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Laura Merkey

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# Building Trust and Breaking Down the Wall: The Use of Restorative Justice to Repair Police-Community Relationships

Laura Merkey\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The town of Ferguson, Missouri, captured national attention when a grand jury failed to indict Darren Wilson, a white police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, three months prior.<sup>1</sup> Similar citizen deaths involving police in both New York City and Cleveland have magnified the tensions felt across the country, and in many cities and communities, the community-police relationships are rapidly becoming untenable.<sup>2</sup> Baltimore, Maryland, is a prime example; protests, riots, and an atmosphere of mistrust pervaded the city for months after the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice.<sup>3</sup> The situation was, simply put, a powder keg waiting to explode.

Our traditional justice system is simply not adequately responding to all of the issues currently confronting society. A new strategy needs to be put into place, and quickly. An answer can be found within the practice of restorative justice. A proactive initiative, targeted at sparking authentic com-

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\* J.D. Candidate, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, 2016; Winner of the University of Missouri School of Law's Center for the Study of Dispute Resolution National Writing Competition. The author would like to thank Professors Deborah Eisenberg and Toby Guerin for their encouragement in writing this Article. The author would like to dedicate this work to her grandparents, Ronald and Kathryn Merkey, Jeannette and Paul Marx, and Donald and Shirley Crouch.

1. See Moni Basu, Holly Yan & Dana Ford, *Fires, Chaos Erupt in Ferguson After Grand Jury Doesn't Indict in Michael Brown Case*, CNN (Nov. 25, 2014), <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/24/justice/ferguson-grand-jury/> (outlining the timeline of the city's response to the grand jury decision, highlighting incidents of looting, violence, and arson that culminated in Governor Jay Nixon calling for additional members of the Missouri National Guard).

2. See Brent Staples, *Hope and Anger at the Garner Protests*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 5, 2014), <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/06/opinion/hope-and-anger-at-the-garner-protests.html> (describing demonstrations in cities throughout the country, voicing outrage and frustration over the police shootings, and rallying behind the slogans "I Can't Breathe" and "Black Lives Matter," which allude to the Eric Garner and Michael Brown shootings, respectively).

3. See, e.g., Justin George & Jessica Anderson, *Ferguson Protesters Take to Baltimore Streets*, BALTIMORE SUN (Nov. 25, 2014), <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-ferguson-protests-20141125-story.html> (describing the demonstrations and protests staged in Baltimore in the weeks following the events in Ferguson, Missouri).

munication between police, public officials, and the communities they serve, would begin to eliminate the wall that has come between citizens and the police.

Additionally, a concurrent, reactive approach that utilizes restorative justice techniques, particularly restorative circles, needs to be adopted as an appropriate response to traumatic events that involve both the community and the local police. Only once the community is engaged and a level of trust is established between officers and citizens can strong relationships be built. It is these relationships that hold the most promise for withstanding traumatic events that challenge the community.

## II. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice, or the idea of focusing on the needs of victims, offenders, and the affected communities, is not a particularly novel concept; in fact, its core values parallel the practices of ancient cultures spanning the globe. As Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie noted in his groundbreaking article, *Conflicts as Property*, in 1977, the criminal justice system as a whole has taken criminal conflicts from the parties and has made them the property of others, primarily lawyers.<sup>4</sup> Christie explains that “[m]odern criminal control systems represent one of the many cases of lost opportunities for involving citizens in tasks that are of immediate importance to them.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, Christie explains, the victim never has the chance to come to know the offender and the offender in turn has “lost the opportunity to explain himself to a person [whose] evaluation of him might have mattered . . . [and he has also] lost one of the most important possibilities for being forgiven.”<sup>6</sup>

Restorative justice builds on this concept of conflicts as the property of the parties and seeks to use a process of direct, usually facilitated, communication with the affected community and the offender. As alternative dispute resolution (“ADR”) expert Carrie Menkel-Meadow wrote, “In its most idealized form, there are four Rs of restorative justice: repair, restore, reconcile, and reintegrate the offenders and victims to each other and to their shared community.”<sup>7</sup> The main goal of restorative justice is to heal all individuals directly affected by a crime or bad act.<sup>8</sup> The criminal justice system has used restorative justice as a means of mediation between victims and offenders, particularly within the juvenile court system, since the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> It is widely

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4. Nils Christie, *Conflicts as Property*, 17 BRIT. J. CRIM. 1, 1 (1977).

