

Punishment at the Turn of the Century: The RCMP Perspective

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Introduction

For hundreds of years, in almost all modern societies, the word ‘justice’ has evoked the concepts of crime and punishment. At the turn of the millennium, however, many streams of thought have converged to challenge the validity of this close association and the effectiveness of punishment as an indisputable solution to the societal problem of crime (see Van Ness and Strong, 1997). The present paper examines some of the basic premises of the conventional position from this context, and endeavours to grasp the implications of alternative solutions, especially from the vantage point of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the national police force of Canada. In particular, the paper seeks answers to the following questions:

What is punishment?

Depending on the country or state, punishment is most often synonymous with some loss of privilege/rights (e.g., loss of freedom as in incarceration), of money (e.g., fines) or pain (e.g., lashes, death penalty, hard labour in harsh conditions) for the offender. Aurbach (1983) sums it up as: “The state establishes its scale, the rank-order of values, through variation in the number of blows administered to the criminal, or through the number of months or years taken away from him.”

Who are the agents of punishment?

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In the current judicial system, the state, represented by the judicial and correctional system and assisted by the police, constitutes the legal machinery of punishment. It is the state that defines through legislation what would be considered a 'crime' and establishes the continuum of appropriate negative consequences (i.e., punishment) for a crime. However, we should be cognizant of the fact that it is the society that ultimately legitimizes this definition of crime and appropriate punishment. In some societies, a woman who alleges to have been raped may face death penalty by public stoning because *she has committed the crime of adultery*. Most other societies would find this to be a barbaric travesty of justice.

What are the objectives of punishment?

Punishment is believed to be a deterrent for the person who committed an offending action (i.e., aimed at correcting or preventing anti-social behaviour, to reform the offender). Another stated objective of punishment is prevention of crime and maintaining social order by demonstrating that a socially (i.e., formally, by the state) defined wrong action must have negative consequences imposed by the society. In other words, it is administered to denounce crime, and thereby to help crime prevention in general. Lastly, punishment is also used to ensure the safety of citizens by removing (through incarceration) or restricting (through probation) dangerous offenders.

What are the consequences of punishment on individuals (victims and offenders), on the communities and the professionals (police, lawyers, correctional facilities)?

1. Effects on Victims

As evident from the Victims' Rights Movements, quite often, victims and their family members and friends do not feel satisfied with either the way the system operates, i.e., the legal process, or the nature of the punishment given to the offender. Typically, the punishment does not include offenders' accountability, neither is it relevant in any way to repairing the harm suffered by victims—and thus, the system does not seem to adequately recognize the injuries suffered by a victim. Other

emotional needs of victims such as fear of re-victimization and loss of control over their own life are rarely addressed by the punishment of the offender. In some cases, it is the victim or the key witness and *not* the offender, who is required to move to a far-away location with a new assumed identity for his or her own protection. Naturally, the punishment-oriented system is also very much an offender-centred system.

2. Effects on Offenders

The punishment-centred justice system reinforces offenders for *not taking responsibility* for their wrong actions. The majority of offenders are not ‘corrected’ or healed by receiving conventional punishment. The offenders are fined (which only benefits the state) or incarcerated even when most offenders pose no serious threat to public safety (RCMP data base). Ironically, in correctional facilities, they often become acculturized to the ‘criminal’ lifestyle (Van Ness and Strong, 1997) or experience despair, because of labelling, because often the root cause (e.g., emotional instability/poor socialization/lack of education and life skills/poverty) is not addressed by the punishment, or perhaps because they feel like caged animals and get more alienated from the ‘normal’ community and resentful about the mainstream society. Neither does it adequately address (or afford to address) the offenders’ needs for re-integration into the society. One lamentable statistic that speaks volumes about the effect of incarceration on offenders is that the cause for thirty-five percent of all deaths of prison inmates is suicide, twice the rate of suicide in general population (Statistics Canada, 1997-98). Braithwaite (1989) maintains that “Punishment is a denial of confidence in the morality of the offender [...]. Punishment creates barriers between the offender and the punisher through transformation of the relationship into one of power assertion and injury” (p.72-73). A restorative approach, by contrast, “aims to prevent crime by allowing offenders to put their crimes behind them. Before this can happen it is essential that they repay society and their victims the costs their crimes have incurred, material and emotional. This should allow them to look forward to the regard of the law-abiding people whom they care about most, rather than joining a group of fellow-outcasts from society who have been stigmatised by the criminal justice process.” (p. 4, Sherman and Strang, 1999a).

