

*Coalition County Justice Council Program*

Good morning committee members, Mr. or Mrs. Chairman, and audience members. My name is Mike O'Donnell and became involved in our local restorative justice program as a result of a car accident in which a person rear-ended me. Up to this point I had no knowledge of the program or how it functioned within the community. I received a phone call from the program coordinator wanting me to participate in a meeting in which we would talk about what happened, how it impacted myself and family, and how we can restore things prior to the accident.

As it turned out, the individual did not have insurance so I had to pay my deductible for my insurance to perform repair to my vehicle. The damage was not at that severe but my vehicle did need to be repaired to function properly. The restorative justice program was successful in making sure the offender made payments to help offset the expenditure of repair my vehicle. The way in which the committee members added their advice, experience, and desire to make sure the offender understood what he did was an accident, but need to be accountable for his actions was professional and respectful.

I have to say that I was very apprehensive at the beginning of the process, but after attending the meeting and seeing the dedicated individuals which volunteer their time to help me and my family and then being able to talk with the offender, I thought the process was awesome and I began to volunteer to sit on the committees and attending meetings for others.

Throughout my volunteering of sitting on the committees I began to understand the program and how effects the judicial system. I believe that the local restorative justice program is very successful because of its leadership of the program coordinator, and the volunteers who give their time to make sure that the program is successful. Programs like the restorative justice do not operate because someone has to do a job, but it operates because individuals are dedicated to volunteering their time to make sure the program is a success.

One struggle in which I think is very important to bring forward is that these programs do not succeed unless those in the judicial system believe in their success and performance. I do believe that the judges and public were not familiar with the restorative justice program and it took great leadership and education from the volunteers, committee members, and program coordinator to become the success it has become.

I think that if I never had the opportunity to know about the restorative justice system and justice council on a local level, I don't think that I would have volunteered. Not because I don't believe in it, just that I was not educated that it existed and an opportunity to volunteer was available.

My experience on the justice councils was very fun and interesting. I believe that offenders need to understand what they are doing to get them in trouble is not working and the justice council offers peers to make them accountable to restore things as a result of their actions. The other thing that I found interesting is that some offenders did not want the help of the council because they did not want the help period. I think that the offender needs to recognize the opportunity to get help before they can move forward. Sometimes programs are not necessarily unsuccessful but more like not used because it is not recognized a usefully tool to an offender, or judge when the offender is getting sentenced.

In summary, I would like to say that I believe in the local restorative justice system I would hope that the professionals at the local and state level understand that the programs can be successful and useful with dedicated volunteers and great leadership from a program coordinator, local justices, and state leadership. Programs like these need support from everyone to be successful and make our communities, and state a better place to live.

Thank you