5. *Id.* at 7.

6. *Id.* at 9.

7. Carrie Menkel-Meadow, *Restorative Justice: What Is It and Does It Work?*, 3 ANN. REV. L. & SOC. SCI. 161, 162 (2007).

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.* at 163.

used in schools and the community as a strategy to keep young people out of court.<sup>10</sup>

Restorative justice has been used in a broader context as well. As Menkel-Meadow has noted, restorative justice commissions “are designed to heal the nation-state or civil community by allowing many narratives of hurt and harm to be told and by creating new collective narratives of the truth so that a society can begin anew with transformative understandings of both its past and its future.”<sup>11</sup> Restorative justice processes involve many stakeholders and produce more authentic communication and thus more genuine understanding. Researchers have found that rates of compliance with regulations are higher when regulated industries and corporate actors are actively engaged in the discussions with the regulators.<sup>12</sup> It is logical to see how such a strategy employed in the corporate arena, heavily influenced by power dynamics, could also be utilized in a community that has a high police presence and is also strained by power dynamics.

One particularly effective restorative justice process that is widely used in communities is the restorative circle.<sup>13</sup> Similar to the restorative conference, which is a more structured meeting between offenders, victims, and impacted parties used to help all parties deal with the consequences of a particular wrongdoing and decide how to best repair the harm, a restorative circle can be used proactively or as a response to an emerging conflict.<sup>14</sup> Restorative circles can both respond to problems as well as build relationships and a sense of community.<sup>15</sup> Within the circle, members share their perspectives in an atmosphere of safety and equality, in contrast to traditional meeting formats, which can sometimes be hindered by a sense of hierarchies, win-lose positioning, or other factors.<sup>16</sup>

Some jurisdictions across the country are already using innovative ADR processes to rehabilitate police officer-community relationships. An excellent example of a restorative circle used to address a collectively felt wrong is the case of the 2010 Seattle police shooting of John T. Williams.<sup>17</sup> Williams was a Native American wood carver who had a history of misdemeanor of-

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10. See generally Ted Wachtel, *Defining Restorative*, INT’L INST. FOR RESTORATIVE PRACTICES (2013), <http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/Defining-Restorative.pdf> (providing an overview and history of restorative practices).

11. Menkel-Meadow, *supra* note 7, at 169.

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at 167; see also Wachtel, *supra* note 10, at 7.

14. Wachtel, *supra* note 10, at 7–8.

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.*

17. See Steve Miletich, *Extraordinary Meeting Followed Carver’s Fatal Shooting by Seattle Officer*, SEATTLE TIMES, <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/extraordinary-meeting-followed-carvers-fatal-shooting-by-seattle-officer/> (last updated Feb. 3, 2011) (reporting on the restorative circle that took place between police officers and the family of John T. Williams).

fenses and alcoholism.<sup>18</sup> While carrying a piece of wood and a small carving knife one afternoon, Williams encountered Seattle police officer Ian Birk.<sup>19</sup> Officer Birk yelled at Williams three times to drop his knife.<sup>20</sup> Officer Birk later said that he felt threatened and that this was the reason why he fatally shot Williams from a distance of nine feet.<sup>21</sup> The shooting ignited tensions between the Seattle police department and the Native American community, resulting in highly emotional demonstrations and protests.<sup>22</sup> The feelings of anger and mistrust were mutual; one year before the Williams shooting, two police officers were shot and killed while sitting in their marked car.<sup>23</sup> They were targeted because they were police.<sup>24</sup>

