of RJ (Hazen, 2012).

**Juvenile Arbitration Programs**

In Aiken County, South Carolina, an exploratory study was conducted by Hazen (2012) with the purpose of determining if attendees of the program were completing JAP programs, whether the programs helped lift the financial strain on the juvenile justice system, and also whether the programs provided sufficient financial compensation to the victim(s) and their family(s) as well as to the community. The sample data used for this study was from the 2010 Aiken County Juvenile Justice statistics that included 386 arrested juveniles that year. The sample was taken from juveniles who had been arrested and been directed to participate in JAP in Aiken County (Hazen, 2012). Interview responses were compared with other responses to the same question and additional
information was obtained from the case files of the juveniles included in the study (Hazen, 2012). Around 67% of juvenile incarcerated offenders recidivate after three years of being back in their communities from traditional juvenile justice programs as opposed to 30% to 40% of youth returning to the juvenile court system after six months of being outside of JAP programs (Tsui, 2014). This statistic offers some evidence that JAP does produce positive outcomes.

Victim Offender Mediation (VOM)

In a qualitative explorative study of youth offenders who went through VOM, semi-structured interviews were conducted and responses were analyzed for comparison (Abrams, Umbreit, & Gordon, 2006). In the study seven families were included from one of Minnesota’s VOM county programs and four sets of parents of the same group of youth. The purpose of the study was to learn more about how youth and their families experience VOM programs, their sessions with mediators, and how the parties felt about meeting the victim of their crime. Another question posed to the participants was whether they felt change in behavior could be attributed to the VOM process (Abrams et al., 2006). Youth reported themselves taking the actions they chose more seriously as they faced their victim(s), told the story of the events that took place surrounding the crime to the victim(s), answered their victims’ questions, and heard how the victim was affected (Abrams et al., 2006; Choi, Green, & Gilbert, 2011). The resulting feelings of youth offenders, and victims, surrounding this meeting included: relief, closure, shame, and guilt (Abrams et al., 2006).
This face-to-face meeting between the victim and the offender also provides an opportunity in which the offender can see and hear how their actions affected the other parties. They face each other, which allows them to come to the realization that the person they are facing is human just like themselves, which creates compassion for the other party (Abrams et al., 2006). The offender realizes during this process that they deeply hurt another person and the victim sees the offender as a child who made a mistake but is remorseful and deserves support rather than harsh sentencing (Abrams et al., 2006). In this setting, youth learned lessons that they likely never would have learned from the juvenile justice system alone. The interaction that the involved parties had with each other was on a much deeper level than they would have had with just the legal system. VOM requires that both sides, with the help of a facilitator, come to an agreement of restitution that the offender will provide to the victim or their family. The offenders in the cases that ended with such an agreement being made, felt that, even if they were repaying more than what they had taken from the victim, that the agreement was still fair (Abrams et al., 2006).

Victim Offender Mediators were approached by the researchers in a study conducted by Choi et al., (2011) and asked to provide their clients with the option to participate in a qualitative study. Agreeing to participate in the study would provide the researcher with the opportunity to sit in on VOM sessions. The sample was picked purposefully with the intent of identifying two typical and two atypical cases, a total of four cases, to interview in great depth those cases identified by the VOM mediator as having agreed to participate. There were 34 interviews that were included in the data
collection and 37 total participants (Choi et al., 2011). The researchers were also granted permission by participants in the study access to observe the VOM participants (i.e. the offender, offender’s family member, the victim, the mediator, and a referral source) in their natural settings. This study was done in order to gain knowledge of the experience of participants of VOM, as there has been very little research into this topic (Choi et al., 2011). An issue presented by the design of this research study and the Abrams et al. (2006) study, is the use of a very small sample size that is also not representative of the population. This reduces the ability to generalize the findings to the population as a whole.

One of the common themes in the responses of the youth who participated in this study was that the youth overwhelmingly agreed that VOM was not an easy punishment, but that it was a good punishment for them (Choi et al., 2011; Stahlkopf, 2009). A good punishment was outlined by the youth as having provided a significant learning experience, a realization of parts of their crime they were not previously aware of, to better empathize with their victims, and humanize their victims. One of the outcomes of this research study was that it also found that empathy was reached through these sessions between the victim and the offender. The youth also changed their view of the situation during the VOM sessions to one that was more constructive. This empathy and new view of the situation as well as their actions is a result of the youth having met victims of the crime they committed face to face. This new found meaning allowed youth to change their actions in the future for the better (Choi et al., 2011). The effects of VOM that are outlined here are more succinctly summarized by Harris, Walgrave, &
Braithwaite et al. (2004) in his diagram of the loop of RJ. The chain starts with the victim showing compassion and non-condescending distaste for the actions of the offender. On both sides empathy that stems from the participation in VOM conferences radiates out to the victim and the offender. The result of this cycle is that the offender in turn feels empathy for the victim and makes better choices in the future (Harris et al, 2004).

**Youth Offending Teams**

YOTs, programs that were previously mentioned as producing some of RJ’s goals, were shown to have positive outcomes in a study done by Callaghan, Young, Pace, & Vostanis (2003). The sample for this study included seventeen YOT staff members from 2 different YOTs. After the completion of the focus groups with the study participants, themes were analyzed and compared in accordance with the constant comparative method. The purpose of the study was to review responses from YOT staff regarding the addition of a YOT staff member, Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHWs), whose role is to increase collaboration between the YOT and the specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHSs; Callaghan et al., 2003). CAMHSs are specialty mental health service providers whose treatment focus is for a specific mental health concern. Staff members responded in the focus groups that they saw the benefit of having PMHWs on the team and one benefit was more responsive care for YOT youth (Callaghan et al., 2003).

A case study used observation, interviews, and case file analyses in order to better understand the work that the Oxfordshire Youth Offending Teams (YOT) conduct and
whether they produce the outcomes RJ is intended to produce (Stahlkopf, 2009). The study was conducted by obtaining complete access to the Oxfordshire YOT team’s, one in the rural North area of Oxford and another in the cosmopolitan area. The sample included 33 cases in all and over 150 interviews were conducted with participants between age eleven and seventeen. The cases included were 45% minor offenses and 55% major offenses (Stahlkopf, 2009). A Youth Offender Panel (YOP) is created after a youth is ordered to go in front of one that was developed in an effort to hold the offender accountable and develop a plan to provide reparations to the victim. For each youth they look different, but consist of the stakeholders in the matter at hand and those who have insight into the presenting problem, including a YOT member. Youth reported that the experience was a positive one for them, that the referral to the programs was just, and that it was very helpful (Stahlkopf, 2009).

