

# The Role and Attitudes of Restorative Board Members: A Case Study of Volunteers in Community Justice

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*Criminal justice agencies often call for partnerships with the community. In restorative and community justice initiatives, citizen volunteers often serve as decision makers in nonadversarial sanctioning. Although prior research has reported the attitudes of other participants in restorative decision making, such as victims and offenders, none have examined those of community volunteers. We report on findings from a state-wide survey of volunteers serving on Vermont Reparative Probation Boards. In this program, board members meet with probationers to negotiate a “reparative contract” that may include apologies, restitution, community service, and other tasks. We found a board membership that is generally representative of the community, highly supportive of the program, and knowledgeable of restorative justice principles.*

**Keywords:** *restorative justice; community justice; accountability boards; voluntarism; reparative probation; Vermont Department of Corrections*

It is a rewarding feeling to be an active participant in the Reparative Program. I hope to help some of the troubled young people get their lives back on a productive track. I want to help to build a strong, supportive community for my sons to grow up in. I want to impress on my sons that it is important to “give back” to the community. . . . To be successful, we cannot isolate ourselves from what is going on around us—because a community is more than just a place to live, it is a lifestyle.

—Vermont Reparative Board Volunteer

Criminal justice professionals have talked about forming “partnerships” with the community and about citizen participation in criminal justice programs for at least the past 3 decades (Abel, 1982; Bennett, 1998; Fried-

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man, 1998; Fulton, 1996; McGillis, 1997). This has been particularly evident in the concept of community policing (Rosenbaum, 1994). In the past decade, a “new justice” movement, as manifested in community and restorative justice initiatives, has prioritized this objective (Bazemore, 2000; Braithwaite, 1999; Clear & Karp, 1999; Karp & Clear, 2002; Kurki, 2000).

Consider, for example, the position statement of the American Probation and Parole Association (2003):

APPA therefore resolves that the principles of community justice will guide the work of the organization in keeping with its proclaimed motto of “Community Justice and Safety for All” . . .

- The community, including individual victims and offenders, is the ultimate customer, as well as partner of the justice system.
- Partnerships for action, among justice components and citizens, strive for community safety and well being.
- The community is the preferred source of problem solving and citizens work to prevent victimization, provide conflict resolution and maintain peace.
- Crime is confronted by addressing social disorder, criminal activities and behavior, and by holding offenders accountable for the harm they cause to victims and the community. (n.p.)

Although the citizen role is widely touted, in only a few studies have researchers examined this role empirically. We know little about how community members participate in community justice initiatives, who volunteers, their level of commitment and satisfaction, and their attitudes about the philosophy and practice of the programs in which they participate. The current study is the first we know of that has a focus on the volunteer role in community restorative justice.

Specifically, we examined results of a survey of volunteers involved as neighborhood board members in Vermont’s Reparative Probation Program, one of the most extensive partnerships undertaken in community corrections and certainly the most systemic restorative justice initiative yet attempted in the United States (Bazemore, Schiff, & Erbe, 2001). We explored the characteristics of this community/government partnership as board volunteers view it by examining their attitudes about the program and the sponsoring agency, the Vermont Department of Corrections (VDOC). Although exploratory in nature, these findings suggest challenges and promises associated with the community and citizen role in decision making about sanctioning and provide a unique opportunity to examine what is distinctive about restorative justice decision making in one programmatic manifestation. In presenting these findings, we may, in turn, provide insight into the potential for such decision making to mobilize and sustain a less sporadic, and a more permanent, systemic form of citizen participation in criminal justice decision mak-

ing. Implications of these data for trends in the theory of restorative justice are also presented in the concluding section of this article.

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

It is important to remember that there are a host of motives for volunteering. Being safe is one reason, however people also give time to be of service to others, to belong and feel useful, to learn and grow, and to be part of a respected community. (Friedman, 1998, p. 1471)

Correctional volunteerism has a long history; indeed, probation began in 1841 when the courts placed offenders under the supervision of unpaid citizen volunteers (Moore, 1987). Yet volunteers themselves have received little empirical attention, and literature reviews are now out of date (e.g., Peters, 1973). The few studies that do exist show that volunteer programs are highly satisfying for the volunteers and capable of effecting positive change in offenders (Alford, 1997; Greenberg, 1988; Moore, 1987; Shields, Chapman, & Wingard, 1983). At the same time, a common set of problems often undercuts the effectiveness of citizen participation in criminal justice activities: weak management of volunteer programs (Swart, 1983), tension between professional staff and volunteers, poor training of volunteers, and volunteers' authority may be challenged or rejected by offenders (Kratcoski & Crittenden, 1982).

Although many criminal justice agencies encourage volunteer participation, tasks assigned to volunteers are often the most menial and least rewarding or challenging. Moreover, such tasks fail to capitalize on the unique position that volunteers may play in correctional intervention. Notably, to the extent that they are embedded in local networks and/or have ties to local victims and offenders, volunteers bring important knowledge and resources, including the capacity to exercise informal social control and provide social support (Bazemore, 2001; Cullen, 1994; Pranis, 1998). Although the volunteer role has been partially restricted by legislation or policy, several factors may be changing this tradition of underutilization of citizen volunteers.