Charles F. Abel and Frank A. Marsh (1984) argue that restitution offers an alternative form of punishment that is ethically, conceptually and

practically more beneficial than contemporary criminal justice. In their proposed model, incarceration would not be the norm for most offenders, as they work towards restitution of the victims under varying degrees of supervision as judged necessary. Imprisonment would be used only as a last resort for offenders who pose a threat to the community. They believe that even imprisoned offenders should have the opportunity and obligation to paid employment so that they are able to compensate the victims and reimburse the state for the cost of their incarceration.

Data are available to demonstrate that the majority of offenders *do not* pose a serious threat to public safety. Statistics Canada (1997-98) reported that the typical inmate in a provincial/territorial facility (constituting 31% of all correctional population) was serving a prison sentence of 44 days for committing a property crime. The RCMP database shows that in 1998, for example, out of 82,557 cases of criminal code violation by adults, only 245 were charged for homicide or attempted murder. During the same period, among 27,578 young offenders, only 29 were charged with murder or attempted murder, 426 were charged with robbery, and 3,100 were assault cases. For juvenile offences, the highest number of cases involved Break and Enter (6,466) and 5,448 cases of theft under \$5,000. Yet, Canada's incarceration rate is one of the highest in the Western world (Canadian Criminal Justice Association, 1998).

3. Effects on communities

The community's needs to heal do not seem to be addressed by the current judicial system. On the contrary, fear of crime and victimization remains high (25% of survey respondents, Statistics Canada, 1997), suspicion, division and hostility among community members have steadily increased along with a cynicism about the effectiveness of the expensive, time-consuming judicial system. There is an opposite reaction as well: more frustrated communities are with the perceived unfairness and ineffectiveness of the present justice system and the more fearful they are of crime, stronger is the demand for tougher measures to deal with offenders. As incarceration becomes the most common form of punishment, prisons get increasingly overcrowded at a considerable cost to the society. In addition, when the offenders are released from these overcrowded prisons, they are more likely to become socially isolated, dysfunctional and unproductive members of the society—again, at a considerable cost to the society. At the same time, only one-third of all crimes are reported (because the society is sceptical about the value of

reporting crimes), police make an arrest in only 20% of cases that are reported and convictions result in only 50% of them (Statistics Canada, 1990).

The effect of the punishment-centred system has been particularly disastrous on the Aboriginal communities in Canada. The rate of incarceration of aboriginal peoples in Canada is at least four times the national average (Canadian Criminal Justice Association, 1998) and increasing (Statistics Canada, 1997-98). In introducing 'Aboriginal Legal Issues', Borrows and Rotman (1998) commented, "The over-representation of Aboriginal people in federal, provincial and territorial court systems and prisons casts a long shadow over Canada's claim to be a just society." (p.864). Not unexpectedly, aboriginal communities tend to view the conventional justice system as unfair and ineffective, and sometimes, even perceive the police to be nothing more than law enforcement agents who have no understanding of their culture, history and tradition, of the social conditions that contribute to 'crime' and beg for a long-term solution. Aboriginal Justice Strategy was specifically initiated by the Government of Canada to rectify this situation, in full awareness of the fact that the failure to address the issue would result in a complete alienation of the aboriginal communities from the Canadian justice system.

4. Effects on police, corrections and legal professionals

The police, the lawyers and the prisons are overburdened in spite of the overall police-reported crime rate going down for the sixth year in a row (Statistics Canada, 1997). Increasingly, there is a tendency for the police and the court to ignore minor crimes. For example, Break & Enter's traumatize citizens considerably, yet once committed, are low priorities for the police. Courts have thrown out hundreds of old cases irrespective of the nature of offences, because they could only handle so much *within a reasonable time*. (*R. v. Askov*, 1990) On the other hand, many communities come to perceive the police and the legal professionals as the enemy, fostering an 'us vs. them' divisive attitude. Many veteran police officers, however, are disillusioned about the effectiveness of the punishment-centred, 'quick-fix' approach, which they find results in a 'revolving door' for a large number of offenders, who escalate from minor shop-lifting or assaults before they are 12, to drunk driving, break and

enter and theft in their teenage years, to aggravated assaults and robbery as adults.

