

**State of Illinois
Circuit Court of Cook County**



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**Restorative
Justice
Community
Courts**

**Restorative Justice
Community Court**
A Restorative Approach to Crime & Conflict

**Participant Handbook
Guidelines and Program Information**

Honorable Timothy C. Evans, Chief Judge



STATE OF ILLINOIS
CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY
Office of the Chief Judge

2020

“Welcome to the Restorative Justice Community Court, where healing is the goal rather than punishment, and the quest for justice becomes a collective effort.”

- Honorable Timothy C. Evans, Chief Judge



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**Restorative
Justice
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**Circuit Court of Cook County
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Conclusion and important reminders

The Restorative Justice Community Court will be held once a week to hear non-violent cases and determine a path to recovery which will include individualized steps which must be completed by those in the program. The goal is to bring young people back into the community, repair harm, and move down a different path. The Restorative approach is a second chance to start over with a positive attitude and a vision of the success in the future.

Court participants must abide by the following guidelines:

- Be respectful to all Case Managers and Court Officers and Staff.
- Accept the assistance you are offered to complete the ROHA
- Schedule your peace circles as soon as possible.
- Start working on your Repair of Harm Agreement requirements right away
- Dress for success
- Stay positive for a successful program completion
- Your progress and success depends on you.



What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative Justice is an alternative form of justice rooted in the belief that repairing harm, building empathy, and restoring relationships is a better way to prevent, deter, and respond to crime. In restorative justice, offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their criminal actions and to be accountable for the harm they caused. In addition restorative practices look past criminal behavior to educate offenders on how to acquire tools, resources, training and skills needed to reintegrate into the community in a meaningful and contributory way.

Restorative Justice also emphasizes the importance of elevating the role of victims and community members through active involvement in the justice process.

What is the Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC)?

The Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC) is the first court of its kind in Cook County to adopt peace circles as the resolution process for criminal cases for adults. Restorative justice empowers the community to create solutions to repair the harm caused by crime and conflict. For every case, the RJCC brings together the person charged, the person harmed, and the community members in a confidential conversation in a peace circle.

The RJCC will help reduce criminal convictions, which can create a barrier to individuals participating fully in society and the workforce.

Who qualifies?

- Be 18-26 years old
- Have been charged with a non-violent felony or misdemeanor
- Live in the neighborhood assigned to the court
- Have a non-violent criminal history
- Accept the responsibility for the harm caused

What is required of the RJCC participant?

The person charged must do the following:

- Be willing to accept responsibility for the harm caused
- Actively participate in all RJCC processes including pre-circle work and peace circle meetings
- Appear at the court meetings as scheduled
- Notify their case manager, case worker, or court coordinator about any change of address, phone number, or employment status
- Follow all of the requirements of the Repair of Harm Agreement
- Complete all of the requirements of the Repair of Harm Agreement created in the peace circle, which may include community service, job training, counseling, restitution, or paying for damages

Community Involvement

Empowering local communities to respond to their own conflicts meets the needs of the community to repair psychological injury of crime and helps to nurture the sense of community.

Members of the community are trained by the RJCC to participate in peace circles and create the Repair of Harm Agreements. They also provide support to both the person charged and person harmed.

Graduation

Once all of the requirements of the Repair of Harm Agreement are completed, the person charged will be eligible to have the case dismissed and graduate from the Restorative Justice Community Court. Graduation is a time to celebrate. All graduates will be invited to the RJCC graduation ceremony and encouraged to speak about the program experience.



Challenges

Completing the Repair of Harm Agreement will require work and a change of behavior. It could be challenging at first. Orientation with staff member or court coordinator is designed to explain and help court participants to understand the rules and requirements of RJCC. When the Repair of Harm Agreement is created, the participants should start working on it. If within the first two months the court participant has not started working on the completion of the Repair of Harm Agreement, the court staff will initiate our early warning procedure. If there is no evidence of completing the Repair of Harm Agreement for the next month after the early warning, JRCC judge will decide if court participant will be able to continue the program.

Services

The Restorative Justice Community Court will work with local community organizations, colleges, and local service organizations to provide all court participants opportunities to complete the Repair of Harm Agreement. Court participants will be advised to use the treatments and programs under the supervision of their case manager and provided by local service organizations.

Restorative Justice Community Court mission, goals and values

The Restorative Justice Community Court serves the community. RJCC offers deferred prosecution to individuals who successfully resolve their case through the use of peace circles and other restorative practices to address and repair the harm of their criminal behavior. This process allows offenders to be accountable for their criminal activity, victims to express how a crime affected them, and an agreement to be reached between them about how to repair the harm.

These community courts decrease convictions, increase public safety by reducing crime and teaching peace practices, empower community leadership, restore trust between the community and the government who serve them.

Restorative Justice is based on four values: encounter, accountability, inclusion, reintegration.



The Repair of Harm Agreement

The Repair of Harm Agreement (ROHA) is an agreement by all members of the circle that describes the steps necessary to repair the harm caused by the crime. The ROHA is a result of a consensus decision made by participants in the circle. Methods to repair the harm are individually tailored, and may include, but are not limited to:

- an apology letter
- restitution to victim or the community
- community service and counseling
- goal setting for education or employment
- reconnect with family
- re-integration into the community, etc.

The goal is to complete the ROHA within 6 to 12 months.

How will the person harmed benefit?

The person harmed will have the opportunity to express how and why they were hurt by the crime and directly ask the person charged for what is needed to heal from the incident. The person harmed will have the opportunity to express their pain, be heard and actively works towards recovery.

Restorative Justice Community Court Structure

- Welcome by the Court – at the first appearance the judge and RJCC personnel welcome the participant and briefly orient them to restorative practices and responsibilities
- Orientation – conducted by a staff member or court coordinator who explains the process and expectations.
- Acceptance by the victim and court participant. If the court participant or victim do not accept the RJCC process to resolve the case, then the case will return to the traditional court process.
- Schedule the first peace circle with in a two-week timeframe from the day of the acceptance of the RJCC process.
- Create the Repair of Harm Agreement within a month of the date of the first peace circle.