First, according to available data, millions of volunteers participated in various forms of crime prevention in the past decade (Friedman, 1998). Much of this activity appears to have been made more relevant for volunteers by virtue of its apparent direct link to enhancing the safety of their own neighborhoods, and its association in some cases with popular community policing and related initiatives. At a broader cultural level, in the past decade, a convergence of voices now echoes a more general optimism about the potential for citizen participation in community life and the possibilities of solving

persistent problems through community involvement (Putnam, 2000; Schorr, 1988). Reflected in such popular phrases as "it takes a village," such optimism has also generated initiatives informed by communitarian perspectives on crime and the role of community members (Etzioni, 1996, 1999) and influenced thinking about the positive role of volunteers as "natural helpers" in a variety of service roles (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2000; Kinney et al., 2002). However, optimism is also balanced by concerns about the loss of community capacity and a decline in democratic participation in problem solving (McKnight, 1995; Moore, 1996).

In addition to these normative expressions, the social science research and theoretical literature is now replete with formal conceptualizations of community resources including especially the focus on "social capital" (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). For their part, criminologists in the past decade appear to have rediscovered the effect of community factors on crime rates and public safety (e.g., Braithwaite, 1989; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Skogan, 1990), emphasizing the important role of community "collective efficacy" in preventing and intervening in the response to crime (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

A number of writers in the emerging community and restorative justice literature have portrayed a sense of urgency regarding the decline in the capacity of citizens and community groups to exercise informal social control and the need to rebuild this capacity (Bazemore, 1999; Clear & Karp, 1999; Rose & Clear, 1998). To address this growing deficit, some have encouraged direct reforms in criminal and juvenile justice systems based on community and restorative justice principles (e.g., Bazemore & Walgrave, 1999; Clear & Karp, 1999; Van Ness & Strong, 1997). Such reforms would seek to change the role of criminal and juvenile justice systems and reshape the intervention task to build on community strengths while encouraging system efforts to replenish and revitalize community capacity (Bazemore, 2001; Braithwaite, 1999).

Since the 1990s, volunteers have become actively engaged in restorative conferencing programs (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). As informal decision-making approaches aimed at developing sanctions focused on repairing the harm of crime by involving those harmed in some way, these conferencing programs are based on a normative theory of justice grounded in restorative justice principles (Van Ness & Strong, 1997; Zehr, 1990). Unlike traditional criminal justice processes focused on guilt and offender intervention, restorative decision-making processes seek to provide answers to the following questions: what harm resulted from the offense, how can it be repaired, and who is responsible for this repair (Zehr, 1990).

The volunteer program we studied here was designed to operationalize these principles (Karp, 2001; Perry & Gorczyk, 1997). In the Vermont Reparative Probation Program, "reparative boards" are composed of citizen volunteers who meet with victims and offenders to negotiate a restorative justice contract. As of 2000, 49 boards operated across the state, with 293 board members volunteering 22,018 hours of service in the course of that year (Karp, Sprayregen, & Drakulich, 2002). Offenders are obligated to fulfill the terms of the contract, such as writing apology letters, paying restitution, or completing community service, as their probationary sanction. Thus, boards are integral to correctional programming in Vermont even though Department of Corrections personnel do not staff them.

Typically, three to five board members meet with an offender for 30 to 60 minutes, reviewing the crime and the harm it caused to victims and the community, and deciding how the offender can make amends and regain community trust. The process is informal, with participants sitting around a conference table in a probation office or community center. When a contract is negotiated, offenders typically check in with the board to provide a progress report and appear again at the point of completion, to "decertify their deviant status" (Braithwaite & Mugford, 1998) by receiving the congratulations of the board.

According to Karp et al. (2002), reparative probationers are minor offenders, having committed misdemeanors such as driving under the influence (32%), underage drinking or other drinking offenses such as furnishing alcohol to minors (22%), other motor vehicle offenses such as reckless driving or driving without a license (19%), and an array of other offenses such as theft, fraud, harassment, assault, and criminal mischief. This target population represents only part of the total Vermont probation population. In 2000, more than 1,900 probationers were discharged from reparative probation, 81% successfully completing program requirements. Recidivism data indicate that 31% of offenders are rearrested within 1 year of meeting with the reparative board, though only 1.5% are rearrested for violent offenses.

Victims are invited to participate in board meetings, although only 9% choose to do so. Nevertheless, 72% of victims are satisfied by the negotiated reparative contracts, 87% report that the program helped them feel better about the incident, and 92% believed the program should continue. Similarly, 94% of agencies in which offenders completed community service were satisfied with the work performed by the probationers, and all the agencies were willing to receive more referrals.

Although there is now an emerging body of research on restorative justice conferencing programs (Braithwaite, 2002), there has been very little effort

to describe the community role generally and the role of volunteers specifically. As a result, little is known about who volunteers, their values and beliefs, or their views about their work and the agencies they support.