**Circles of Support and Accountability**

Other RJ programs that employ the techniques of RJ circles are COSAs. Core Members (The client) have to agree to participate in the circle, express desire to receive support from the Volunteer Members, and accept the terms of the agreement, or “Covenant” (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007; Duwe, 2013). Typically any where from four to seven Volunteer Members participate in the COSA (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007; Duwe, 2013). A volunteer member informally provides support services, out in the community, or in the offender’s home, and the support can be highly creative and of a broad variety (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007). For example, a COSA meeting can transpire in a coffee shop to discuss how the Core Members’s week went, what they struggled with, what
worked or did not, and strategies they can try in the future. In addition to the “inner circle” of Volunteer Members, there is another group of Volunteer Members that are psychiatrists, law enforcement officers, supervision agents, social service workers, and other professionals (Duwe, 2013). These professionals in the “Outer Circle” are on hand in order to support the Inner Circle Volunteer Members to do their work with Core Members.

COSAs fulfill the goals of RJ by surrounding an offender with support persons, “Volunteer Members”, tasked with creating a supportive environment and relationship between the offender, or “Core Member”, their family and friends, employees of the justice system, other communal resources, and the wider community (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007). Volunteer Members are, as Hannem & Petrunik, (2007) describe, “‘good Samaritans’ who ‘walk with’ the offender” on their journey (p. 160). The Volunteer Members are available at any time during the week, day, or night for support as crises happen. Some of the methods used by Volunteer Members to produce the desired outcomes are: avoid addressing Core Members by labels; focus on the crime and not the perpetrator; understand the context without reducing the role of the offender; identify equally with the goals of the victim, offender, and community; and identify themselves to all participating individuals and other involved individuals, like family members, as upholding the law (Hannem & Petrunik, 2007). In this way, Volunteer Members can support all individuals involved in the crime committed.
Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth’s (RJOY)

RJOY was created with the intention of supporting the institutionalization of
Restorative Justice in Oakland. They have implemented RJ in three Oakland schools,
influenced policy changes in the JJ system and within the OUSD, and provided training
for a variety of different groups of community members. Their goals are to reduce
violence, school suspensions, arrests, and consequently the output of funds into the
justice system. These accomplishments and goals made RJOY the best organization to
support Mayor Libby Schaaf in her goals of creating a Restorative Oakland.

Victim Impact Panels

Victim Impact Panels (VIMs) provide a safe space for victims to express
themselves to the offender, allowing both the offender and the victim a chance to learn
from each other (Fulkerson, 2001). Fulkerson’s study (2001) confirmed through this
interaction, the victim and offender heal and reengage within their community. The
sample consisted of 55 victims and 85 offenders who were interviewed by a panel. This
model of care is an RJ modeled program because it promotes the healing of all parties
involved and works to repair a relationship that has been broken between the victim and
the offender. The study reports that victims and offenders had positive experiences with
the victim impact panel and overwhelmingly stated that a common positive component of
the victim impact panels was awareness (Fulkerson, 2001).

Behavioral Health Needs and Juvenile Justice Involvement

One study by Fazel, Doll & Langstrom (2008) took on the task of reviewing and
analyzing the rate of mental health disorders within the detained juvenile population. The
sample in this meta-analysis included 16,750 youth. This study analyzed 25 surveys conducted by other studies, and reports that 60-80% of detained youth are reported as having at least one mental health disorder. On the contrary, only 15-20% of the general youth population is reported as having a mental health disorder (Fazel, et al., 2008). Van Lier, Der Ende, Koot, & Verhulst, (2007) point out that ADHD, depression, and psychotic illnesses are associated with criminality, the increased possibility of resulting in the development of antisocial behaviors, and determines how detention will affect the child. Other common side effects of mental health challenges are deliberate self-harm and reoffending (Langan, Schmitt, & Durose, 2003).

**Mental Health Disorders and Recidivism**

Behavioral health data as well as juvenile justice involvement data was gathered on 8,363 adolescents 12 months after release from a Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF) during a study done by Aalsma et al. (2015). The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of mental health care administration at JDFs on future outcomes. It was reported that 19.1% of youth screened positive for some form of mental health problems and 25.3% of all detained youth recidivated before 12 months had passed since detention (Aalsma et al., 2015). Although it has been well-documented that youth with mental health needs and youth who use substances are more likely to become incarcerated and to recidivate at higher rates, after having been released from JDF only 15.3% of youth were recommended for mental health services (Aalsma et al, 2015). According to Aalsma, et al. (2015), mental health disorders were most predictive of a youth’s future juvenile justice involvement. Substance use and dependence can be used to predict the liklihood
that a youth will be rearrested on a substance use charge (Aalsma et al., 2015; Collins et al., 2011). The Aalsma et al. (2015) study is significant because it confirms that youth who have mental health concerns and youth who use substances should receive treatment while detained before and after they are released from JDF.

Colins and associates (2011) conducted a study that furthered the knowledge base on juvenile incarceration and its association with mental health disorders. They interviewed 232 male incarcerated youth at three JDF’s by university students in their final year who were trained in the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children, Version IV (DISC-IV). Two to four years after the initial interview, information was gathered on the recidivism of the youth who did recidivate and 82%, or 191 youth, were rearrested. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between mental health disorders and criminal recidivism. In the Colins et al. (2011) longitudinal study it was found that the use of substances by incarcerated youth was one of the most telling signs that they would commit another substance use offense after release from incarceration.

**Mental Health Disorders and Initial Juvenile Justice Contact**

Building upon the known correlation between mental health disorders and recidivism rates, this next study examined more in depth the effect of individual mental health disorders on adolescents’ initial contact with the juvenile justice system and later recidivism (Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012; Aalsma et al., 2015). The examined data was gathered from a sample of 5,720 youth age 7 to 17 in Florida between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005 who had been removed from their homes and relocated to an out-of-home placement due to maltreatment experience in their homes of origin. The results of this
study confirmed that the presence of depression, conduct disorder, ADHD, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse disorder produces an increased likelihood of the individual having contact with the juvenile justice system (Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012). The variable that had the strongest positive significant association with juvenile justice contact was that the youth had received a Conduct Disorder diagnosis. Youth who had a Conduct Disorder diagnosis were five times more likely to have contact with the juvenile justice system when compared with youth who had no mental illness.

