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**Evaluating an Offender-Victim Reconciliation Program**

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## Introduction

The Center for Community Peacemaking (also formerly known as LAVORP; now re-named Advoz, after a merger with Conflict Resolution Services in 2017) offers several restorative justice programs, including Peacemaking Circles and student-parent workshops. Specifically, the center offers an offender-victim reconciliation program, primarily focused on juvenile offenders and their victims. One of the main goals of this program is to provide victims with an opportunity to convey to the offenders the impact of their actions. Ideally, the offenders will also have an opportunity to take accountability for their actions. According to the Advoz website, “(a)ddressing harm, rather than blame, is the focus of restorative justice (<https://advoz.org/services/restorative-justice/>).”

From 2004 to 2015, the center collected feedback from clients who participated in its offender-victim conferencing program. A short survey was administered at the conclusion of the program – asking both victims and offenders to assess certain key items. In addition, participants are also asked to provide additional feedback about their experiences. In this report, we assess the additional feedback that participants provided about their experiences from 2004 to 2015. After 2010, the amount of participant feedback decreased significantly (with a bigger decrease of feedback from the offenders). We assess participants’ positive and negative experiences, and suggest ways that these data could help the center improve both its program and its methods of program evaluation. We also note that all names used in this report are pseudonyms, so that all participants’ identities are kept confidential.

## Positive Experiences

### *Facilitator/Mediator*

Several participants – both offenders and victims – expressed their satisfaction with a specific facilitator/mediator. Often, participants mentioned the facilitators by name, indicating that they had established a connection. For instance, we see the following comments:

*“John was an excellent LAVORP mediator.”  
(Victim, 2004 January-March, Quarterly Evaluation)*

*“Mrs. Smith did an outstanding job. She is an asset to your program.”  
(Victim, 2006 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*“Mediator Jane Smith was very good.”  
(Victim, 2007 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*“John and Jane could not have been better moderators.”  
(Victim, 2007 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*“I really appreciated John Smith’s facilitation of the meeting.”  
(Victim, 2010 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*“Jane Smith helped us and we could not have asked for any more. She did great!!”  
(Victim, 2011 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

While the forms of address varied – from the use of first names to complete names to titles – everyone who commented on the positive role the facilitator played referred to them by name. This indicates that the facilitator has an important role to play, and that successful sessions require that participants see the facilitator as a person and a partner in the process, and not as someone filling in the role of “facilitator.”

The comments above from participants – while highly positive about the facilitators – are vague, and do not pinpoint specific traits and approaches that they felt were particularly effective. Below, we highlight comments from participants who provided more information on what they felt was particularly effective on the part of the facilitator.

First, it was important to the participants that the facilitator was able to establish a tone and atmosphere for the process. One participant commented that *“John Smith does an outstanding job to help both parties feel comfortable.”* (Offender, 2006 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter) Clearly, one of the important jobs the facilitator needs to accomplish is that of helping all participants feel at ease and comfortable with the process. Second, it was important to the participants that the facilitator clearly conveyed that they were committed to and invested in the process. One participant expressed their appreciation that *“(M)r. Smith was a very caring facilitator(s),”* and that *“(h)e did a great job(s)”* (Victim, 2012 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter) while another participant appreciated that *“John Smith was incredibly patient and went beyond the call of duty!”* (Victim, 2013 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter) It is evident that the facilitator needs to have certain personality traits that clearly manifest themselves to the participants during the conference. Specifically, they need to be able to convey that they are caring individuals who are patient and who are invested in the process and outcomes.

In addition to specific personality traits, participants also focused on the process itself. Participants who said that they had a positive experience indicated that they appreciated how the process itself occurred, crediting the facilitator with smoothing the edges. Some comments were more general, including one from a participant who stated that *“... Mr. Smith’s ability to bring both of our parties together was very successful.”* (Offender, 2004 April-June Quarterly Evaluation) Other participants provided feedback on what they thought made the process successful. It was important to participants that the process be efficient and productive, and not take up excessive time. One participant, for instance, appreciated that *“(t)he gentleman from LAVORP did a great job keeping the meeting moving and focused.”* (Victim, 2006, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) Participants also noted when facilitators remained committed and upbeat throughout the whole process, especially valuing the importance of facilitators’ remaining pleasant and respectful:

*“[The facilitator] did a great job facilitating and was very respectful of everyone, which set a healthy tone for open communication. For all parties (sic) sakes, this should have happened much sooner.”*

*(Victim, 2011 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*“John Smith was absolutely a gem. Polite—he handled the meeting in such an adequate way. He was pleasant and helpful all the way through. Kudos to him!!”*

*(Victim, 2012 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

Finally, participants who provided positive feedback of the experience of victim-offender conferencing appreciated that the process was genuinely inclusive of everyone, and that as victims, they were able to express their feelings and thoughts.

*“Appreciated the way John Smith handled the meeting. Thanks for the opportunity to talk about what happened/ that we can better understand both sides and move forward.”* (Victim, 2007 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

*“I was very impressed with the mediator and general way the meeting was run. Also the opportunity for each person present to be free to express themselves and the positive results of the meeting.”* (Victim, 2010 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

The feedback above, from victims, clearly indicates that they appreciated the opportunity to process their experiences of victimization, and that they saw this opportunity as yielding positive outcomes. It is interesting to note that participants who were offenders did not offer this feedback, leading us to ask whether offenders might not feel that their participation would yield positive outcomes for themselves. How might facilitators engage offenders in such a way that they view their participation as positive? One participant offers us a suggestion:

*"Jane was an excellent mediator. Adam and Maria felt very grateful to the Johnsons for meeting with us, essentially to help us, not for their own benefit. This is an excellent program. We thank everyone involved."* (Offender, 2004 January-March, Quarterly Evaluation)

From this offender's viewpoint, their participation in the process was experienced as positive in part because they understood that the program was not set up to benefit certain participants over others. It was also obvious to this offender that the facilitator herself did not stand to benefit from her involvement. If both victims and offenders are to experience participation as positive, this is an important point that the facilitator needs to convey.

Interestingly, the one negative comment from a victim about the facilitator failed to refer to the facilitator by name. The participant expressed negative feelings about the process, and felt that the program was set up to benefit the offender, not the victim. (We return to this discussion in a later section.)

*"The mediator was not unbiased. He tried to get me to convey feelings for the offender that I did not have. I was made to feel that I, the victim, should make the offender feel cared for and then pay me less than the court ordered restitution. Many aspects of the impact & harm were glossed over including the offenders affecting people on vacation, small children, volunteers & my health. My overall feeling was that since the offender gave three sentences of an apology that should be sufficient. He tried very hard to get me to let her pay less money. The offender was a 17-year old when was convicted of a felony, and ordered to pay more than \$2,700 in restitution. I was extremely irate and unhappy about how this case was handled." (Victim, 2012 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

### *Positive Outcomes*

Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, we saw comments from both victims and offenders as to the positive outcomes that they experienced from participating in the program. It is not difficult to anticipate that victims would have positive experiences. For instance, one participant commented, "I would definitely recommend the program. I could not have foreseen the help that the program offered. I am very pleased and grateful to LAVOR." (Victim, 2006 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) Other victims were more specific about how they had benefitted from participating in the program, pointing out that their participation had allowed them to achieve closure. For instance, victims' comments included the following in connection to achieving closure and moving forward:

*"I am very pleased for your help in this matter. So on behalf of my wife and grandson, our sincere thanks. We will now be able to put this behind all of us."*  
(Victim, 2004 July-September, Quarterly Evaluation)

*"I think this helped out both parties involved a little bit. There will always be some hard feelings towards the act that took place"*  
(Victim, 2007 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

*"It was great to bring closure to this. Thank you!"*  
(Victim, 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

*"This was very helpful for me. I think it helped to settle some feelings and it helped create more peace. Thanks so much for this opportunity.*  
(Victim, 2008 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

*"Thank you for helping me get through this finding out what really happened and moving on."*  
(Victim, 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

The comments from offenders about the positive outcomes of their participation yielded some interesting insights into the various ways that restorative justice affected them. First, offenders explained that the process helped them understand the severity of their actions, and the corresponding negative consequences. The following four offenders' comments reflect this understanding:

*"I'm really sorry for what I did and I really won't do anything bad like that as long as I live! Thank you for your help and understanding."*  
(Offender, 2005 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

*"I felt horrible after meeting the victims because it made me realize what I actually did"*  
(Offender, 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

*"I really did not realize how much we hurt them emotionally. I think that was important to see and understand. Thank you for the opportunity."*  
(Offender, 2014 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

*"Really helped me understand how severe this situation is."*  
(Offender, 2015 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

Second, several of the offenders discussed how important it was for them to have the opportunity to offer their apologies to the victims. For instance, one participant commented, *"I'm glad I got to meet with Mr. Smith and Mr. Johnson so that I could apologize and tell them what was going through my head face to face. Thank you for this opportunity."* (Offender, 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter) For this participant, not only was the opportunity to apologize in person important, the chance to explain the rationale behind their actions was important as well. Another comment noted that *"At the end of the conference, the offender told the facilitator, "This was very important for me to do. I am really glad I had this opportunity to offer my apology directly."* (Offender, 2008 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) At a deeper level, the restorative justice process also offered the offender an opportunity to demonstrate that they were not "bad people," but were simply people who had made a mistake. For instance, one offender's parent offered the comment that *"(i)t was a good process. My son felt ashamed and sorry, and he had a chance to say that in an attempt to prove he was not a bad kid."* (Offender, 2009 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

Third, offenders who participated in the process expressed their appreciation that, like the victims, this provided them a way to obtain closure. In contrast to the victims, offenders stated that they were grateful for the opportunity to express contrition, and some expressed their surprise that the victims were willing to forgive them. Some comments from offenders included:

*"I felt a lot better after the meeting, and in some sense I felt things were set right."*  
(Offender, 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

*"This was beautiful and redemptive. We were so thankful as a family to have an opportunity to show our remorse and express our hearts."  
(Offender, 2008 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"[The victim] was a very understanding person. I am glad I got to meet her and apologize for my actions."  
(Offender, 2008 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"This meeting helped me feel a lot better about the situation at hand."  
(Offender, 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"LAVORP helped us to reconnect with the victim, she is a long time friend of the family. We were able to see eye to eye once more and now it does not feel awkward when we as a family speak with her and take part with her. We are thankful for this program it really does what I says it does. Thank you."  
(Offender, 2012 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"I am proud to redeem myself and start over with my life."  
(Offender, 2012 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"I appreciated the opportunity to meet fact-to-face to talk about the situation and express my remorse. I was surprised by their willingness to forgive me."  
(Offender, 2015 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

Fourth, some offenders praised the program for not only allowing them to obtain closure, they credited the program with helping them understand their actions within a larger context. The following offenders commented:

*"It really helped me make the right choices."  
(Offender, 2008 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"I very much appreciated the fact that LAVORP took the time to help the situation in every way possible. Through this experience, my understanding of the justice system has been increased. I am deeply thankful for how this situation turned out."  
(Offender, 2009 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"Thank you for helping me through this program. It made me very successful and caring. Make me look at a big picture in life."  
(Offender, 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

One of the participants offered specific commentary about how the process helped increase their understanding of the justice system. In contrast, the other two participants were vague about what they had learned – one talked about making *"the right choices"* while the other talked about looking *"at a big picture in life."* It might be helpful to pinpoint how participants define and understand making *"the right choices"* or looking *"at a big picture in life."* If we have more information about how the process provides specific helpful resources to them in this area, we would be able to tailor the process to fit their needs. *Care for the Offender (Compassion and or Concern)*

A third area of positive comments regarding participation in the program comes solely from the victims. Several victims felt that the program was effective and that rehabilitation, rather than a punitive,

approach should be used towards juvenile delinquents. For instance, one victim offered, "I have no ill will toward either person. If this works and it appears it does, why doesn't the government use this?" (Victim, 2004 April-June Quarterly Evaluation), while another commented, "I work and volunteer at Lebanon County Prison. I'm for any help in rehabilitation for youth in trouble - I'm very impressed with this program! [The facilitator] did a super job!!" (Victim, 2011 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter). This requires more research, but it is quite possible that people who are open to a rehabilitative, rather than punitive, approach might be more open to restorative justice.