Given the limited development of empirical knowledge about volunteers in restorative community justice, the primary purpose of the current study was exploratory and descriptive. General questions addressed in the current study include what is the demographic make-up of the volunteer pool, and how does it compare with previous studies of correctional volunteers, with the population as a whole and with other relevant groups? Are volunteers satisfied with their participation, and with the philosophy and delivery of the program?

Because of the emphasis on restorative principles and theory as a distinguishing characteristic of Vermont boards (Karp & Walther, 2001; Perry & Gorkczyk, 1997), it is also critical to answer basic questions about the extent to which volunteers understand and express commitment to these principles relative to other criminal justice values and rationales. For example, we wanted to know how volunteers feel about working with victims and offenders. Do volunteers seek reparation of harm as a primary intervention goal, and do they seek to maximize stakeholder involvement in decision making? What is the nature and quality of their partnership with the VDOC, and how do they feel about the discretion granted to them as the voice of the community; is there tension in the relationship with the department?

#### *METHOD*

For this study, all community volunteers actively serving on reparative boards were sought as potential participants. The universe of reparative board volunteers in the state of Vermont, as determined through volunteer rolls maintained by the state-level administrators for the VDOC, was relatively small ( $n = 292$ ) as of January 2000. After an agreement to survey the volunteers was reached between the researchers, state-level administrators, and the Reparative Board Association (an organization representing the reparative volunteers), potential participants were asked by researchers to participate in the study by letter. We collected data over a 4-month period beginning in February 2000.

To maximize our response rate, we conducted a minimum of four follow-up phone calls to reach potential participants who did not immediately respond to the survey. In all, 51 members never completed the survey, providing a final response rate of 78% ( $n = 229$ ) of all reparative board volunteers in the state of Vermont.

## FINDINGS

### *Who Volunteers? Demographics and Background Characteristics*

Compared to the population of Vermont as a whole, and to an earlier national survey of volunteers (Kratcoski & Crittendon, 1982), Vermont volunteers tend to be older. The median age is 54 years, with 75% older than age 45, and consistent with Vermont demographics, nearly all White. These volunteers have had remarkably stable residential histories compared to the population as a whole and to the other samples. Two thirds have lived in the area of their reparative board for longer than 15 years. They are also surprisingly well educated relative to these comparison groups, with 42% having graduate or professional degrees (see Table 1). Notably, the volunteers are very different from the offender populations participating in board hearings on all available indicators other than race.

Considerable variation within the group of Vermont volunteers can be seen in gender, income, religiosity, and political orientation. The group is nearly equally divided between men and women. Regarding religiosity, the volunteers in general view their faith as important, although with regard to political affiliation, they tend to be moderate to liberal in their orientation.

### *Satisfaction, Commitment, and the Community Connection*

Most board members have substantial experience—staying on the board for a long period of time, and hearing large numbers of cases (see Table 2). Although length of membership and numbers of cases heard are correlated ( $r = .5$ ), in some areas of the state, board members can accumulate cases rapidly, hearing on average two cases per week. Thus, experience must be measured in time and cases. Most board members have had at least some contact with victims (62%) and offenders (75%) outside the formal probation proceedings. In other words, it is common for board members to see these stakeholders in the community. One respondent commented, “It is a surprise to me how many offenders I meet at the grocery store, video store, on the street, and at my work (hospital). I think this is a good thing. The offender gets an idea that we are all connected as a community.”

Occasionally, citizens became volunteers after appearing before the board either as a victim or an offender. This may increase their satisfaction as a volunteer. For example, one board member wrote

I originally faced the board I serve on as a DWI offender. The whole process was very good for me as a person and on all aspects of my life. . . . I have a better

**TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics of Reparative Board Volunteers (in percentages)**

	Reparative Volunteers	Vermont Census 2000 <sup>a</sup>	National Survey <sup>b</sup>	Reparative Probationers <sup>c</sup>
Age				
18 to 40 years	14	35 (20 to 44)	64	78
40 to 60 years	49	14	29	22
Older than 60 years	37	15	7	0
Sex				
Male	45	49	44	74
Female	55	51	56	26
Race				
White	97	97	82	98
Other	3	3	18	2
Length of residence				
Less than 5 years	10	20		
5 to 15 years	23	80 (> 5)		
More than 15 years	67			
Education				
Less than high school graduate	0	18	0	37
High school graduate	27	57	45	45
College	31	16	22	15
Graduate/professional	42	9	30	3
Household income <sup>d</sup>				
\$0 to \$20,000	7	19 (0 to \$25,000)		
\$20,000 to \$40,000	24	58 (\$25,000 to \$75,000)		
\$40,000 to \$60,000	27			
\$60,000 to \$80,000	19			
More than \$80,000	24	23 (> \$75,000)		



Religiosity/spirituality	
Not important	17
Somewhat important	30
Very important	31
Of primary importance	17
Not sure	6
Political orientation	
Very liberal	10
Liberal	28
Moderate	38
Conservative	17
Very conservative	4
Not sure	4

a. [www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html](http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html)

b. Kratoski & Crittenden (1982).

c. Statistics are based on an evaluation of Year 2000 reparative cases (Karp, Sprayregen, & Drakulich, 2002).

d. VT census income is measured as \$0 to \$24,999, \$25,000 to \$49,000, \$50,000 to \$74,999, \$75,000 to \$99,999, more than \$100,000.