In the sense of healing for all parties as prescribed by RJ it follows, based on the aforementioned data, that if a child suffers from a mental health disorder that has been untreated, the treatment of this condition should be provided to youth for the good of all parties involved. Aalsma et al. (2015), reports that out of 4,527 youth, 1,079 youth screened positive for mental health symptoms, and only 16.3% of those youth receive mental health services while detained. Only 11.6% of youth in the same sample were mandated to participate in mental health assessment in the community upon release and even more disturbing, only 1.8% of youth who were experiencing symptoms that were indicative of possible mental health disorders, received a mental health assessment while detained. Although mental health referrals were received by 30.8% of the sample youth and 31.6% of those reporting suicidal ideation were placed on suicidal precaution, integrative mental health services more often should be provided within the JDF facilities; the rate of youth (those identified as requiring services) receiving services while detained was a deplorable 39.3% of the identified youth (Aalsma et al., 2015).
Restorative Justice Programs and Improved Mental Health

One study confirmed that recidivism rates have been lowered since the last study was done on the effectiveness of Circles of Support and Accountability (COSAs; Wilson, Cartoni, & McWhinnie, 2009). The study used a sample of 44 offenders who participated in COSAs and 44 offenders who did not participate in COSAs in order to reproduce the results of a previous study. This study found at the 35 month check-in that recidivism, measured as a charge or conviction for a new offense, that COSAs produced an 83% reduction in sexual recidivism, 73% reduction in violent recidivism, 71% reduction in overall recidivism in comparison to their counterparts. These results show that COSAs are effective in reducing sexual recidivism. These results were higher than the study that Wilson, Cartoni, and McWhinnie (2009) conducted.

In another study, a pilot reentry program revealed RJ principles as reducing the re-offense rate of mental health sexual disorders as well as reducing incarceration recidivism rates (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). These programs increase the rate of successful reentry into the community, while also securing public safety (Duwe, 2013). A randomized controlled trial evaluated the effect of Minnesota COSAs (MnCOSAs) on sex offender recidivism rates by gathering recidivism data on 62 sex offenders after release from incarceration, comparing the data of the members in the control group to those who participated in MnCOSAs during their incarceration (Duwe, 2013). The study found that those offenders in the control group had significantly higher recidivism rates (65% were rearrested) than those who participated in MnCOSAs (39% were rearrested). MnCOSAs were also proven to be more cost-effective in that providing the services cost
less ($450,000) than not providing the services and having to pay for the incarceration of the individual again ($800,000), thus proving the case that recidivism rates, although not the main goal of RJ, can be reduced by implementing programs that employ RJ principles (Duwe, 2013).

**School to Prison Pipeline**

Ladson-Billings (2006), stated that “Our supreme reliance on individual’s means that we look at students as individually responsible for their success in school. We lack complex understandings of how individual, family, community, school and societal factors interact to create school failure for some students” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 103). Some students are pushed further down the ladder of success due to the conditions they face in schools while others are conversely pushed up the ladder of success. Currently the school system puts up barriers, such as ability grouping, zero tolerance policies, less resources to urban schools, hidden curriculum, credentialism and pervasive racist views that make it harder for youth to make it out of their circumstances (Wachtel, 2013).

Education has the ability to transform the life of a person from one of hardship and pain to one of success and healing. Unfortunately, school conditions were created based, not on meritocracy values, but on values of furthering the gain of those currently in the affluent position. The Act called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) put into place to raise the education attainment ability of youth who were at risk of failing or dropping out, made it harder for youth who need help to do well in middle school and high school and go on to obtain higher education (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). The education
system serves as a pipeline for some youth to incarceration and increasingly worse circumstances rather than a ticket out of poverty. The NCLB was created with good intentions, of closing the achievement gap between White students from affluent backgrounds and youth from poor families who were at risk of academic failure, but has many disadvantages (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009).

The objective was to have a hundred percent of all youth passing the standards for math and reading that were set by each state. The standards were measured by periodically testing students and comparing their scores with the previous class scores (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). The resulting ability grouping based on the scores received from the standardized tests rather than address them, creates more of a problem out of circumstances faced by the youth. The practice of ability grouping, or tracking, separates youth into groups based on their abilities, rather than challenging all students beyond their “abilities” (Laprade, 2011). Ability groups are honors and remedial classes, special education classes, and English as a second language classes. These groups tend to separate the students based on their economic status. “Poor and minority students are assigned to remedial and vocational skills classes where they receive a diluted academic program making it unlikely that they will ever catch up to their white, middle-class peers” (Johnson & Rhodes, 2010, p 7). NCLB unfortunately increased the academic achievement gap between disadvantaged and affluent students.

Zero tolerance policies, police presence, No Child Left Behind testing practices, and harsh punishment, for example; expulsions, in and out of school suspensions for minor misbehavior can be seen as similar to mandatory minimums that are enforced in
the criminal justice system (Wachtel, 2013). Mandatory minimums take the crime and generalize the punishment for every instance of that crime rather than using a case-by-case system. Just how mandatory minimums enforce unfair punishment for crimes, so do zero tolerance policies for minor misbehavior that used to be handled on a case-by-case matter in school. Zero tolerance policy that has brought police power on school campuses has given schools the right to send youth to juvenile hall rather than solving issues on school grounds (Wachtel, 2013). The labels that are placed upon youth who are sent to juvenile hall for minor misbehavior, that follow them and perpetuate their separation from school and lack of ability to participate in higher education.