Transition from Punishment to Restoration

The scenario depicted above is all too familiar, and has caused thinkers from many parts of the globe to search for alternatives to the conventional ‘punishment-oriented’ justice system. Are there other alternatives? According to a growing number of scholars and practitioners from various walks of life, the answer is a strong affirmative, and the recurring themes that are highlighted in their theories seem to be the following:

1. Redefine **crime** as harm done to an individual or individuals by someone or some people; that needs to be redressed or minimized to the extent possible. Thus, the impersonal state or crown is no longer the victim, it is a person or a relationship.
2. Redefine **punishment** in terms of meaningful, relevant, constructive consequences, and accountability, resulting in a redemption for the offenders—not incarceration, unless they pose a serious risk to public safety.
3. Redefine **Justice** in terms of fair, insightful and respectful participation of and treatment to all stakeholders that *maximally benefits and satisfies* the people in communities. Justice in this paradigm, is no longer synonymous with loss or pain inflicted by the state. “It [restorative justice] *measures success* [of a justice system] differently: rather than how much punishment has been inflicted, it measures how much harm has been repaired and prevented” (p. 42, Van Ness and Strong, 1997). When justice is redefined in this manner, the agents of punishment (also redefined) become those who constitute the community of the offender and of the victim. Thus, the lost control is restored to the empowered community which now has a chance to heal.

In a national research project conducted by the RCMP (see Appendix A), we asked the Community Justice Forum (a meeting of all those affected by an offending incident gathered by a neutral facilitator to solve the problem fairly and meaningfully) participants the question: “What is Justice?” The most frequent response from the victims was ‘*the offenders taking responsibility for their wrong actions*’. The other two

similarly frequent responses to the question was: ‘punishment for the offence’ and ‘righting the wrongs’, followed by ‘fairness’ and lastly, by both ‘personal changes of the offenders’ and ‘victim satisfaction’. Most often, what the victims wanted was an apology. Suggestions of victims on how to make things right included reimbursement or reparations for damages and restitution. The offenders’ supporters gave similar responses to the question regarding what justice is, in their view. The most frequent response from the offenders themselves was ‘punishment’ and the next one was ‘fairness’—and both occurred almost equally frequently. It should be noted that the CJF participants’ concept of punishment was reflective of fairness to all and consequences for the offender that will right the wrong to the victims’ satisfaction: it was *not revenge or pain*, not ‘eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth’. Our findings confirm the observation that “In fact, when crime victims are asked about their view on punishment, they often respond that they hope something will happen to the offenders to help them emerge as better people who will not hurt others” (p. 4 in Van Ness and Strong, 1997, referring to *Umbreit et al. Victim Meets Offender: The Impact of Restorative Justice and Mediation*). In a recent case of dangerous driving causing death, the parents of the 26-year old victim were reported saying, “If he [the offender] turns his life around, we have all gained.” (The Ottawa Citizen, June 19, 1999). Apparently, they wanted to have a more meaningful resolution (by having the offender perform community work that the victim was dedicated to) than would be served by imposing fines or sending him to jail.

Who should be the agents of transition from punishment to restoration?

In addition to enjoying wide-spread positive public regard and trust with respect to efficient performance of policing duties in ensuring public safety and law enforcement (Statistics Canada, 1990), the police are the gatekeepers in the criminal justice system. It is the police who respond to public requests for help whenever risks to public safety are anticipated or experienced. It would therefore, be efficient for the police to resolve the problem, especially when dealing with young offenders, as early as possible and at the community level. This type of proactive role of the police should also help the cause of community policing by dissolving the tension between the community and the police seen only as a law-enforcer. In fact, preliminary RISE data reported by *Sherman et al* (1998) indicate that offenders who attended family group conferences were more likely to say that they trusted the police, and that the police were fair to

them. As such, we believe that the police are natural agents for playing a leadership role in the transition in the Canadian Justice System, from punishment to restoration.