**TABLE 2: Volunteer Experience With Reparative Boards**

	<i>Percentage</i>
Length of membership	
Less than 1 year	25
1 to 2 years	34
More than 2 years	40
Number of cases heard	
0 to 10	8
11 to 25	20
26 to 50	25
More than 50	47
Contact with victims outside of board	
Never	39
Rarely	30
Sometimes	25
Frequently/very often	7
Contact with offenders outside of board	
Never	25
Rarely	39
Sometimes	26
Frequently/very often	10

understanding of how Vermont's justice system works and as a volunteer representative of my community. I have a direct say in how the process works. (Anyone complaining about it should look into joining a board.) I feel being on this board that I am being a very productive member of my community. It is a much needed service that we perform.

The vast majority of board members are satisfied with their participation, and they believe their membership has positively affected their enthusiasm for volunteer work, their sense of membership in the community, and their commitment to restorative justice (see Table 3). One respondent said, "Working with others who are committed to the goals of restorative justice and who bring a wide range of skills and backgrounds to their involvement in Reparative [boards] has been a gratifying and energizing experience for me." Another reported that, "Being on a board has increased my sense of purpose as a person. I feel good about giving my time to something I feel so strongly about." A third reported, "some sadness, frustration, but a sense of generativity."

Although reparative probation was designed to help victims and offenders, the program may have impacts on board members themselves. Many board members believe their empathy for the victims and offenders they see has increased because of their participation. One wrote,

**TABLE 3: Impact of Board Participation on Volunteers**

	<i>Percentage<sup>a</sup></i>
Personal satisfaction with board experience	
Satisfied	92
Dissatisfied	4
Enthusiasm for volunteer work	
Increased	48
Not increased	7
Sense of membership in community	
Increased	78
Not increased	3
Commitment to restorative justice philosophy	
Increased	89
Not increased	2
Empathy for offenders	
Increased	42
Not increased	23
Empathy for victims	
Increased	63
Not increased	4

a. Survey items identified in this and subsequent tables were constructed as 5-point Likert-type scales of agreement unless reported otherwise. Agreement and strong agreement are combined, and neutral and missing responses are not summarized here.

I was unaware that my old beliefs about criminal offenders were so closed. I thought most were social deviants who could never benefit from a program like reparative justice. What changed my mind came in two stages: (1) seeing offenders in their roles as community members (e.g., store clerk, elementary school teacher) instead of only seeing them in the "hot seat"; and (2) the enthusiasm many (not all) offenders bring to the table when they learn that reparative justice is a chance to make things right again.

#### *Crime Victims and Restorative Attitudes*

One of the greatest challenges presented to corrections-based programs provided by the restorative justice vision is work with crime victims (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001; Umbreit, 2001). Board members in general believe they are successful in their work with victims. Although victim participation in board meetings has been low historically, it is clear from these data that this is not because of indifference on the part of board members. Most clearly want victims involved, and despite confidence in their work, many board members are critical about lack of victim involvement and would like to see more effort made in their recruitment. One respondent stated,

"This factor is quite weak. I have only participated in about ten hearings with victims versus hundreds of cases overall. Contact with victims is lacking."

As other studies of restorative dialogue and conferencing programs have demonstrated (Umbreit, 1989), volunteers tend not to find victims to be retributive, or working at cross-purposes with the board. The findings reported in Table 4 show that board members generally believe the program is effective in responding to victim's needs, that it is better than traditional probation, that board members work well with victims, and that victim involvement improves the outcome of board hearings. Despite generally low participation rates in reparative boards, victim involvement was overwhelmingly viewed as a good thing. As one respondent observed in written commentary accompanying his survey, "By coincidence, in many of my cases, the victims were not interested, or content not to participate. . . . When victims are involved, overwhelmingly they have concern for the well-being and direction of the offender."

Although this supportive view of victims is the majority viewpoint, it is not universal. Another board member wrote, "I have mixed feelings about [victim involvement]. I think the aim of victim restoration is great, but some of the victims seem as if they take advantage of their role as victim in some pretty petty cases." In general, advocates of restorative justice argue that unless boards can increase victim participation, they will be unlikely to serve victims well (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001). Here we find at least that low victim participation is not a result of board members' philosophical opposition to their inclusion.

#### *Restoration and the Community Focus*

Board members typically spend time discussing the community impact of an offense because they see themselves as community representatives, and because many of the crimes are victimless and/or victims infrequently attend hearings (Karp, 2001). Table 5 shows that board members strongly believe the program is effective in meeting community needs by repairing harm and increasing public safety. They tend not to view community service as a means of retribution, but instead as a vehicle to repair harm and reintegrate offenders. For example, one respondent wrote that service "should not be looked at as punitive, but as an opportunity to give back some of the trust that was damaged by the offense." Although they also tend not to see their role as providing a form of treatment, another pointed to the effect of service on the offender: "We have had some dramatic successes in which the offenders, sullen and reluctant, have been so impressed by the way they've been received

**TABLE 4: Attitudes About Victims**

	<i>Percentage</i>
Program succeeds in restoring victims.	
Agree	59
Disagree	14
Boards work well with victims.	
Agree	66
Disagree	4
Victims are retributive.	
Agree	15
Disagree	49
Victim involvement improves hearings.	
Agree	70
Disagree	4
Current efforts to recruit victims are adequate.	
Agree	28
Disagree	52
Reparative probation is better than traditional probation with regard to victims.	
Agree	70
Disagree	6

and treated by the community service agencies that they've continued to volunteer after their required stints have been completed."