Several victims felt that their participation in the program was further bolstered by what they hope will be a positive outcome for the offender. Specifically, many expressed hope that the offenders would be able to avoid going down a path of crime, and be able to turn their lives around. One participant commented that this was a "(v)ery good program" and that they hoped that the offender "has thought about what could have happened that day and learned something from (the) meeting." (Victim, 2005 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) Another participant stated that they were "greatly impressed with this program and feel confident the offender will turn his life around." (Victim, 2006, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) It was clearly important to many victims that the offenders not only apologize for their actions, but that they accepted the responsibility, and made efforts to turn their lives around. In one comment, we were made aware of the following situation:

*"Two offenders had \$714 each to pay in restitution. Both began to make payments as agreed but one missed a few months and then made a catch-up payment. The victim was so encouraged that these youth were taking their responsibility seriously and after the offenders paid \$450 each, informed them that he is going to forgive the rest"*  
(Victim, 2006 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

What impressed this participant is the offenders' willingness to shoulder their responsibility and to make good on their restitution. Other participants also commented on the importance of seeing the offenders turn their lives around:

*"This is a good program for first time offenders, to help them turn their lives around."*  
(Victim, 2007 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

*"Overall good experience and glad to see parent involved. Offender could have shown more remorse, but he seemed to be sorry. I'm glad to have met him under less formal circumstances and hope he benefits and does well in the future."*  
(Victim, 2008 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

*"Wonderful program -- wonderful facilitator. I think it really helps the kids see and understand what they've done. Put things in perspective to them. Helps them right their wrong and grow from it. Hopefully keeps them from going down an ugly path later in life. I hope this type of program spreads across our nation to help our youth."*  
(Victim, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

*"This is an excellent program. I am sorry that we had a need for it but at the same time I am very grateful that it was available for us to use. People like you that help give kids another chance, hopefully will keep them on the right track. It also goes back to the old saying "It takes a community to raise a child." Thank you for your help and support."*  
(Victim, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

An interesting finding from victim participants' comments is how often they drew upon their religious and spiritual beliefs to frame the positive experiences they felt they received from the program. Below are some comments that serve as illustration:

*"We appreciate the work that you are doing. We are hopeful that Jack continues to make good on his agreement. We hope to be supportive of him as well. Blessed are the peacemakers." (Victim, 2007 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

*"The program is a wonderful way to resolve issues. I pray the words the Lord gave me to speak to the young men will be taken to heart and that they truly receive Jesus as their personal Savior. I pray the Lord also blesses all these young men and gives them a heart like David, and I believe Jack must have really taken things said to heart by paying all his share. The money isn't the important thing here, but that I believe he did this from a repentant heart, which is a wonderful blessing that will bless him."  
(Victim, 2007 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*"I both feel more empathy for Jack S. and more long-term concern. It had never occurred to me that he would say he had no recall of the entire event. What does one do with that? His level of maturity and self-insight was soberingly(?) low. He was not at all frightening or belligerent, but his view of himself as victim does not bode well for his future. His pastor's participation was excellent and so appreciated. It was reassuring to me that such persons are in Jack's life. John did a wonderful job of facilitating and enabling us all to feel safe and heard."  
(Victim, 2008 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"In my heart [the offender] continues to concern me due to behaviors I have seen over his time here. I pray he does as well as he said.  
(Victim, 2010 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

We see some familiar themes here. Participants singled out the contributions of the facilitators, and expressed hope that the offenders will stick to the "straight path" from here on out (despite some reservations). What is unique is that these participants frame their experiences within the context of their religious and spiritual beliefs, with one participant focusing on an offender's pastor's participation.

Finally, participating in the restorative justice process might also have an unintended outcome for some of the victims, in that it helped them view the offender in a different light. For instance, one of the participants quoted above noted that he ended up feeling "more long-term concern" for the offender, noting that "(h)is level of maturity and self-insight was soberingly(?) low(,)" and that "(h)e was not at all frightening or belligerent, but his view of himself as victim does not bode well for his future." Another victim commented:

*"Overall, the meeting was positive, hopefully juveniles seemed apologetic. Not much family support. Really surprised by their young age. I never felt anger, just sorrow for mislead youth. I shook hands with the offenders."  
(Victim, 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

These participants ended up feeling surprised, and their views of the offenders were challenged. They reported feeling more concern and sympathy, rather than anger, for the offender. It might be helpful to include some indicators in the evaluation process of participants' emotions as they went through this process, in addition to how their views of the offenders were modified.