But undoubtedly, the police will need to act in close partnership with the law-makers, law practitioners and other key community members. There is a popular saying in Canada: “It takes a whole community to raise a child.” We believe this to be true with respect to many other social phenomena. Something as significant as achieving satisfying justice too will take the efforts of a whole community. In recognition of this fact, the RCMP has taken the initiative to implement this approach under the term “Community Justice Forum” (CJF), a term of choice for its emphasis on community involvement, and has adopted the philosophy of *restorative justice* to be applied in policing. It is important to note that the *restorative justice* approach is entirely consistent with the principles of community policing which the RCMP adopted in 1989 as its model of service delivery. The essence of community policing is a more inclusive, collaborative, responsive and pro-active way of making Canadian communities safer. Community policing strives to prevent crime and address public concerns through establishing a partnership between the police and the communities, thereby empowering the latter to identify problems and to solve them, with police officers facilitating the process and offering assistance as required.

In implementing the restorative justice initiative, from the very beginning, the RCMP has acted as a catalyst in getting various other police forces, agencies and community members trained and in encouraging them to actively utilize the new approach. CJF is a powerful tool for community policing, and it would be a lost opportunity for the police not using it.

What have we accomplished towards this transition?

During the last three and half years since this approach was formally initiated by the RCMP as a viable option, facilitators (including both RCMP members and community members) trained across the country under the auspices of the RCMP have conducted hundreds of community justice forums (CJFs). CJF participants' overall satisfaction level with their CJF experience was very high, as was their satisfaction with the fairness of the process and the outcome. Almost all participants, including offenders and their supporters, reported that they were treated fairly, with respect and understanding, and most importantly, that *justice was done*. The time elapsed from the offending incident to the CJF ranged from a few days to a few weeks—never a year or longer.

A total of 30 different types of offences or combination of offences were reported by the sample of 200 plus CJF facilitators we contacted. CJFs were most frequently reported for theft. Twenty six percent of all reported CJFs were conducted for cases of theft under \$5,000, and 21% of CJFs for cases of common assault. The next few major categories of offences dealt with at CJFs were public mischief (7%), drugs (6%), property damage and break & enter (5%), sexual abuse (4%) and harassment or bullying (4%). It is to be noted that according to Statistics Canada (1997), theft under \$5,000 constitutes the most common form of property crime, followed by breaking and entering, common assaults account for 60% of all violent crimes and the other most common criminal code violation was public mischief.

In majority of CJFs, the offenders were 19 years-old and under. The most frequently reported age range for offenders participating in CJFs appeared to be 14 to 16 years of age (38%), and another 15% were between 17 and 19 years-old. There were 6 cases (2%) where the offender was over 50 years of age and 18 cases (7%) where the offenders were 11 years of age and under. Thus, the data demonstrate how Community

Justice Forums can achieve justice satisfyingly, efficiently, and economically, in many cases involving the youth. Experimental data from Australian National University are consistent with our findings: self-reported fear of being discovered by family and friends as a repeat offender was much greater among those who attended conferences than those who attended court (Sherman and Strang, 1999b). These Australian researchers and we in Canada have yet to gather information about how effective the restorative approach has been, in the long term. We like to believe, that by re-defining ‘crime’, ‘punishment’ and ‘justice’ in our approach to policing, we have been able to make a long-term positive impact on the lives of these Canadians, most of whom are young, and thus, have been able to provide quality service to the Canadian society.

Challenges

Almost since the 12th century, the justice system has evolved to be a punishment-centred, state-operated, professionally dominated system in most countries of the world. We are fully aware of the fact that this system is so entrenched in the collective thinking that it will not be easy to make a significant change in this framework and to suggest that anything other than punishment could be a more effective way of achieving justice, and of deterring or denouncing crime. Yet, those who have experienced the restorative justice approach from either side of the law, seem to find it satisfying, making this alone a compelling reason for our serious consideration. Another reason to give this approach a fair chance is that historically, almost all societies can look back to a tradition of community-based restorative justice.

Secondly, despite empirical evidence to show that Canada’s police-reported crime rate has been steadily declining and the general public prefers offenders to be rehabilitated, their mistrust of the current justice system often finds expression in a demand for tougher laws and punishment. It is no surprise that politicians cater to these demands to seek political gain. The proposed *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) is a prime example that reflects this societal ambivalence. It suggests wider use of community-based sentences and informal alternative measures for minor offences, but at the same time recommends expanding the range of offences for which the youth would receive an adult sentence at a younger age. The RCMP is currently exploring a partnership with Justice and other police agencies to provide education/ training on the proposed YCJA

to highlight the possibility of wider application of restorative justice under the provisions of the Act.