One of the attorneys for the Williams family, Andrea Brenneke, wrote an extensive account of the aftermath of the shooting.<sup>25</sup> She noted that the Williams family felt unfairly singled out and harassed by members of the Seattle police department after the shooting.<sup>26</sup> The situation had reached a boiling point. Brenneke, an ADR practitioner, suggested that the Williams family, members of the police force, and affected members of the community participate in a restorative circle in order to deescalate the tension and work toward a level of better mutual understanding.<sup>27</sup> Brenneke describes how she and the other leaders of the restorative circle modified the process to fit the situation by holding pre-circle meetings and creating written summaries of the process to share with the participants.<sup>28</sup> The leaders of the circle decided that the details of the shooting would be off-limits because an investigation was already in process, and civil and criminal liability was at stake.<sup>29</sup> As she explains, “[A]ll of these were obvious barriers to open and direct communication. Yet, we realized we didn’t need to talk about the details of the shooting

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18. Andrea Brenneke, *A Restorative Circle in the Wake of a Police Shooting*, TIKKUN (Feb. 1, 2012), <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/a-restorative-circle-in-the-wake-of-a-police-shooting>; Lynda V. Mapes, *Carver’s Death a Violent End to a Tormented Life*, SEATTLE TIMES (Oct. 15, 2010), <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/carvers-death-a-violent-end-to-a-tormented-life/>.

19. Steve Miletich, *Woodcarver was Shot Four Times in His Side by Officer, Autopsy Shows*, SEATTLE TIMES (Oct. 5, 2010), <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/woodcarver-was-shot-four-times-in-his-side-by-officer-autopsy-shows/>.

20. *Id.*

21. Brenneke, *supra* note 18 (account of the Williams family’s lawyer, depicting the aftermath of the shooting and the genesis of the idea for a restorative circle).

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

itself to address the dynamics and conditions that gave rise to it and continued after it.”<sup>30</sup>

Instead, for over three hours, the restorative circle focused on the interactions and ongoing conflicts between the family and the officers and what each participant thought the solutions to the conflicts should be.<sup>31</sup> The emphasis of the restorative circle became a recognized need for mutual respect, particularly among the newer officers and the Native American carvers.<sup>32</sup> Brenneke believes that the restorative circle built new relationships that have deepened over time, and that “the shared understanding and connections from the Restorative Circle enabled peaceful and efficient navigation of ongoing, serious challenges and turned further devastating circumstances into additional opportunities for healing.”<sup>33</sup>

Skeptics of restorative justice processes argue that these processes can and will be “manipulated, corrupted, co-opted, and deformed to produce oppression, more state surveillance and discipline, and more inappropriate social control.”<sup>34</sup> However, the advantage of a restorative process is its flexibility. A circle or conference can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the particular community. It is facilitated by neutral, impartial parties and additional safeguards can be added to the process as necessary. The process is voluntary; no one person can be coerced into participating against his or her will. A restorative process focuses on the victim, offender, and the affected parties, not the system; therefore, they can control the process without fear of interference from an outside system’s or an individual’s personal agenda.

### III. BALTIMORE

Baltimore, Maryland, is among the communities that were significantly impacted by the events in Ferguson, Cleveland, and New York. In the months following the grand jury decision in Ferguson, multiple demonstrations showing solidarity with Ferguson protesters or calling for an end to police brutality shut down major interstates and roadways around the city for hours.<sup>35</sup> A *Baltimore Sun* article described one such protest, reporting that “[s]ome protesters came within inches of police officers, who did not react even as they were called the ‘klan.’”<sup>36</sup> The issue of police brutality is not a novel one in Baltimore; in September 2014, the *Sun* reported that over \$5.7 million had been paid over a three-year period in both court judgments and

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30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. Menkel-Meadow, *supra* note 7, at 171.

35. George & Anderson, *supra* note 3.

36. *Id.*

settlements in police misconduct suits, which activists say contributed to strong feelings of mistrust in Baltimore.<sup>37</sup>

In one demonstration in January 2015, protestors against police brutality announced on a loudspeaker that they planned to deliver a letter to police headquarters, calling for an end to systematic racism as well as the indictment and firing of officers who they believed terrorized and endangered communities.<sup>38</sup> The group became upset because they believed that the police then unconstitutionally prevented them from delivering the letter.<sup>39</sup> Baltimore police stated that they would have accepted the letter if they had known of the group's intentions.<sup>40</sup> The incident could have been an ideal opportunity for protestors and city officials to discuss their perspectives and generate potential solutions to this conflict. Instead, the event resulted in magnified feelings of resentment and anger between both groups.