## Negative Experiences

### *Logistics and Organization*

Negative responses from the participants centered around two specific concerns of logistics and organization. The first had to be with preparedness and efficiency. For instance, one participant



commented that *"(t)he first meeting was very disjointed."* (Offender, 2004 January-March, Quarterly Evaluation) Other participants felt that closer attention needed to be paid to the details to avoid mistakes and misconnections. One participant offered the following comment:

*"When there are multiple offenders and multiple victims we feel more time should be spent paring up the offender with the correct victims. In our son's case he had to appear before a person who was a victim but not at the hands of our son. Therefore he was falsely accused of a crime he did not commit. Upon questioning the victim of the date and area of the crime, it was learned that Jack was not involved but this was after he apologized for something he didn't do and the victim still has his name and address on her list."*  
(Offender, 2004 January-March, Quarterly Evaluation)

Interestingly, an offender expressed frustration at no-shows:

*"The victim did not show up. Next time make sure that doesn't happen to anyone ever again."*  
(Offender, 2013 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

Other participants expressed a wide array of dissatisfaction with different aspects of scheduling, interaction, and logistics:

*"Extremely concerned about Jack (offender) being allowed to work in E-town, since we were told he lives in York and could not get here. I will never sign off again until all details are in place." (Note: a follow-up call has been made by mediator to clear-up some misunderstanding about fulfillment of community service)*  
(Victim, 2006 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

*"In my case I knew the subject through a person who I work with. Had it been a different situation I don't feel that it is professional to be addressed by first name as an officer with a person who was arrested by that officer. It should be Mr. or Officer."*  
(Victim, 2008 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

*"Games & devices which make noises should not be allowed in these meetings. I could not hear part of the facilitator's presentation because a child was playing a game on a device that played music. Even after being asked to stop, there was a low sound which made hearing difficult."*  
(Victim, 2012 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

*"It would have been more beneficial to meet with the person who physically came to my home, not just with one of the group of those caught."*  
(Victim, 2013 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

A second concern that many participants expressed had to do with long the entire process took. Some participants felt that by the time they were scheduled to participate in the process, they felt that they had moved on from being victimized, and that participating in restorative justice would be counter-productive. Below are comments from victims that illustrate this concern:

*"I thought it took a little too long to get to this point – 10 months."*  
(Victim 2005, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)

*"I was overwhelmed with letters, when I had forgotten all about the event. This part of the process for a victim came a year later, and in some ways has been more stressful than the event"*

*itself. I dealt with the shock, repairs, etc., and moved on, to have it all brought back again. Then when I think it is all over, I get contacted again, because the report wasn't filed. The process from court info to this needs to be shortened. The feelings expressed by the people who did the crime had a year to massage what they did, come up with answers we want to hear, which may have been different if the timing was closer."*

*(Victim, 2007 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*"Ours was a small theft. It took up too much of our time." [Victim answered "no" to recommending LAVORP.]*

*(Victim, 2008 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

*"The incident that led to this session occurred over a year ago. This time delay between the incident and the mediation session made it difficult to remember the events in their detail. Overall, the session went very well."*

*(Victim, 2009 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"The process and meeting should have happened much sooner. This occurred 5 months after the initial attack."*

*(Victim, 2010 2010 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"In this situation, my granddaughter and I had already resolved the issue. My daughter was angry about "interfering with her schedule" to do the meeting."*

*(Victim, 2011 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*"The only real problem I experienced was the long time between offense and the restitution. I was not able to have the damaged car repaired until I received restitution almost 7 months later."*

*(Victim, 2011 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*"Proceedings took a long time from actual crime to restitution period. Would like to see a shorter time frame while everything is still fresh."*

*(Victim, 2014 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

*"My only problem with this was how long it took to resolve. I believe it would have been more of an impact if it was resolved earlier... Thank you."*

*(Offender, 2015 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

#### *Dissatisfaction with Restitution*

Several victim participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of restitution that they ultimately received from the offender through this process. For instance, two victim participants offered the following comments:

*"I was satisfied with the restitution as far as what we could prove. However, I don't think Julie was honest about how much she stole. On paper it was well over \$2,000, as opposed to the \$167.00 she admitted to."*

*(Victim, 2004 January-March, Quarterly Evaluation)*

*"The only restitution I required was to replace the window that they broke. As of today it never happened. I was told they would be here within seven days to do the repairs after we met."  
(Victim, 2004 April-June Quarterly Evaluation)*

It was clear that the participants expected that participating in this process would help them receive the restitution that they felt they deserved.