In Summary, there have been very few studies that analyze the narratives of youth that discuss restorative justice and the needs of youth (Abrams et al., 2006; Fazel, et al., 2008). It becomes clear through discussions with youth that RJ programs would eliminate the issues that youth are expressing. RJ themes of taking responsibility, cooperation and collaboration, respect, future orientation, honesty, and honor are not beyond the understanding and intention of youth. These values are held by many youth who participated in this study. Speaking with youth allows all to better understand that youth desire the same things as most adults and youth also have ideas of solutions to the troubles of the community. There is still a lack of understanding by adults of the problems that youth face and in that case not enough solutions in place to reduce those concerns. Although there is evidence that RJ practices produce the desired positive results, there is still a lack of clear definition as to what RJ is and how it should be practiced. The problems and solutions outlined in this study can provide insight into how
best RJ can be practiced to come closer to eliminating youth concerns. This study will provide some insight into problems and solutions from the perspective of youth themselves.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The Mayor of Oakland, Libby Schaaf, during her first hundred days of office in 2015, requested that Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY) conduct ten RJ Peer COSAs with 100 youth. RJOY is an organization that was founded in an effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, saving the lives and minds of many young children. Prison, the last stop on the school-to-prison pipeline, is precipitated by many factors that reduce the capability of youth to participate in pro-social activities. Part of RJOY’s mission states that the organization promotes the institutionalization of restorative practices to repair harms done and reduce the reoffending of youth. RJOY’s mission statement made the organization a good fit for the Mayor of Oakland to employ in her fact-finding mission on what was needed to create a restorative city in Oakland. The circles were done with the desired outcome of sharing the information gathered to inform the new mayor of the plight of inner city youth with limited resources and access to power.

Study Design

This study is an exploratory, qualitative study that analyzes the themes found in the 8 available transcripts of the 10 RJ circles conducted at the Oakland Unified School District Office (OUSD), Alliance Academy, Oakland High School, Bret Harte Middle School, Ralph Bunche Continuation High School, West Oakland Middle School (WOM), Coliseum College Prep Academy (CCPA), and Dewey Academy. This study collected data through a circle process of interviewing these eight groups of youth. Mayor Schaaf
was present in these circles and expressed understanding, care, and concern for the City of Oakland and the youth present in the circles. Not only did she express concern, but also some ideas were expressed in these circles that Mayor Schaaf affirmed that she would work on putting into practice. The topic of the circles was identified issues that youth face today. The study was conducted with the working hypothesis that youth are facing issues that reduce their capacity for participation in pro-social activities.

**Sampling Procedures**

The participating youth, ages 15 to 20, only participated in one circle each. The participating youth were identified by RJOY based upon the relationships of RJOY and being the most marginalized youth in Oakland relative to race, income, and incarceration history. Convenience and representative sampling methods were used rather than a random sampling procedure as not to violate the confidentiality of the protected population of young people. To increase the diversity of the participants, and the generalizability of the findings, youth from different schools were included and they came from different neighborhoods around Oakland. A small sample was ideal for this research due to the level of detailed manual analysis required to complete the project.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Through circle interviews, the data was collected from the youth by RJOY employees and prepared by the organization to be analyzed by a third party. The researcher contacted a member of the organization RJOY, and petitioned to receive the previously collected data. In order to receive the data, the researcher presented the RJOY employee with the specific nature of the project and the reasons that the research was
being conducted. The data was received electronically and stored on the researcher’s computer until the completion of the project.

**Instrument and Measurement**

Groups of guiding questions that the youth were asked were in regards to their impression of their neighborhood and community, what the mayor could do to work with the youth, feeling safe in Oakland, their values, and how they would like to be treated by police. One of the central themes of the surveys was the value of respect. One of the questions the mayor posed asked students what adults can do to support youth to receive respect. The youth were given a chance to ask the mayor questions and the mayor gave open and honest responses to the youth, providing them with stories of Mayor Schaaf’s own human experience. These questions were constructed with the intention of providing an opportunity for the Mayor to hear what youth had to say and to build a relationship with them.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received an application that detailed the exact methods, sample, risk level, and reason for the research project. The IRB at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), approved this research and deemed it to pose no risk to human subjects as it was a secondary data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

This researcher used content analysis to analyze the data from these circles, looking for common themes among them, and reporting these findings for this research project. The responses that were documented in frequency tables for synthesized analysis
included only the youth’s responses. The researcher’s purpose for reviewing the transcripts was to determine what needs are not being met by the community and what needs to be done to improve positive youth outcomes either through Peer COSAs or through other programs. The data analyzed were the transcripts of the Circles. The researcher examined the data and counted how many times a concept was entered into the records and highlighted themes that are found within the youth statements. Data is organized into tables and presented along with a summary of the findings and the researcher’s interpretation of the data.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Youth from eight Oakland schools were surveyed through interview questions that were conducted in group, circular format in 2015. The researcher sought to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the needs of youth. This study provided a platform for youth to express what they needed to be successful. Participants provided solutions to many of the concerns they had and expressed a desire to help create structural change in their community. The responses in each frequency table are from multiple combinations of high school populations and were chosen based on the questions that were asked of each RJ school circle. Some frequency tables include responses to multiple questions along the same topic and were consolidated into one table. Although, the transcripts reflect responses from adults, including adult advocates, the mayor herself, police staff, teachers, and members of the mayor’s staff, the researcher took precautions to exclude the responses from any adult participant from the frequency tables. Unless otherwise stated, all responses that are referenced are those of the student participants.

Overall Findings

RJ has the ability to create and strengthen communication and collaboration between parties that under normal circumstances would not do so and the ability to reduce recidivism rates. The respondents’ focus on strong community ties and youth involvement, along with their desire for youth programs, confirms a need for RJ practices within the city. Many of the responses to questions posed by the facilitators, expressed a need for youth programs that divert juveniles from participation in criminal activities to
interests in being productive citizens. By asking for youth programs, respondents were asking for support from their community. Support was also suggested by the youth to be provided in other forms including that of education opportunities, career education, and support from individual community members. Throughout the study, participants voiced their needs and the needs of their community as well as their motivation towards changing their own behavior.

**Where Youth Feel Safe in Oakland**

The facilitator asked the group “Where do you feel safe in Oakland?” Youth responded that they felt most safe in their homes, or the homes of their families (33%), with family (21%), and nowhere (12%). They did not feel safe outside of their homes or neighborhoods. There were 5% of youth who did not feel safe at home and 7% of youth stated that they felt safe all over Oakland. Contrary to belief, youth are most comfortable at home with their family.
Where Youth Don’t Feel Safe in Oakland

Participants’ responses to the question “where don’t you feel safe in Oakland?” were at night (41%), in certain neighborhoods (27%), and in uncertainty (27%). It should be noted that 5% of youth also answered that there was nowhere they did not feel safe in Oakland. One youth was afraid “at night as a woman”, fearing that her femininity put her at risk at night. Another said in “environments [they] can’t control”, indicative of their fear of uncertain situations. Certain neighborhoods like “the 60’s”, East Oakland, and the Oakland hills were mentioned places the respondents did not feel safe in.

