

## Peacemaking Circles Fact Sheet: Evidence Supporting Their Effectiveness in Dealing with Domestic Abuse

### What is a Peacemaking Circle?

Peacemaking Circles—implemented in Nogales, Arizona as *Circuitos de Paz* or Circles of Peace—was created to treat couples and/or families who have experienced domestic or family violence. The Circle provides a practical system designed to address the myriad of problems associated with both the criminal justice response to intimate violence and Batterer Intervention Programs. The *Circuitos de Paz* program is the first court-referred domestic violence treatment program to use a restorative justice circle approach to reduce violent behavior in families in the United States.

The program consists of 26 - 52 weeks of conferences, or “Circles,” bringing partners who have been abusive, together with willing family members, support persons, a trained professional facilitator, and community volunteers. The goal is to encourage dialogue about the incident(s), explore gender dynamics, uncover the history of violence in the particular family, and to create meaningful change. The inclusion of the extended family network in the treatment helps those in the Circle understand how violence is transmitted across generations and serves to hold applicants accountable for their words and actions.

### Facts about the Criminal Justice Approach to Domestic Violence:

- According to a study funded by the National Institute for Justice and the Centers for Disease Control, “most victims of intimate partner violence do not consider the justice system an appropriate vehicle for resolving conflicts with intimates.”<sup>1</sup>
- 75% of women who are victims of domestic violence do not call the police because they believe that the police can do nothing to stop their victimization.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2002, a study funded by the U.S. Department of Justice found that of 404 male domestic violence defendants who completed a traditional Batterer Intervention Program, there were no statistically significant differences in their attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, or likelihood of future violence when compared to violent men who had not completed any treatment.<sup>3</sup>
- Similarly, in 2003, a study of two different traditional Batterer Intervention Programs found no significant attitude changes towards domestic violence in abusive men before or after their participation in the programs. There was a slight improvement in post-treatment violence among those who participated in a longer treatment program.<sup>4</sup>
- One recidivism study on a domestic violence court in Quincy, Massachusetts, found that roughly 50% of victims were being revictimized within a one-year follow-up period from the date of the initial arrest. The study noted that completing batterer treatment had no significant impact upon re-offending behavior.<sup>5</sup>
- A study published recently by The Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University states that out of more than eight hundred of Arizona’s judges, prosecutors, victims, victim advocates, and probation officers, it was widely agreed that the states response to intimate and domestic violence was “falling short of achieving its goals.” Only 24% of prosecutors believed that prosecution helps deter future domestic violence incidents and only 14% of judges believed that the programs available for the treatment of domestic violence offenders are effective.<sup>6</sup>

## Facts about the Restorative Justice Approach:

- Authors of The Morrison Study write that it would be more effective to have a “victim-centered” approach to domestic violence. For victims that choose to remain in a relationship, this could mean providing counseling and community interventions that draw upon restorative justice practices. The report specifically mentions Circles of Peace as an innovation worth exploring to address the problem of intimate violence.<sup>7</sup>
- The Ms. Foundation for Women’s 2003 report on domestic violence and sexual assault, *Safety and Justice for All*, argues that community interventions hold a great deal of promise as systemic and holistic solutions to the problem of domestic violence. The report specifically mentions restorative justice as a development that, together with other approaches, could ensure the safety of the individual, while building the capacity of the community to stop abuse within it.<sup>8</sup>
- A study done by Professors Joan Pennell of North Carolina State University and Gale Burford of the University of Vermont revealed that a Family Group Conferencing program that drew on similar principles to Circles’ was very effective at changing violent dynamics within families. A total of 472 people participated in the study; 384 family members and 88 service providers. Two-thirds of the families interviewed after the conference said that their family was “better off” because of the intervention.<sup>9</sup>
- In a similar study in South Africa, Amanda Dissel and Kindiza Ngubeni examined the Victim Offender Conferencing Project (VOCP). They found that none of the original victims had been abused again since the mediation and that there was a general overall improvement in abusive partner’s conduct toward the victim. In the cases in which the couple stayed together, better communication and less verbal abuse was reported.<sup>10</sup>
- In Hollow Water, a small community in Manitoba, Canada, the Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) process has been used since 1986 to deal with criminal family charges, including intergenerational family violence and sexual abuse. In cooperation with the Canadian Solicitor General, Dr. Joe Couture and his colleagues evaluated the Hollow Water experiment. They found that the CHCH program costs were less than one-third of those associated with the traditional criminal justice system. Additionally, as a result of the program, the community showed significant improvements on health and wellness scales, indicating empowerment, greater community responsibility toward domestic abuse issues, an increased sense of safety, and a decrease in overall violence.<sup>11</sup>

Facts drawn from: Mills, Maley & Shy, *Circulos de Paz and the Promise of Peace: Restorative Justice Meets Intimate Violence*, (33)(1) NYU Review of Law and Social Change 127 (2009).  
Compiled by Mika Gellman, 2009.

<sup>1</sup> Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, Dep’t of Justice and Ctrs. for Disease Control and Prevention, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*, at v (2000), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/181867.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Tjaden and Thoennes, at 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> Lynette Feder and Laura Dugan, *A Test of the Efficacy of Court-Mandated Counseling for Domestic Violence Offenders: The Broward Experiment*, 19 Just. Q. 343, 371 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Shelly Jackson, Lynette Feder, David R. Forde, Robert C. Davis, Christopher D. Maxwell and Bruce G. Taylor, *Batterer Intervention Programs: Where Do We Go From Here?* Nat’l Institute of Justice, 9, 19 (2003), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/195079.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Eve Buzawa, Gerald T. Hotaling, Andrew Klein and James Byrne, Dep’t of Justice, Nat’l Institute of Justice, *Response to Domestic Violence in a Pro-Active Court Setting: Executive Summary 11* (1999), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/181428.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Toon and Bill Hart, Arizona State University, *System Alert: Arizona’s Criminal Justice Response to Domestic Violence 1* (2007), <http://www.asu.edu/copp/morrison/SystemAlert.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Toon and Hart, at 82-83.

<sup>8</sup> Ms. Foundation for Women, *Safety and Justice for All, Examining the Relationship Between the Women’s Anti-Violence Movement and the Criminal Legal System 1* (2003), [http://www.ms.foundation.org/user-assets/PDF/Program/safety\\_justice.pdf](http://www.ms.foundation.org/user-assets/PDF/Program/safety_justice.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Joan Pennell and Gale Burford, *Family Group Decision Making: Protecting Children and Women*, 79 Child Welfare 131, 151 (2000).

<sup>10</sup> Amanda Dissel and Kindiza Ngubeni, *Giving Women Their Voice: Domestic Violence and Restorative Justice in South Africa 1* (2003), <http://www.csvr.org.za/docs/crime/givingwomenvoice.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Couture, Ted Parker, Ruth Couture and Patti Laboucane, *Native Counseling Services of Alberta: A Cost Effective Analysis of Hollow Water’s Community Holistic Circle Healing Process 8*, 10-11 (2001), [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/19/77/08.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/19/77/08.pdf).

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