Tensions between the police and community members in Baltimore erupted after April 12, 2015, when twenty-five-year-old Freddie Gray was pursued by foot and subsequently arrested by Baltimore city police officers.<sup>41</sup> After his arrest, Freddie Gray was shackled and placed without a seatbelt into a police van, contrary to the procedure required.<sup>42</sup> The exact timeline is unclear, but it is known that the van made several unscheduled stops on its way to Baltimore's Western District Police Station, and at some point during the transport, Freddie Gray was severely injured.<sup>43</sup> By the time the van arrived at the station, he was no longer breathing.<sup>44</sup> Freddie Gray died one week later as a result of a spinal cord injury.<sup>45</sup>

News of Freddie Gray's death sparked an immediate reaction. After two days of primarily peaceful marches that virtually shut down Baltimore, violence erupted, and the city was faced with riots, looting, and fires.<sup>46</sup> At

37. Mark Puente, *Undue Force*, BALT. SUN (Sept. 28, 2014), <http://data.baltimoresun.com/news/police-settlements/>.

38. Barry Sims, *Protestors: Police Blocked Them From Delivering Letter*, WBALTV (Jan. 16, 2015), <http://www.wbalTV.com/news/protesters-police-blocked-them-from-delivering-letter/30763780>.

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.*

41. *Arrest to Death: What Happened to Freddie Gray*, CBS NEWS (May 1, 2015), <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/arrest-to-death-what-happened-to-freddie-gray/>; see also, Justine George & Kevin Rector, *Baltimore Officer Said Freddie Gray Asked for Help*, BALT. SUN (Sept. 26, 2015), <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/freddie-gray/bs-md-officer-statements-20150926-story.html>.

42. *Arrest to Death: What Happened to Freddie Gray*, *supra* note 41.

43. *Id.*

44. *Id.*

45. David A. Graham, *The Mysterious Death of Freddie Gray*, ATLANTIC (Apr. 22, 2015), <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/the-mysterious-death-of-freddie-gray/391119/>.

46. Greg Botelho et al., *Baltimore Protests: Crowds, Police Stand Off After Curfew*, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/28/us/baltimore-riots/index.html> (last updated Apr. 29, 2015).

least fifteen officers were injured, buildings and cars across the city were destroyed, and hundreds of people were arrested.<sup>47</sup> The violence culminated in Maryland Governor Larry Hogan declaring a state of emergency and deploying thousands of National Guard members and law enforcement officers from neighboring jurisdictions to help quell the unrest.<sup>48</sup> Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake also instituted a mandatory 10:00 p.m. curfew for a week following the unrest.<sup>49</sup> In other cities across the country, such as Seattle, Portland, and Oakland, crowds of hundreds staged demonstrations in support of Baltimore protesters, several of which involved clashes with officers.<sup>50</sup> Only a few short days after these events, Marilyn Mosby, Baltimore City State's Attorney, handed down several indictments for all six officers involved in Freddie Gray's arrest and transport.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV. THE SOLUTION

This is not the first time in history that Baltimore and other communities across the nation have experienced civil unrest and tension between public servants and the community. Vernon Herron, Senior Policy Analyst for the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security, is the former Director of Homeland Security for Prince George's County, Maryland, as well as a twenty-year veteran and former leader within the Maryland State Police.<sup>52</sup> In the wake of the events in Ferguson and Cleveland, Herron wrote an editorial that suggested that within Baltimore and the policing community at large, a shift in focus is necessary in order for there to be an improvement in the police-community relationships.<sup>53</sup> Primarily, Herron points to the need for increased officer training on community relations and, similarly, more

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47. *Id.*

48. Holly Yan & Dana Ford, *Baltimore Riots: Looting, Fires Engulf City After Freddie Gray's Funeral*, CNN (last updated Apr. 28, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/27/us/baltimore-unrest/>.

49. Botelho et al., *supra* note 46.

50. Ralph Ellis, Ed Payne & Pat St. Claire, *In Philadelphia, Police Clash With Supporters of Baltimore Protests*, CNN (last updated May 1, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/30/us/nationwide-freddie-gray-protests/index.html>.