Not even a staunch proponent of restorative justice would claim this to be a panacea; but through the ages, punishment has not solved the social problem of crime—it only appears to do so in the short term, by pushing it behind bars. The reasons for crime are complex, rooted at multiple levels in communities, and hence, it is to the communities we need to look for a long-term solution—by building stronger, healthier partnerships. Community policing and restorative justice, both of which are incorporated as integral components in RCMP's recruit training curriculum, provide us with the opportunity for this multi-faceted, multi-level, multiple-partner approach. We believe that the ultimate objective of crime prevention can only be accomplished by such a partnership among all concerned agencies not only in Canada, but around the world.

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Appendix A

A Brief Outline of and Selected Findings from RCMP's Restorative Justice Evaluation Project

The concept of “*restorative justice*”, in spite of the wide diversity in its actual implementation methods, can generally be described as a way of dealing with the harm caused by an offence by involving the victim(s), the offender(s), and the community that has been affected. The outcomes that are sought include restoring harmony in the community by repairing, as much as possible, both material and psychological damages to the victim(s), and re-integration of the offender (thereby preventing recidivism) by the use of shame and remorse for committing a wrong action. The offender is expected to ‘pay’ by taking active responsibility for causing the harm and by being accountable to the victim and the community for repairing or minimizing the injuries. The process helps the offender to experience shame for committing the harmful action—but in a reintegrative way, in a caring and supporting context. The proponents of *restorative justice* believe this approach to be more fair, satisfying, efficient and effective than the conventional, court-based, adversarial approach to justice.

This new (yet ancient) way of dealing with offending behaviours was seen by all key players in Canada (e.g., The Solicitor General, the Director of RCMP Community, Contract and Aboriginal Services Directorate or CCAPS and Judge David Arnot) as a natural extension of the Aboriginal Justice Initiative launched by the Federal Department of Justice in 1991. Consequently, the RCMP adopted the philosophy of *restorative justice*, and has taken the initiative to implement this approach through one of its tools, the “Community Justice Forum” (CJF), a term of choice for its emphasis on community involvement, instead of the term “Family Group Conferencing” (FGC) as it is known in Australia and New Zealand. The initiative has expanded to a large number of detachments across the country through three “Train the Trainers” workshops, held by the RCMP in January, 1997. Currently, CJFs are being successfully used for youths and sometimes for adults in conflict with the law, and the types of offences which are being commonly dealt with include theft, assault, vandalism, “bullying”, property damage, drug use and possession, shoplifting, and breaking and entering.

The current evaluation project of the RCMP initiative was undertaken by the Research and Evaluation Branch of the CCAPS

directorate in December, 1997. The first part was an evaluation of the “Train the Trainers” component, which includes (a) effectiveness of the three initial training workshops in training RCMP and community members to be competent trainers, and (b) effectiveness of these trainee-trainers to train others in conducting CJFs, and the second part consisted of an evaluation of the effectiveness of CJFs through perceptions of CJF participants and facilitators, based on their actual experience. The first major part of the evaluation generally demonstrated the effectiveness of the training workshops. Information regarding the number of conferences conducted, types of offences dealt with, and the age of offenders was also collected.

For the second part of the project, various data collection methods, such as mail-in questionnaires, telephone interviews and in-depth personal interviews were utilized in order to collect information regarding the following basic variables hypothesized to be associated with *restorative justice* (not compared to those associated with conventional ‘retributive’ justice, because the methodology did not allow such a comparison): 1. CJF participants’ overall satisfaction, 2. CJF participants’ satisfaction with the process, and 3. CJF participants’ satisfaction with the outcome/agreement. A 5-point Likert-type scale was utilized for collecting all quantitative data: where 1 meant ‘very little’, 2 meant ‘somewhat’, 3 indicated ‘medium’, 4 denoted ‘quite a bit’ and 5 meant ‘very much’.

Additional information was collected regarding other issues such as participants’ perception of *regained control* over what happened in the community, victims’ *willingness to give the offender a second chance*, victims’ *fear of revictimization*, *the extent to which participants felt that justice was done*, and if they had to do it over again what would they choose: *the court or the CJF*. Similar information was collected from CJF facilitators as well, by using questionnaires and face-to-face in-depth interviews. Most respondents seemed to enjoy the interviews, and to provide honest, thoughtful and candid responses (the CJF participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality).