Table 1

Where Do You Feel Safe In Oakland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowhere</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Around Oakland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everywhere</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from Alliance Academy and Dewey Academy circles*
Table 2

_Where Don’t You Feel Safe In Oakland?_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At Night</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain Neighborhoods</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Uncertainty</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nowhere</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from the Alliance Academy circle*

**Youths’ Strengths**

Table three includes responses to the question “when you see an Oakland youth what do you see?” Analysis of the responses shows that youth are and have the capacity to be smart (12%), strong (14%), caring, respectful, understanding and empathetic, creative, valuable to their community (6%), and diverse (8%). They also felt misunderstood (4%). Many of the responses reflect the respondents’ intelligence, kindness, needs (26%), resilience, and worth. Needs were expressed through comments of “disadvantages”, “some [youth] crying out for help and some giving up”, and “guidance”. Participants spoke to their strengths almost as much as their needs. One participant in their statement questioned, “what have [youth] been surrounded with? What have they gone through?”, thus acknowledging that youth have needs and strengths. One youth commented that when they see an Oakland youth they see “someone who deserves to have all of the opportunities”. Another youth said they saw “a successful person”. Respondents also commented on their “strength” (14%), nature as “survivors”,
and their “crazy courage”. Two other common responses were that youth saw themselves as community and family and as hope and future.

Table 3

*What You See When You See Oakland Youth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community/Family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart/Capable</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from Bret Harte Middle School and Oakland High School circles*

**Youths’ Values**

Youth were asked what they valued, what values they brought to the circle and what family meant to them and the answers were included in Table 4. After respect (35%), youth most often stated that they valued strength (23%), honesty (13%), and loyalty (9%). Their values overwhelmingly show desire for being respected for their abilities and respect for others. They admit that “labels are bad, whether they are about police or African Americans or youth. A world without labels would be really good. The respondents also saw the value in having a “support system, people you can always
depend on to guide you the right way” and “people you can open up to, that you can always connect with, that they are always there for you”.

Table 4

Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses from Alliance Academy, Bret Harte Middle School, and Ralph Bunche Continuation High School circles

Activities Youth Enjoy

Youth were asked “what is a fun thing [they] do in [their] neighborhood”, and “if you could be anywhere in the world, where would you be?” The activities that they identified were travel (39%), outside activities (23%), and family (14%). Family was again one of the top responses showing that the values youth identified in these circles
along with the enjoyable activities they named, highlight their craving for support, partnership, and participation in high and low energy activities.

Table 5

*Youth Enjoy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Activities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Fun</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/Active Activities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from Alliance Academy circle*

**Value About Oakland**

The following responses are to the questions, “what does Oakland do well?”, “what do [they] love about Oakland?”, “what is valuable about Oakland and the people in it?”, and “what would it mean to you if you couldn’t live in Oakland due to things outside of your control?” Although the youth called for changes within the city of Oakland, they also recognized that Oakland had significant value. They saw value in the richness that stemmed from diversity. Diversity of people (“diversity/people from everywhere” or “different types of culture”), music and art (35%). The people of Oakland were recognized as giving value to Oakland (28%). Youth were quoted saying statements such as, “people are really willing to work together to make a change, and also people are
really accepting of each other’s differences.” This quote marks not only the inner strength of the community, but also Oakland’s resilience as a city. Another youth stated that “[Oakland] gives you hope and it inspires you”. Youth called for more opportunities for Oakland citizens, but also cognizant of the presence of some opportunities that Oakland provided (9%).

Table 6

*Value About Oakland*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People of Oakland</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience/Perseverance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Responses from Bret Harte Middle School, All City (OUSD), West Oakland Middle School, Coliseum College Preparatory Academy, and Dewey Academy circles

**How Oakland Would Feel if Human**

Youth were asked “If Oakland were a person, how would Oakland feel?” and “how does Oakland feel?” Although the students responded that they felt Oakland would feel futuristic (17%) and hurt (17%), they also believe that Oakland would feel proud (14%) and respected (2%). Youth identified with youth by responding Oakland would feel like Oakland youth did, misunderstood (5%), strong, (5%), and diverse (5%). The respondents also believed that if human, Oakland would feel ready for change (2%).
Table 7

*How Oakland Would Feel if Human*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loved</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ready For Change</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Responses from Bret Harte Middle School, All City (OUSD), Ralph Bunche Continuation High School, West Oakland Middle School, and Dewey Academy circles

**Changes to Oakland**

Youth in the study responded to questions like “what do you want to change about Oakland”, “what would the ideal Oakland look like?”, “what are your biggest fears about living in Oakland?”, “what do we need to grow and change?”, “what needs to happen for youth to put their differences aside and come together”, and “how can Oakland be safe or better?” Their responses included wanting to be part of the decision-making process, stating that they desired a “type of structure where there is a student advisor” and that
“they would communicate with other student reps around the city. That student advisor would have a role and they could come to [Mayor Libby Schaaf] with [youths’] concerns. It would be effective, because students would start feeling like they have a say”.

Some of the highest frequencies, in regards to changes that participants believed needed to be made to Oakland, were community building (25%), opportunities (14%), safety procedures (11%), and a reduction in violence or criminality (9%). With the highest frequency in any category of Table 8 being community building, it can be noted that the youth value strong communities. These community values include peace, security, accountability for their actions, and for all individuals that make up the community. Community building included a desire, and ideas for creating a better relationship with police officers.

Community building also included youth programs and citywide beautification projects (Remodeling was mentioned by 8% of respondents). The participants desired more beauty in their city and safer places to gather for recreation without worry or fear. Other responses within the area of community building were centered on structural and procedural changes within the Oakland Police Department (OPD) and also within their city management. Community activities, like barbeques were mentioned in terms of ideas for community building and familiarity. Beyond community building activities, youth participants felt that individual advancement would make the city safer for everybody: “bettering yourself and the people around you” were important, as well as being able to “communicate with everybody”.
Table 8

*Changes to Oakland*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor/Respect</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Activity</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remodeling</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Programs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care For The Homeless</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>405</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from all eight circles*

**Changes to Oakland Police Department**

Some of the questions included in this section are “what are ways people can feel safe with the police?”, “how do we improve the relationship between the police and the community in Oakland?”, “how do youth want to be treated by cops?”, and “how do you feel when an unarmed person get’s shot and killed by the police?” The top four responses regarding concerns the youth had surrounding police treatment towards community members, were familiarity of police with the community and vice versa or humanizing treatment (30%), understanding (24%) and respect (10%) between both parties, and police training and multicultural policies (11%). One response called for police officers’ biases to be recognized and challenged. The student stated: “everyone
has their bias”, and “first you have to be able to acknowledge something before you can fix it. Police are not there to contain; they are here to protect us”.

