

Center for Restorative Justice – 2021 Annual Report

Restorative Justice is a form of community justice; it is a framework by which a community can respond to crime. It holds offenders accountable and places emphasis on repairing the harm done to the victim and community. This is the framework by which the Center for Restorative Justice (CRJ) bases its programs.

In Bennington County, CRJ works in partnership with the courts, State's Attorney's Office, defense attorneys, Department of Children and Families, Department of Corrections, schools and other community partners to deliver programs using restorative justice principles. The Restorative Justice philosophy involves the community in the process of holding offenders accountable for repairing the harm caused and helps him/her gain the skills necessary to become a productive member of our society. Restorative Justice also empowers victims and the community to have an active role in the process.

This past year, CRJ was challenged with delivering quality restorative justice programs and services while confronted with the COVID pandemic. CRJ is proud to have successfully served 1,531 Bennington County residents this past year. CRJ is a unique, one-stop restorative justice agency providing a full range of services from helping at-risk youth get on the right track to assisting individuals coming back to the community from incarceration. In addition to CRJ's traditional programs such as Court Diversion, Youth Substance Abuse Safety Program, Truancy Programs, Pre-Charge Programs, and Reparative Probation, CRJ helps hundreds of people each year get their driver's license reinstated, file petitions to get their records expunged and support victims to have a voice and be compensated with restitution. A unique program run by CRJ which started in 2020 (unique to anywhere else in the state) is Threads – a clothing boutique that provides free clothes and accessories to all Bennington County teens. The simple gift of clothing and contemporary accessories in many cases is all it takes to help a teen feel good about themselves and succeed in school. Some teens have even gained new confidence to go on job interviews with some new "threads"!

CRJ is a non-profit agency, funded by numerous state and private grants, donations and town funding. More information about CRJ programs can be found on CRJ's website- www.bcrj.org. With your town's support, CRJ is able to continue the important work of strengthening communities, empowering victims, supporting individuals in need, and holding people accountable who may have caused harm to others. It is the strength of our partnership that helps to make our community such a great place to live. Thank you very much for your continued partnership and support.

Respectfully Submitted by:
Leitha Cipriano, Executive Director