51. Alan Blinder & Richard Pérez-Peña, *6 Baltimore Police Officers Charged in Freddie Gray Death*, N.Y. TIMES (May 1, 2015), <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/us/freddie-gray-autopsy-report-given-to-baltimore-prosecutors.html>; Jean Marbella, *Six Baltimore Police Officers Charged in Freddie Gray's Death*, BALTIMORE SUN (May 2, 2015), <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-riots/bs-md-freddie-gray-mainbar-20150501-story.html>.

52. See Vernon Herron, *City Takes Steps to Prepare for Protests*, CAP. GAZETTE (July 6, 2015), <http://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/columns/ph-ac-ce-herron-column-0706-20150706-story.html>.

53. Vernon Herron, *Enhancing Police Transparency Takes More Than Body Cameras*, U. MD. CTR. FOR HEALTH & HOMELAND SECURITY (Dec. 4, 2015), <http://www.mdchhs.com/enhancing-police-transparency-takes-more-than-body-cameras/>.

education for community members on the dynamics of police tactics.<sup>54</sup> Herron explains that this can only result from continuous engagement between both parties at all times, not merely in the wake of a tragic event.<sup>55</sup>

In an interview, Herron also discussed the problems associated with program funding; primarily, once funding is cut off, the work put in place to bridge the gap between community and police can disintegrate.<sup>56</sup> He noted that “[i]n order for us to be successful this time, we must employ these new strategies not like a ‘program,’ but like a ‘way of life’ both in the police departments and the communities.”<sup>57</sup>

A 1990s initiative called “Operation People” embodied this “way of life.” Operation People, like the strategies that Herron suggests, incorporated concepts of both restorative justice and community policing.<sup>58</sup> High-crime neighborhoods were targeted for the operation, and a group of Maryland state troopers were handpicked to implement the initiative’s goals.<sup>59</sup> The first step was to conduct a survey in the neighborhood.<sup>60</sup> The survey was printed on a tag, hung on front doors, and included free postage so that answers could be returned anonymously and without any burden on the community members.<sup>61</sup> The survey contained a short list of questions that assessed perceptions of police and the community as a whole.<sup>62</sup> Simultaneously, Operation People’s leaders engaged the local police chief in discussions about the initiatives’ mechanics and objectives.<sup>63</sup> Without the chief’s agreement and support, Operation People would not be willing to enter that particular neighborhood.<sup>64</sup>

Next, a group of state troopers, paired with local police officers, would enter the community.<sup>65</sup> They would participate in community meetings in which they engaged in discussions about issues that concerned citizens in that particular neighborhood and worked with them to brainstorm solutions.<sup>66</sup> For example, one concerned mother mentioned that it would be easier to keep her children inside and off of the streets if she had cable.<sup>67</sup> The local cable provider, however, did not have enough customers willing to pay for the service to make it financially worthwhile for them to lay the cable.<sup>68</sup> After being

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54. *Id.*

55. *Id.*

56. Interview with Vernon Herron, Senior Policy Analyst, Univ. of Md. Ctr. for Health & Homeland Sec., in Balt., Md. (Jan. 21, 2015).

57. *Id.*

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.*

60. *Id.*

61. *Id.*

62. *Id.*

63. *Id.*

64. *Id.*

65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. *Id.*

68. *Id.*

approached by the troopers, the cable company was willing to bring cable to the neighborhood in exchange for publicity.<sup>69</sup> Other citizens requested more basketball courts and job fairs, all of which Operation People made happen.<sup>70</sup> One citizen voiced her concern that prior to the initiative, she felt like a prisoner in her own home, unable to drink tea on her front porch because of the drug dealers down the street.<sup>71</sup> Operation People made it clear to members of the community that no issue was too small to tackle.<sup>72</sup>

Other activities included having the state trooper and local police teams do homework with the neighborhood's children and then hang the children's artwork and high test scores on the command buses parked in the neighborhood.<sup>73</sup> Every trooper and local police member was required to give his or her pager number to any citizen that requested it.<sup>74</sup> The initiative also organized an officer-teacher basketball game at a local school, which gave members of the community an opportunity to see the officers out of their uniforms and as real people, not just members of the police force.<sup>75</sup>