Other students called for trainings, “or even just conversations that police officers get to have with the community – consistent conversations”, “multicultural policy”, as well as “student led trainings” to “start supporting [police] into their change,” and trainings for the students themselves to understand police officers’ policies, procedures, thought processes, and in general to become more familiar and empathetic with police officers. Justice was another theme, but was only mentioned at a 6% rate of all concerns and responses regarding police treatment. A shared understanding between police officers and young and people in the community appeared in the data 38 times. This is captured in the following youth statement “better understanding between police and community and community and police”.

Familiarity between police and the community was another common theme. The importance of this familiarity was stated 48 times within the data in statements such as “they should start talking to the kids at school more”, or stating that police should have a more friendly demeanor and have conversations with community members so that both parties to get to know the other as “a person”. They asked for more opportunities to candidly speak with officers and see them out of uniform, the uniform was seen to be intimidating and power assertive. Familiarity was further captured when students stated that they would like “more police from Oakland”, because “each area is completely different”, and that “people are different within it”. They also mention that having familiar faces from the community as police officers would help the relationship between
community members and police officers. They also recognized that police officers also
have families and that “when they in the streets, you have to put yourself in their
position” and that “people need to see each other’s humanity”.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity/Humanizing</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/multicultural policies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectfully</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring of The OPD Force</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Hope</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/O Fear/Worry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Guns</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses from All City (OUSD), Alliance Academy, Bret Harte Middle School, Coliseum College Preparatory Academy, Oakland High School, and Dewey Academy circles

Youths’ Needs

When participants were asked “how do you want the mayor of Oakland to work
with youth?” and “what is the ideal relationship of power between mayor and students
when making big changes in the community?”, one student said that the “Ideal place
would be to not think of [Mayor Libby Schaaf] as the mayor – but as a person, to have
mayor in community and in schools”. Of the student participants, 9% wanted to see the mayor in the community and more accessible to youth. Collaboration (23%) not only between the youth and mayor, but also from all community members; including youth, police, and other community officials, and members was mentioned in the responses. Also mentioned here was a need for youth programs (9%).

Table 10

*How The Mayor Should Work With Youth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Support</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Programs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Mayor to be Seen in Community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help/Opportunities to Travel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses from All City (OUSD) and Alliance Academy circles*

**How Youth Felt After the Circles**

In the Ashe (closing) circles, the youth were asked for one appreciation, one word about what we are going to take away from this circle, for three closing words, how they were feeling after they had this conversation, and how they were feeling at the end of the circle. At the closing of the circles, the youth felt accomplished (27%), respected (20%), and that collaboration happened and was possible (16%). An overwhelming feeling of possibility and change was expressed in the Closing, Ashe Circle. Ashe is a Yoruba phrase, referring to the creative power to create change, and affirming that the change
will happen. Youth overwhelmingly stated a desire for follow up in order to hear what was said in other circles (76% of 21 responding youth), have a discussion where they can give additional feedback to the Mayor (57% of responding youth), find out ways to stay involved & engaged (38% of responding youth), learn about job & leadership opportunities (57% of responding youth), tour City Hall (43% of responding youth), and tour a Police Station (14% of responding youth).

Table 11

*Closing Ashe Circle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Responses from All City (OUSD), Bret Harte Middle School, Coliseum College Preparatory Academy, Oakland High School, Ralph Bunche Continuation High School, and Dewey Academy circles

**Overall Themes**

The data show that youth desire and identify both a need to be heard in a respectful way, and a need to be respected (32%) by adults especially government officials for their ideas and input. In half of the frequency tables (6), respect as a value and a need was a central theme. They recognize that what the mayor decides and
implements within the community affects youth, and for them to be supported and feel valued, they ask that their opinions be sought out, respected, and put into practice as a catalyst for change. Collaboration was another frequent response (7%), showing that for them, being heard goes beyond simply being respected: they would like to “impact all lives”. Many of the youth placed value on their commitment to family (7%), stating that “I’d like to consider myself as a family oriented person”, and commented that they wanted things to be different for the safety and future of their family members. One such response was that “I’m afraid that harm will come to my family or my community”. Youth also expressed future orientation (10%).

Participant interviews indicated an understanding that youth violence and gang involvement is often times the result of lacking opportunities for other pro-social activities. Lacking opportunities or a need for more opportunities was mentioned in 18% of the responses and the need for youth programs was stated by 8% of interviewees. Similar to other responses, a youth stated that the solution to gang violence was to “keep our youth off the street in any possible way, meaning youth jobs, sports – more things that certain youth would be interested in. Keep their minds on the right track, so that they don’t get sidetracked from what they want to do, so that they can achieve what they want to achieve”. Other students asked for safe places for youth to hang out, play, and obtain support. Some students were interested in internships and others in job training opportunities. The responses reflect that youth are asking for more positive places and activities for involvement. They see the value in this and are asking for these opportunities.
Table 12

*Tots of Specific Themes Across All Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Programs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Orientation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Training</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>367</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative Findings From Mayor’s Questions and Input**

The Mayor’s questions and her answers display her strong interest in hearing and understanding participant concerns, and a commitment to meeting the needs identified by these interviews. This is evident in her response to a challenge by one student who wanted “to know if (Mayor Libby Schaaf was) actually gonna go and try to do something with what [the youth] told [Mayor Libby Schaaf], or what any of the other kids in the schools have told you. Or just come here to pretend like you’re listening to us and do something”. The mayor responded by saying that “I hear just a lot of cynicism and bitterness and lack of hope, and I just wanna respect that”.

Mayor Libby Schaaf’s response shows respect for youths’ statements and she goes on to say “and again I’m not the mayor today, I’m Libby, person not the position” and “all I can do is talk to you about what I’m doing to try and change.” And then circle
back with you and listen to hear if you think it made any difference.” Another question
the mayor posed to the students that showed here respect for them was “I saw a lot of you
ask for respect, how can adults help you get that respect?” One response characteristic of
the group’s responses was “respect is a privilege; earn respect through your actions”.