CJF Participants’ Views. The results of this study, based on responses collected from a total of 239 CJF participants, showed that the mean ratings for *overall satisfaction* as well as *levels of satisfaction with procedural and outcome fairness* were high among all participants. Almost all participants reported they felt ‘quite’ (39% rated it 4) or ‘very’ (51% rated 5) satisfied with the CJFs, and others felt ‘moderate’ level of

satisfaction. Eighty-five percent of offenders and 94% of victims reported they felt either 'quite' or 'very much' satisfied with their overall CJF experience.

Similarly, 96% of all participants indicated that they felt the CJF *process* was 'very' (5) or 'quite' (4) fair. In spite of the generally high level of satisfaction with the CJF process, there was a slight indication of perceived undue pressure to attend the CJF on the part of victims. Responses also suggested that before coming to the CJF, not all participants had a completely clear and thorough understanding of what it involved. However, in spite of their imperfect understanding of the process, the majority of participants had participated in CJFs voluntarily (100% of offenders and victims' supporters, over 95% of victims' and offenders' supporters).

Results for *satisfaction with agreement/outcome* were also consistently high: 91% of all participants felt that the *agreement/outcome* was 'quite' or 'very' fair and most participants acknowledged that they were given a chance to provide input into the agreement with no pressure from anyone. Ninety-seven percent of victims rated the fairness of the *agreement/outcome* as 'quite' or 'very' fair while 77% of offenders rated it either 'quite' or 'very' fair. These results are significant, particularly in relation to victims who often report feeling frustrated with both the *process* and the *outcome* of the traditional court system. Another measure of participants' satisfaction with their CJF experience was demonstrated in their reported choice between the CJF and the court, if they had to do it all over again. The majority of them—87% of the offenders, 93% of the victims as well as of victims' supporters, and 95% of offenders' supporters would choose CJFs over court.

Results showed that 98% of all offenders indicated that the CJF helped in their understanding of the consequences of their actions and their willingness to take responsibility for the same. About 97% of their supporters and everyone in the categories of victims and their supporters (100%) indicated that they felt the offenders understood and took responsibility for the consequences of their offenses at least to some extent. The total percentage of interviewees who stated that the offenders had actually complied with the CJF agreement was 84.8%, with other cases still on-going. Both offenders and their supporters expected that there would be quite a bit (or higher) of support for the offenders from their family and friends in complying with the agreement. Over 90% of victims who answered the questionnaire indicated that they would be

‘quite’ or ‘very’ willing to give the offender a second chance. In fact, some of the victims indicated that they came to the CJF because they wanted the offenders to have a second chance. Victims’ supporters and offenders’ supporters were also willing to give the offenders a second chance (ranging from ‘moderate’ to ‘very much’). Following their participation in CJFs, 97% of questionnaire respondents reported ‘somewhat’ or higher regained sense of control over what happens in their community. The majority of respondents in each category reported that the CJF process gave them back ‘quite a bit’ of control. In this study, 88% of victims interviewed reported that the CJFs helped ‘quite a bit’ or ‘very much’ with their psychological healing. An additional 12% reported that it helped ‘moderately’. The mean response to the question ‘Was justice done?’ was high for the total group of participants. Also, both victims’ supporters and offenders’ supporters indicated that in their view, harmony was restored. The data indicated that the CJFs took place within 1 to 20 weeks (average 5.4 weeks) after the offending incident occurred. The facilitators’ observations corroborated this fact. Responses to the question about the likelihood of the offenders re-offending showed that offenders themselves and their supporters believed that they were unlikely to offend again, although victims’ supporters were a little less convinced.

The results of the present study seemed to indicate that the RCMP restorative justice initiative has been successful in enhancing client satisfaction and improving service delivery through this new approach. However, this was not a controlled experiment, the sample was not completely random or sufficiently large, and data collection was not as systematic as we desired. Yet, the internal consistency of the results, and the similarity of the present findings with the available research literature including empirical studies that involved controlled experiments seem to lend validity to the data. It was also evident from the findings that the restorative justice initiative, although initially implemented as an extension of the Aboriginal Justice Strategy, has expanded far beyond the Aboriginal communities into the mainstream and that communities which are aware and well-informed about this approach, are usually receptive. The implementation of this approach, however, has yet to occur as consistently or widely as the RCMP aims for, towards the goal of a transition from the old “re-active” policing style to a pro-active one of preventing crime by building healthier communities.