Some victim participants not only wanted to receive what they felt was a just restitution, they also felt that the offenders should experience some degree of difficulty in making restitution. For instance, the following participants commented:

*"Only thing I thought would be helpful to your program would be if you would place the people in a job so they could pay their debt back."  
(Victim, 2011 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"I thought about what was said afterwards and I don't think [the offender]'s way of making restitution will help him. It's too easy and he doesn't have to work for it so he knows how he would feel if it happened to him; but saying all that Jane did her best to keep things calm.  
(Victim, 2012 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

For these participants, it was not just about the amount of the restitution. They felt that it was important that the offenders go through some degree of difficulty and learning experience to make restitution.

#### *Lack of Remorsefulness and Responsibility from the Offender*

It is to be expected in some cases, victims participating in the restorative justice felt disappointed and let down. Several victims felt that the offender did not truly feel remorseful, and the feeling that the offender "didn't get it." was a common refrain. In contrast to victim participants who felt glad that the offenders were going to get an opportunity to move forward on the "right path," these victim participants were upset, perceiving that the offenders were not at all sincere.

*"The situation was made more difficult by the offender's insincerity, he didn't "get it" at all, and that was sad. Under other circumstances, safety could have been an issue as well—we were alone in a church room with no one around. I do appreciate the support of the LAVORP volunteers, thank you very much."  
(Victim, 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

*"I feel some of the answers were not honest (from offender). When it came to restitution, it was helpful. Only time will help with hurt feelings. I felt Grandma and Jack just didn't quite get it! Not humiliated, just hurt and humiliated. Offender's letter of apology seemed more sincere than he did in person."  
(Victim, 2008 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)*

One participant offered a more extended complaint about their perceptions that the offender felt no remorse or responsibility. Interestingly, the participant also pointed to the parents' recalcitrance in this specific example, pointing the responsibility towards the victim, rather than helping their son accept responsibility:

*"Jack says the right things, but based on his behavior at school, I'm not convinced of his sincerity. I actually felt worse after the meeting. Justin's father implied/stated that I "run a loose classroom" which is entirely untrue. More evidence of Jack misleading his parents. My*

desk area is OFF LIMITS. From the moment I sat down, his father stared at me and did not look away. That felt like a direct challenge. His mother told me how difficult it was to see her son fingerprinted, have a record—all stated while focused on me. How long would she be willing to excuse his actions? His father also commented about him and his wife having to pay the restitution—due to the amount, it will take time. I can't help what Verizon charges for their phones. I was disappointed that counseling was not part of the agreement because that is what he needs the most."

(Victim, 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

Several other victims also expressed their skepticism that the offenders were aware of the magnitude of their crimes:

"I don't feel the offender was completely honest. I can't understand how you can "accidentally" throw a huge rock at a window and not notice that it broke—it was a huge window and you would hear it. I was also told he bragged about it in school and on the bus."

(Victim, 2011 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

"My goal was to educate the parties involved and to make them responsible for their actions. Unfortunately, I'm not sure all parties have remorse. I do not think every person at the meeting understood the seriousness of the crime committed. My hope is that it will be addressed in another phase of the program. CCP is a good program!! Thank you."

(Victim, 2012 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

"I felt this was a very good program. I felt it was very helpful to meet the kids and families. My heart goes out to them. With regards to answering my questions and resolving my feelings, I wish I would have asked a few more questions of the kids. We heard how their actions affected their families, but I didn't get a good understanding of how it affected their lives, it was touched on briefly. I would have asked a few more direct questions of the boys. Thank you to the CCP organization and their volunteers!"