Although service is rarely linked to the offense (Karp, 2001), board members believe such a linkage is an important objective. For one board member, community service has multiple impacts: "I think it is important in helping offenders become productive members of the community. It is positive for them to be doing something good and helpful for others. Hopefully, this leads to a more positive self-image, too. And hopefully, it develops compassion in the offender."

#### *Transforming Offenders*

Board members recognize that the program is not going to change the lives of every offender but are decidedly positive about offenders who successfully complete the program. One board member wrote, "The process seems to be a critical turn-around point for some and a shrug for others. Clearly, we cannot compensate for a lifetime of negative experiences. Nevertheless, I've never seen that the process did any harm and we can point to some successes."

**TABLE 5: Attitudes About Community Needs and Community Service**

	<i>Percentage</i>
Program succeeds in restoring communities.	
Agree	78
Disagree	3
Community service is meant to be punishment.	
Agree	20
Disagree	57
Community service repairs community harm.	
Agree	94
Disagree	3
Community service is most restorative when linked to the offense.	
Agree	91
Disagree	3
Community service reintegrates offenders.	
Agree	88
Disagree	3
Reparative probation helps meet basic community needs.	
Agree	89
Disagree	2
My community is safer because of reparative probation.	
Agree	41
Disagree	13

Table 6 reports findings that more accurately reflect board member attitudes about what the program is meant to achieve in its work with offenders than about their assessment of every offender they meet with. The table shows that when offenders do complete the program successfully (about 80% of offenders—see Karp et al., 2002), board members largely believe they have an understanding of the harm they caused, are remorseful, have taken active responsibility for repairing the harm, and learned something about how to be a better citizen. One board member wrote:

For me, this has been the most effective and rewarding part of the Reparative Board process. I believe our panel has been very effective in getting many of the offenders to think about what they have done in a larger context, to give serious consideration to their own futures, and to clean up their acts. Time will tell.

#### *Community/Government Role and Relationship*

In restorative and community justice, a partnership between the community and the state is vital, and as suggested above, there is a view that the crim-

**TABLE 6: Attitudes About Offender Success**

	<i>Percentage</i>
Offenders that have successfully completed reparative probation:	
A. Understand the harm of their offense	
Agree	90
Disagree	2
B. Are remorseful	
Agree	60
Disagree	3
C. Have actively participated in the decision-making process	
Agree	74
Disagree	7
D. Have repaired the harm	
Agree	78
Disagree	4
E. Have gained new competencies	
Agree	56
Disagree	13
F. Understand their responsibilities as a community member	
Agree	77
Disagree	4

inal justice system's role must change. Some restorative justice advocates are worried about co-optation of restorative justice by state agencies (Umbreit, 1999). Other critics are concerned about power differentials (Crawford, 1995) and emphasize the need for power sharing (Pranis, 1998). In Vermont, correctional administrators describe some perceived tension between boards and the "central office" (Jim Spinelli, director of quality assurance, Vermont Department of Corrections, personal communication, February 10, 2000). Indeed, one board member wrote that "mid-level management at DOC has not been sold on reparative (boards), and feels threatened by a program run by volunteers. If this doesn't change, the program will fail."

The survey results reveal, however, that board members are largely content with the management of the boards by VDOC. Table 7 reports that most board members are happy with VDOC, do not find the department to be overly directive, do not think VDOC is strongly inclined to withhold more difficult cases, and rely on VDOC for training.

In summary, these descriptive findings suggest a group of volunteers deeply committed to restorative justice, highly optimistic about the effectiveness of reparative probation, and very satisfied with their participation.

**TABLE 7: Attitudes About the Vermont Department of Corrections (VDOC)**

	<i>Percentage</i>
VDOC works well with boards.	
Agree	58
Disagree	16
I am happy with board's relationship with VDOC.	
Agree	70
Disagree	7
VDOC is too directive of board practice.	
Agree	19
Disagree	44
VDOC should provide more training.	
Agree	57
Disagree	13
VDOC should allow boards to see more serious offenders.	
Agree	32
Disagree	42

### *DISCUSSION*

The growing popularity of community and restorative justice practices, especially those that involve victims, offenders, and community members in decision making, has created demand for greater understanding of how these programs accomplish their objectives. Although the role of the community generally, and the role of volunteers specifically, appears to be a vital component of these new approaches, citizen participants remain understudied relative to the role of victims and offenders (e.g., Bazemore, 1999; Umbreit, 1989, 1999). Research on restorative justice initiatives has previously examined the impacts on and perspectives of victims and offenders but has not looked at community volunteers.