The Mayor affirms that she will try to provide opportunities for youth to sit on
interview panels for police hiring as suggested by the youth in this circle. She recognizes
that the youth need and want to see actual change in her statement, “I don’t expect you to
believe that it’s a new police department until you give us some time to prove that, but
we just became, this year, the first police department in the state of California, to have a
training that was co-designed by community members and community members actually
教 part of the training to officers”. In this statement, Mayor Libby Schaaf offers hope
to the youth that their idea of being part of the solution to the relationship building by
being part of the training provision could become a reality. It is evident that Mayor
Libby Schaaf believes in the potential of young community members by her statement, “I
hope you do recognize how much power you have, you can complain about the police
department or you can be the police department – talk about power! I wish you could see
what I see – engineers, police chief in here. Don’t underestimate that, part of why I won
to be mayor was because I had 60 youth working on my campaign”.

She validates youth’s concerns by expressing that her “impression is that youth in
Oakland are pretty stressed”. She also refers to the youth in Oakland as in “need of more
social capitol”, meaning that they required more adults who understood them and
supported them. Mayor Libby Schaaf showed that she cared and desired to support youth
when she posed the question “does anyone have a suggestion for me about how I should be keeping Oakland diverse?” to the group. The youth throughout the circles had mentioned that Oakland was losing its culture and diversity, mentioning that they were seeing less people that looked like them and less people who felt like community to them. There were no responses to this question.

Summary

After thorough analysis of the data, it is clear to the researcher that RJ programs that encourage youth to engage in accountability, help repair broken relationships, and allow parties to learn from their experiences can yield important information for community advocates, policy makers and funders. The youth in the RJOY circles speak to their needs and their community’s needs, with a focus on solutions, with youth playing a central role themselves. The youth show that they are capable of being insightful and empathetic. Several youth expressed that they had no hope for the future of their community, but the majority of the responses reflect that they are not only hopeful, but also motivated to support the community that they call home. Youth mentioned that Oakland made them and was a reflection of who they were. They expressed that the well-being of their community was very important to them and that just like family, they were loyal and committed to supporting their city.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

The data challenge the notion of a negative impression of inner-city, low-income youth. The idea that youth are not smart, incapable of higher thinking and functioning, and lack desire to live a pro-social life is not evidenced by these findings. The respondents in this study challenge this by providing evidence that they enjoy and thrive in home life, future thinking, positive youth programs, having needs met, reciprocal respect, familiarity with police and the community as a whole, community building, diversity, travel opportunities and most importantly from feelings of accomplishment that were expressed at the end of the circles. The respondents spoke highly about collaboration and about accountability; this leads the researcher to believe that youth not only desire pro-social life and harmony, they desire and have ideas about how they can be part of making that a reality.

Participants spoke about what they needed, but they also often spoke about what the community and society as a whole needed to be more harmonious. Their ideas reflect their desire to repair and have strong relationships with their community. They are tied to their community and want it to be in a place that they are proud to thrive in and to ensure that there are opportunities for all. Their comments expressed the need for support for the whole community. They see that Oakland has a lot of potential and although there were more responses to the changes that they desired to see in Oakland than valuable attributes to Oakland, they still have a positive view of Oakland. Community building was the biggest change they desired, which shows that they valued relationships and
The diversity of Oakland and its citizens were the most often expressed values of Oakland. This reflects that youth value human capitol. Social capitol is another theme that the youth provide in the circles. They talked about a need for community programs including programs for youth, support for the homeless, and education available for all community members. One student posed the question “how can we help [homeless people]?”, recognizing the responsibility of the community to provide support for their members. In regards to education, it was commented that it was out of reach of some youth, but it’s also “not the fact that kids grow up and don’t go to college and be successful, it’s them not knowing that they could go to college and be successful”. In this statement, the youth again refers to the support of social capitol in meeting the needs of youth. This statement refers to the issue of disparate expectations and support for higher education.

It is surprising that a need for reduction in violence and criminal activities were not talked about more often in light of Oakland’s reputation for not being safe. Even when the youth were talking about the changes within their community, they focused more on the solution than the problem. They saw that there were not enough strong relationships within the community and this was most concerning to them. When it came to their individual needs, this theme came up seventh to community building. Indicating their thoughtfulness and communal values. Safety was also mentioned and was the third most common response in Changes to Oakland (Table 7), but was only 11% of the responses. A quarter of the responses being community building (Table 7) leads one to

unity.
question the idea of how dangerous it is to live in Oakland and perhaps there is a conflicting understanding from within and outside the community.

One can see that youth actually have a desire to have peace within their communities. They would like to be agents for change, and they have many creative and thoughtful ideas to create the change they would like to see. From this information, the researcher concludes that youth in fact are very important assets in the community, because they can and are willing to provide support for eliminating violence, they are also interested in supporting the process of building relationships between community members, and between community members and agencies.

**Summary of Study**

The findings in this research project provide specific instances of youth expressing their needs and the needs of their community. Through analysis of their responses one can gain a better understanding of how to meet the needs of youth. This research project also provided insight into youth identified solutions for meeting the needs of youth as well as for their community. The main 2 themes that can be drawn from the data are the need for respect and stronger relationships between the youth and their community. The youth provided ideas like casual community gatherings, beautification projects to bring people out into the city for socialization, social support programs for community members, sensitivity trainings for all community members including government officials and civil servants, empathy for individuals as human beings, and for open and honest communication between all community members. The youth show in their statements that they do have hope for the future and have the
motivation and capability to have a positive impact on their futures and the future of their community.

Youth responses that mention youth programs to keep youth out of the streets, gang violence, and support their participation in pro-social activities, allude to some of the restorative programs already in place that the courts refer many youth to. The statements made by youth are not completely new, but coming from youth, the ideas expressed here are more powerful because youth know themselves. In social work, the provider is encouraged to meet the client where they are at, take care of the needs that the client identifies and allow the client to provide solutions and implement their own solutions for the presenting problem. The same is true in this instance. Youth are the clients, delinquency is the presenting problem, and they are stating what they know is needed to offer viable solutions to the problem of delinquency and recidivism. Youth also mentioned restorative solutions to broader issues in the community, referencing the need for wide-scale community based restorative practices.