(Victim, 2013 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

"We aren't convinced we heard the truth. We don't recall an apology. There was a lot of defensiveness. Still, given what we had to work with, I think CCP and we did the best we could. Thank you! John Smith was incredibly patient and went beyond the call of duty!"

(Victim, 2013 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)

"There were 3 offenders. The 1st one turned out to not be truthful which was upsetting since that's one of the conditions. He broke into my house at an earlier date—didn't get caught—I blamed my dog sitter who I fired. If I had known at HIS meeting, I would have asked that HE apologize to the other boy, and be made to cut my grass for a summer. Otherwise John Smith was a wonderful facilitator. I would have liked to see the kids also do community service for ME since I lost my yard man in this process."

(Victim, 2013 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)

"Believing the parents/ children would have a "let's get this over with and get out of here" mindset, I specifically asked all offenders to stop at the house and apologize to Jane (who could not attend). As I guessed, this would not take place. Only one of the five fulfilled his promise"

(Victim, 2014 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter)

It was interesting to note that the participants here tried to distinguish between what they considered the offender's and the program's flaws. Three of the above six participants stated clearly that while they did not feel that the offender(s) had taken full and complete responsibility for their actions, they did not blame the program for this. In fact, they made sure to compliment the program and to express their gratitude.

#### *Lack of Forgiveness from the Victim*

While several victim participants felt that the offenders' lack of remorse and responsibility, two offender participants felt that it was the victim's lack of willingness to forgive that made the process uncomfortable and negative for them. For instance, one participant said, "I was happy to do the LAVORP process but it was hard to meet with Julie (victim) because I felt that no matter what I tried to do or say she wasn't going to forgive me." (Offender, 2006 Fourth Quarter)

Other offender participants often pointed to what they perceived was the victim's desire to extract more restitution from them as a key negative experience:

*"Felt like the victim made way too much out of it and the amount of restitution is way too high."  
(Offender, 2012 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter)*

*"Settlement was way in excess of what was fair and proper. So-called victim was only out for how much they could get. We agreed to the purchase price from day one to be fair, only to have extra charges added for no good reason. All LAVORP was good for was to make sure the "victim" made a profit. (Above response was by offender's father. LAVORP worked very closely with probation officer in this situation – restitution was exactly what the court was asking them to pay. It seems some offenders choose to turn themselves into the victim)"  
(Offender, 2007 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter)*

*"This was very odd—I did not want to participate with Community Peacemaking, it seemed that the mother of the victim requested additional reimbursement—I believe this is the reason for the meeting. I felt some of the question/request were inappropriate, not a good experience."  
(Offender, 2013 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter)*

It is perhaps a natural tendency, when examining restorative justice processes, to focus on whether the victim feels that they have been justly treated. These few comments from offender participants remind us that for this process to work, the offenders have to perceive that the process was fair to them as well. Feeling that the process is simply a way to extract more restitution from them did not contribute a positive experience.

#### **Conclusion**

We suggest that the additional feedback provided by conference participants can be used towards careful construction of evaluation instruments. The feedback provided in-depth insight into what participants – both victims and offenders – found positive and negative about the conferencing experience! In addition, they offered specific feedback about the facilitator's approach and personality traits. We recommend that evaluation instruments for offenders and victims be constructed differently to focus specifically on the different concerns that they bring to the table. Some evaluation items might be identical (e.g., "I felt that the conference process was fair and not biased towards either party.") and provide us a basis for comparison between offenders and victims. However, it is worth considering adding specific items focusing on the unique findings of this report. For instance, it might be worth

asking victims how much their religious and/or spiritual beliefs affected their willingness to participate in this program, as well as their experiences.

In addition, we suggest that a pre-conference evaluation be conducted, so that we can assess whether and how participants' understandings and perceptions of restorative justice changed. Understandably, there are logistical difficulties here, as participants might find it burdensome to complete yet another survey. Possibly, this evaluation could be conducted during the pre-conference meetings with participants.

Finally, while we understand the need to collect quantitative data, we strongly recommend that the center continues to encourage program participants to provide additional feedback. Not only does this qualitative data provide us with unique and in-depth insights into participants' conferencing experiences, it will continue to help us further refine evaluation instruments in the future.