In this article, we seek to build knowledge about the experience of community members as volunteers in Vermont's Reparative Probation Program, to date the only U.S. state-wide effort to institutionalize the citizen role in restorative decision making. Results of a recent outcome evaluation indicate a largely successful program (Karp et al., 2002), and the volunteers surveyed in the current study are clearly content with this success.

The results of the current survey suggest that board members are generally representative of the community in terms of race and sex. There is great diversity in income level, religiosity, and political orientation. However board members tend to be older, better educated, and to have resided in their communities longer than the average Vermonter. This may have to do with



the civic mindedness of long-term residents, and the time availability of retirees—a natural volunteer pool.

These demographic differences are made more extreme when comparing board members to the probationers they see, who are disproportionately poorly educated, younger, and men. Although critics and Department of Corrections staff have, at times, expressed a need to mobilize a more inclusive group of volunteers (e.g., including welfare mothers, the unemployed, young people, or even ex-offenders), a positive slant on this difference might be that offenders see board members as role models—community elders sharing their wisdom. More likely, this demographic difference creates social distance, in which neither side fully understands the other (Pranis, 2001). These findings raise two questions about board composition for future research. Is the pool of volunteers naturally limited by the characteristics of this sample, and what effect does composition have on offender participation, satisfaction, and cooperation?

One indication of a successful volunteer program is the length of time volunteers stay with the program. Although some board members complain of burnout, and some staff imply that boards get “stale,” it is surprising and encouraging that three fourths of the board members have served on boards for longer than 1 year. This translates into knowledge and experience, diminishes the workload associated with recruitment, and indirectly indicates that board members like their work.

The single most-striking indication of board satisfaction is the item that asked respondents directly about their experience of satisfaction with the program: 92% agreed that they were satisfied with their experience. Moreover, participation has generally increased members’ enthusiasm for volunteering, their sense of community, empathy for victims and offenders, and their commitment to the philosophy of restorative justice. Board members believe their work with offenders is educative and reintegrative, and that they are contributing to the healing of victims and the betterment of their communities. We can therefore add a new group (volunteers) to the list of stakeholders (victims, offenders) already established in the literature to be highly satisfied with participation in restorative practices (Braithwaite, 2002).

Despite expectations of tensions between volunteers and correctional administrators, our findings suggest positive community/justice system collaboration in the case of boards. Although observers of early board hearings raised concerns about excessive independence that would eventually create resistance on the part of volunteers and deviation from restorative justice principles in favor of more punitive or more treatment-oriented approaches, there is little in these findings to indicate opposition or lack of commitment to core program values. Nevertheless, the current study does not evaluate vol-

unteers' knowledge of restorative justice—we did not give them a test—or examine their skills as practitioners. Future research should, perhaps through qualitative research, closely observe and measure their knowledge and skills. In addition, future research needs to explain why, despite enthusiasm for victim participation by board members, this program and others similar to it have not succeeded in eliciting high levels of such participation.

Although we have not examined consistency with restorative principles at the level of actual practice (see Karp, 2001), we find many indications in these findings (e.g., strong support for victims, the lack of support for retributive values) of a normative commitment to restorative and community justice. Moreover, the VDOC strategy of allowing volunteers substantial independence in developing a neighborhood focus consistent with local needs appears to have increased support for the department rather than antagonism and does not appear to have led to wide deviation from restorative principles.

A clear limitation of these data for explanatory analysis is their relative homogeneity: Board members simply did not exhibit as much variation in attitudes as we initially predicted. Although researchers may or may not find similarly high levels of satisfaction in other programs, one corrective to increase variation could be to seek to include former board members who have terminated their membership. Among them we are likely to find greater disagreement with the principles and practices of the program and dissatisfaction with their experience. Low variation among responses may have been caused by biases resulting from self-selection, or perhaps as an equalizing function of the program on volunteers' attitudes over time. Pretests and posttests of volunteers' expectations and attitudes toward salient issues in future research should help us understand the causes of low variation among participant responses.

Regarding other directions for future studies, it is also important to note that board members are not only correctional volunteers but also are community residents and citizens with a stake in the quality of community life. Future research might explore their motivation for participation and factors influencing their ongoing commitment to board membership in greater depth. Furthermore, we need to examine the interpersonal dynamics between board members, correctional staff, victims, and offenders. A substantial body of research has explored the victim/offender dynamic (e.g., Umbreit, 2001), however still very little has explored the volunteer relationship with victims or offenders (but see Karp, 2002).

### *CONCLUSION*

Despite recent growth in the use of volunteers in community justice initiatives, researchers have not fully examined or appreciated their role in the process. In earlier studies, they identify the typical role for volunteers in correctional programs as lay counselors engaged in one-to-one mentoring relationships with offenders. These relationships range in duration and intensity from brief structured interviews of one or two sessions (Greenberg, 1988) to weekly meetings over a 10-month period (Moore, 1987). Less meaningful roles have also been assigned to volunteers charged with monitoring offenders' curfew requirements, or completing paperwork and phone calls. The community justice volunteers examined here have qualitatively new criminal justice roles that seem to fulfill the vision of partnership often promoted by criminal justice professionals and illustrated by the APPA position statement quoted in our introduction. We found respondents to have high levels of satisfaction and commitment to restorative principles and to the community-criminal justice partnership.

