

# Edmonton Journal

## Restorative process unites all ends of spectrum

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EDMONTON - Sue Hopgood smiles fondly when she talks about Bruce Stanley.

"He's like french bread -- crusty on the outside, but soft on the inside," she said.

Their association was formed during the community conference she oversaw as director of the Alberta Conflict Transformation Society, in the aftermath of the death of Stanley's father.

Afterwards, she asked Stanley to join the society's board of directors, recognizing the power of the message he conveyed through his story.

Rick Stroppel, the lawyer who defended the young man charged in Robert Stanley's death, is a member of the board too, as is Dave Hill, the man who was in charge of prosecuting the case.

Seemingly three different men with different objectives, they, like Hopgood, are united in their determination to see restorative justice become more deeply entrenched in the legal system.

"More and more, restorative justice is being seen as one of the tools in the tool box and one of the options that should be available for conflict resolution," said Hill, who, in addition to being an assistant chief Crown prosecutor, carries the designation of co-ordinator of restorative justice initiatives.

The Alberta Conflict Transformation Society has played a pivotal role in some high-profile criminal cases, but Hopgood said the majority of her files -- and many of her biggest successes -- have come as a result of school referrals.

"The school situations are great because that's where you get all the pro-active intervention," Hopgood said.

Like the messages behind anti-smoking and anti-drug campaigns, when it comes to crime and consequences, early education is key.

With restorative justice, said Hopgood, students learn not only to take responsibility, they come to understand the impact of their wrongdoing -- whether it's a broken window or hurt feelings -- and find ways to repair the harm they caused.

Sometimes reparation is a heartfelt apology, other times it's financial restitution, still others it's an agreement to mentor other students.

There is far more latitude in schools than in the

criminal justice system, but the goal is always to stop troubled and trouble-making teens from one day winding up in a courtroom.

School shootings have resulted in zero-tolerance policies at almost all schools.

Hopgood said studies indicate such policies are not just being overused, but are also counter-productive and largely ineffective.

"Kids are being punished more than they need to be and they're not learning anything from it," Hopgood said.

"A suspension becomes nothing more than a five-day holiday and actually winds up reinforcing the negative behaviour instead of dealing with it."

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