Youth in this study expressed how important their voices and efforts are in the process of righting wrongs, meeting needs, and in repairing and building relationships. Their input and human resources are exactly what is needed to complete these tasks. Youth state throughout these circles that they are ready, willing, and capable of effecting change within their community. With youth in the JJ system and occupied with gang and criminal activities, the community has a lot of assets that are not being explored or used for the benefit of the community. However, the JJ system is supported and that system, as noted by the youth, does not solve the problem of delinquency, allowing for the cycle
of criminality to continue. This “pipeline” to incarceration takes away valuable resources from the community twice: by diverting funds from community building projects into the JJ system and by removing human resources from the community. The fact that these resources are not being nurtured does not mean that there is no hope of salvaging them.

**Implications for Social Work Practice**

This research provides support for the healing nature of the social work value of dignity and worth of the person, by allowing the youth in the circles to express their concerns and exercise their agency and record their responses of positivity at the close of the circles. Research presented here supports the wide-scale implementation and support of RJ practices because the practices and programs that employ them, acknowledge the importance of human relationships. Youth mentioned in their responses the importance of relationships in their lives, between community members, entities, and their family members. One solution that they provided multiple times was the building of relationships and communication. At the end of the circles, the youths’ desires to be respected, understood, and supported were satisfied and they left feeling that they had been part of the solution and they were hopeful for positive change.

The participants also indicated their alliance with the social work competencies outlined in the Counsel on Social Work Education (CSWE). They articulated solutions that demonstrate understanding of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation of practices with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (Competencies 6,7,8 & 9; CSWE, 2015). Competencies 2 and 3 were portrayed by youth when they spoke about diversity, and the lack of it, within their community members and
officials. Respondents requested opportunities for diversity to be expressed and explored. They requested support for small businesses, for financial support to allow families to stay in their neighborhood, for social community events to bring the community closer together, and cultural policies and procedures for police officers. This engagement of diversity and difference in practice captures the essence of the second competency. The third competency, to advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice, is voiced in their desires for just and humane treatment for all people.

Youth advocate involvement in the implementation, design, and evaluation of community programs would be supportive of positive change within the community and within youth themselves. With their service and integrity, youth are capable of providing resources that allow for social justice. Consistent with the social work values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence; youth participants indicate by their responses that they hold these values. Throughout the data, youth express their desire to live out these values in their lives in a way that supports bringing peace and harmony to their city. Youth show competence based on their experiences in their eloquent comments regarding the nature of the problem and the solutions, their capacity for working together towards shared goals. After studying the data, a need for more policies and procedures that employ youth in decision making processes and implementation of community building interventions was concluded.

Study participants also captured the essence of RJ principles, represented in their
responses. The youth in this study highlighted their need for mental health support and other supportive individuals within and outside of youth programs. This idea was illustrated when they stated that they needed a “support system, people you can always depend on to guide you the right way”, and “people you can open up to, that you can always connect with, that they are always there for you basically”. Another concept the youth elicited understanding of was that the community needed to come together in order to meet the needs of all community members. Along with discussion of a deficiency in experiences outside of the classroom that prepared them for prosocial life, participants intuitively testified to the deficiency in the use of enough restorative justice programs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher suggests increasing the sample size of this research project in the future, and increasing the participation from more communities, including youth who are in other RJ programs within the JJ system, and randomizing the selection of participants. In the future, the researcher suggests that the questions be more standardized to increase the sample size for each response, obtain diversity in the participants responding, and for the ease of categorizing responses and organizing the data in a visual manner. More high-tech recording equipment would also be beneficial for the research to be more complete and representative of the youths’ concerns or at least a different transcription method to capture all of the responses and identify whether the speaker is a youth or an adult.

**Study Limitations**

The strengths of qualitative research allowed the researcher to glean a more
representative and wholesome understanding of the responses obtained through the circles. A qualitative approach to this research project also provided opportunities for the mayor to respond to her young constituents and ask them questions as well. In this manner, continuous feedback between the mayor and the respondents was allowed and encouraged and the mayor demonstrated to the youth that she respected their humanity, valued their ideas and opinions, and was motivated and committed to establishing systemic change throughout the city. The nature of the research as exploratory, called for more free-flowing data collection procedures to elicit responses that would guide further research on this subject.

The frequencies of responses can vary based on the categorization, which is dependent upon the lens of the researcher. Another researcher may put different statements into different categories or choose different categories altogether. Some of the responses don’t fall into any of the categories and those are hard to present in a visual form for the ease of the reader. In qualitative research it is also beyond the capacity of the researcher to impose strict methods of analysis. Furthermore, the quantity of data for qualitative research analyses is extensive and requires more time to analyze than quantitative data of the same volume, as qualitative data is analyzed primarily without the assistance of software.

The data was limited in its generalizability due to the small sample size and the concentration of the participants in Oakland, as well as the lack of random participant selection. There were limitations in the gathering of the data as the respondents were not randomly selected for participation and there were gaps in the transcripts due to problems.
in the transcription process. Some adult responses were not marked as such, causing difficulties in elimination of all adult responses in the frequency tables. The researcher took measures to eliminate these responses by picking up on clues within the text that this was not the response of a youth respondent. Without the recorded tapes of the circles, the researcher can only guess and assume, allowing for the possibility of error.

**Conclusion**

The research here presents a very different view of youth and their capacities than that which society upholds. This view, as expressed by the youth, holds them back from being knowledgeable, pro-social, and active members within their community. They express in the circles a strong desire and motivation to be the hand of change in their community for themselves, their family, and the well being of their community as a whole. The youth participants expressed in their responses a strengths-based and solution-focused view of the problems they were discussing in the circles. Coming from youth, this viewpoint is surprising because of the view that society has of youth. They are seen as delinquent of their own will and hardened, when in fact they are intelligent and caring human beings with the same desires and needs as adults. The researcher was amazed by the comments made by the youth because they were so profound and insightful.

Participants mentioned ideas and solutions that were creative and thoughtful, based in restorative justice principles and indicative of their desire to change their own behavior and redirect their focus to prosocial and community building activities. These students were pleading to be accepted for their intelligence and respected like adults for
their problem solving skills. They were however, not asking to be treated like adults, because they asserted their understanding that youth needed guidance and support from adults in order to become successful adults. Beyond statements of being “treated like an adult”, the researcher was led by the respondents’ feedback to the conclusion that they were more concerned with being treated with esteem and provided with leadership opportunities that assisted them in becoming stronger assets to their communities.

Although youth are a strong asset today, participants called for guidance, training, and knowledge beyond the lecture hall and textbooks: providing evidence of the capacity of youth for higher thinking and functioning.
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doi:10.1080/10282580903105756