To conclude, we suggest several reasons why the community volunteer role is unique. First, volunteers are viewed as effective because they are less likely than professionals to have competing interests. By contrast, probation or parole officers, for example, must balance social support with enforcement and control. A probationer might see the officer as a source of help or as a potential threat. "Based upon this apparent contradiction of purpose, the probationer may be unable to clearly differentiate between these dual roles" (Shields et al., 1983, p. 58). Because volunteers are rarely given the direct authority to change the conditions of a sentence, thus they are less likely to be seen as a threat.

Second, when volunteers have greater authority, such as in Vermont's Reparative Probation Program, they may be perceived by offenders as the "moral voice of the community" (Etzioni, 1996), rather than as instruments of the state, professionally charged with repressing "problem populations" (Spitzer, 1975). If informal social control is indeed more effective than formal control (Hunter, 1985; Sampson et al., 1997; Tittle, 1980), the influence of volunteers, by inference, should be greater than professional staff influence. They may be seen as more credible.

Third, some have argued that although professionals may possess skills and willingness to form positive relationships with victims, offenders, and

families, their status as paid professionals diminishes their influence in efforts to provide social support and social control (Bazemore, 2000; Braithwaite & Mugford, 1998; Pranis, 2001). Young people in particular appear to make clear distinctions between those who work with or spend time with them because they want to and those who are paid to do so.

If the only adults who intervene in the lives of young people, besides family, are those who are paid—police, teachers, youth workers, probation officers—then children may interpret this to mean that others do not care about them, that they do not belong to the community, that they are unimportant to the community. The implicit message to youth today is an extremely corrosive one... This is a world that does not encourage empathy or a sense of a common good larger than the individual interest. (Pranis & Bussler, 1997, p. 6)

However, volunteers may send a different message, and volunteers are often conscious of their unique role. In another study, board volunteers participating in a focus group believed that when their interventions were successful it was because they were not “getting paid,” that they more effectively conveyed a sense of concern or care, and that their authority is more akin to familial social control—“we can exercise the authority that parents have lost” (Bazemore, 2001). Thus, board members may exert a unique form of authority or social control that is different from professional correctional agents.

Finally, citizen involvement is important because it represents a step toward a more democratic approach to criminal justice problems (Barber, 1984). Christie (1977) argued that criminal justice agencies have “stolen” the authority to resolve crime problems from community members, especially victims and offenders. Thus, crime victims become ancillary to the justice process, rather than the principal focus. Crimes are defined as offenses against the state, rather than against individuals. The perception of harm caused by crime is reduced to a violation of the criminal code, rather than suffering caused to victims and communities. By contrast, citizen participation refocuses the justice “lens” on what some regard as the key stakeholders in the justice process (Zehr, 1990). More broadly, such direct participation in decision making appears to represent a movement toward a democratization of social control (Bazemore, 2000; Braithwaite, 1994). Restorative community justice forums may lead to vibrant social movement politics as board members gain insight into the circumstances of offenders and seek to address the underlying social causes of crime (Braithwaite, 1994; Braithwaite & Parker, 1999). From this perspective, as Pranis (2001) described it, the problem of crime

is generating opportunities to understand and practice democracy in the community in ways that build community and increase grassroots power. It has become clear that creating safe communities requires active citizen involvement. This calls for a reengagement of all citizens in the process of determining shared norms, holding one another accountable to those norms and determining how best to resolve breaches of the norms in a way that does not increase risk in the community. (p. 288)

Although any model of restorative conferencing—whether family group conferencing, victim-offender dialogue, peacemaking circles, or reparative boards—has the potential for such democratization, those approaches that routinely involve a wide array of community volunteers would appear most likely to change the decision-making dynamic and thereby have the greatest potential for maximizing sustained community involvement.

APPENDIX  
Survey Items

- 
1. Which board do you currently serve on?
- Addison       Chittenden       Lamaille       Rutland       Windham
- Bennington       Essex       Orange       Washington       Windsor
- Caledonia       Franklin       Orleans
2. How long have you been a board member? \_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months
3. Approximately how many cases have you participated in?
- 0 to 10       11 to 25       26 to 50       More than 50
4. Prior to your membership on the reparative board, did you ever appear before a board in any of the following roles? (Please remember all answers will be kept confidential.)
- Victim       Supporter of Victim       Offender       Supporter of Offender       None of these roles
5. Regarding the crime victims that have appeared before your board, how frequently have you had contact with them outside of the board (such as knowing them socially, working with them, knowing their family, etc.)?
- Never       Rarely       Sometimes       Frequently       Very Often
6. Regarding the offenders that have appeared before your board, how frequently have you had contact with them outside of the board (such as knowing them socially, working with them, knowing their family, etc.)?
- Never       Rarely       Sometimes       Frequently       Very Often
7. My feeling of empathy for crime victims has increased.
- Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither Agree  
Nor Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree
- Response options for Items 8 through 54 are listed below:*
- Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Neither Agree  
Nor Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree
8. My feeling of empathy for criminal offenders has increased.

9. My sense of membership in my community has increased.
10. My enthusiasm for volunteer work has increased.
11. My understanding of the philosophy of restorative justice has increased.
12. My commitment to the philosophy of restorative justice has increased.
13. My board is generally successful in its work with offenders to restore victims.
14. Repairing the harm to victims and communities should be the main goal of boards.
15. Our board puts too much emphasis on the offender's needs and not enough on repairing harm to the victim and community.
16. Our board meetings are most successful when victims attend.
17. My board works well with victims.
18. I do not feel sufficiently trained to work with victims.
19. The contracts we write often seem unrelated to the crime and the harm it has caused.
20. Victims (when they attend) have a big impact on the reparative agreement—that is, agreements looks pretty different than when victims do not attend.
21. I believe there is a great danger in giving the victim too much power in board hearings.
22. Most victims are primarily interested in more severe punishment for the offender.
23. Victim involvement generally improves a board hearing and improves the decisions boards make.
24. I would like our board to experiment with other processes for making decisions such as family group conferencing or victim offender mediation/dialogue.
25. My board is generally successful in its work with offenders to restore my community.
26. Having offenders do community service is an important way to:
  - punish a criminal offender
  - have them make amends to my community
  - have them learn how to be productive members of my community
27. Having offenders do community service is most restorative when it is:
  - completed in the community where the crime took place
  - linked to the offense (e.g., drunk driver presents at high school on dangers of drunk driving)
28. A primary concern of boards should be making sure the offender gets the proper treatment or counseling.

(continued)

## APPENDIX (continued)

29. Our board needs to spend more time on offender reintegration.
30. Our board is not sufficiently concerned about offenders' due process rights.
31. Our board is generally too soft on offenders.
32. Offenders who have successfully completed Reparative Probation with our board have achieved an understanding of how their behavior affected the victim and my community  
an understanding of their responsibilities as a member of my community  
a sense of remorse for their crimes  
an active participation in the decision-making process that generated their contracts  
a completion of tasks that restored victims and my community  
new skills that will help them avoid criminal activity in the future
33. In terms of Vermont's criminal justice system, reparative probation makes an important contribution.
34. In terms of meeting the basic needs of my community, reparative probation makes an important contribution.
35. My community is safer because of the Reparative Probation Program.
36. Members of our board need to develop a better understanding of restorative justice principles.
37. Reparative Probation has not been sufficiently appreciated by Vermont's criminal justice community.
38. Compared with traditional court-ordered probation, our board does a better job of:  
protecting offenders' rights  
addressing offenders' needs  
treating offenders with respect  
holding offenders accountable  
preventing offender recidivism  
teaching offenders about community membership and responsibility  
meeting the needs of victims  
meeting the needs of my community
39. VDOC has appreciated the efforts of board volunteers.



40. VDOC has done a fine job of promoting restorative justice in Vermont.
41. VDOC has worked well with board members in developing board processes and procedures.
42. VDOC's current efforts to involve crime victims in board hearings seem sufficient.
43. VDOC's current efforts to recruit community members for board membership seem sufficient.
44. VDOC is too directive regarding board philosophy.
45. VDOC is too directive regarding board practice.
46. We need more training and guidance from VDOC.
47. I believe boards should have more discretion over which cases we will hear.
48. I believe boards should have more discretion over the kinds of contracts we can negotiate.
49. Often the cases we receive are too difficult for our board to handle.
50. We should be allowed to hear cases involving more chronic offenders.
51. We should be allowed to hear cases involving more serious offenders.
52. Overall, I am pretty happy with our board's relationship with VDOC.
53. Overall, I am satisfied with my experience with the reparative program.
54. To better support your board, the Department of Corrections should:  
 provide additional or different training opportunities for volunteers  
 help find more community service opportunities for offenders  
 add more paid support staff  
 better respond to suggestions by volunteers  
 demonstrate more leadership or guidance  
 allow for more leeway or autonomy by the boards
55. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ Years  Male  Female
56. What is your gender?  Male  Female

(continued)

## APPENDIX (continued)

57. What is your race or ethnicity (check one)
- White  Hispanic  African American
- Native American  Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other: please specify \_\_\_\_\_
58. How long have you lived in the area where you serve on a board? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
59. What is the highest education level you have completed?
- Less than High School  High School  Some College  College  Graduate or Professional
60. Please specify your work or student status:
- Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_  Student  Retired  Unemployed
61. What was your total household income (e.g., including spouse, if applicable) before taxes last year?
- \$0 to 20,000  \$20,001 to \$40,000  \$40,001 to \$60,000  \$60,001 to \$80,000  More than \$80,000
62. Please write your religious affiliation, if any: \_\_\_\_\_
63. How important is religious faith (or spirituality) in your life right now?
- Not Important  Somewhat Important  Very Important  Of Primary Importance  Not Sure
64. How would you characterize your political views?
- Very Liberal  Liberal  Moderate  Conservative  Very Conservative  Not Sure

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