Many people, when they have their first encounter with police, encounter an officer for negative reasons – whether it be a traffic ticket, a break-in to their home or vehicle, or an arrest. Operation People's goal was for these first encounters with members of the community to be positive experiences.<sup>76</sup> Members of the community would then trust the police and be more willing to serve as their eyes and ears, reporting any incidents that they witnessed within their neighborhood.<sup>77</sup>

The key to this operative is community engagement. While all communities may not have the funds to go to the same lengths as Operation People, all stakeholders in a community can still engage in frank and respectful discussion. Regular, open meetings that bring together everyone involved – from police officers, city officials, protest leaders, police union leaders, public defenders, local prosecutors, and community leaders – should and must be brought together to discuss the conflicts burdening their community. The progress in these meetings should be tracked by written reports that are posted online or distributed to the entire neighborhood. Only then will goodwill, trust, and open rapport be established between police and community members, hopefully diminishing unnecessary or unwarranted violent encounters between police and potential offenders.

If and when any type of wrongdoing occurs, the community should respond to the conflict through the use of restorative processes, like the restora-

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69. *Id.*

70. *Id.*

71. *Id.*

72. *Id.*

73. *Id.*

74. *Id.*

75. *Id.*

76. *Id.*

77. *Id.*

tive circles applied in Seattle. The Community Conferencing Center (“CCC”) in Baltimore is a “conflict transformation and community justice organization that provides ways for people to safely, collectively and effectively prevent and resolve conflicts and crime.”<sup>78</sup> The CCC includes programs that: address conflicts within schools and among students, families, teachers, and administrators; assist juvenile offenders; assist those returning to society from prison; assist soldiers and families who suffer the challenges that stem from serving in a war; provide serious crime conferencing for the families of victims, offenders and supporters; offer workplace conferencing; and address neighborhood conflicts.<sup>79</sup>

Lauren Abramson, the founder of the CCC, explained in an interview that some conflicts that the CCC observes stem from police-community disputes, and the conferences give these people in conflict a chance to talk to each other in a safe space and in a structured way, which gives everyone an equal voice.<sup>80</sup> Abramson has seen how the conferences help participants to come to understand each other’s motivations, and the honest conversations and deepened understanding that result have helped to alleviate some of the mistrust embedded within the community.<sup>81</sup>

The CCC is the only broad-based conferencing program in a large American inner-city, and it provides most of its services at no cost to the participants.<sup>82</sup> The CCC accepts referrals from anywhere, including citizens responding to an arrest.<sup>83</sup> The CCC conducts outreach to churches and community groups, advertises on the radio, and is active in the school system and the city government.<sup>84</sup> While over 17,000 residents in Baltimore have participated in a community conference, there is plenty of room to grow.<sup>85</sup> Overall, Abramson notes, the culture will not change unless there are more structures that encourage people to talk to one another and that motivate all stakeholders to engage in a better understanding on a policy level.<sup>86</sup>

The principles and frameworks established and already employed by the CCC should be utilized more broadly by the Baltimore community and be-

78. *About Us*, COMMUNITY CONFERENCING CTR., <http://www.communityconferencing.org/index.php/about/> (last visited Sept. 26, 2015).

79. *Programs & Services*, COMMUNITY CONFERENCING CTR., <http://www.communityconferencing.org/index.php/programs/> (last visited Sept. 26, 2015).

80. Interview with Lauren Abramson, Founder of the Cmty. Conferencing Ctr., in Balt., Md. (Jan. 22, 2015).

81. *Id.*

82. *Id.*

83. *Id.*; see, e.g., *Programs and Services: For Law Enforcement*, COMMUNITY CONFERENCING CTR., [http://www.communityconferencing.org/index.php/programs/for\\_law\\_enforcement/](http://www.communityconferencing.org/index.php/programs/for_law_enforcement/) (last visited Dec. 22, 2015).

84. Interview with Lauren Abramson, *supra* note 80.

85. *Id.*

86. *Id.*

yond. For example, the protest in Baltimore that dissolved into mistrust and anger over a miscommunication about a letter could have been resolved in a community conference. An open conference, that included both protest leaders and city officials, could have and should have taken place in reaction to this event. The results could have been published and widely distributed to the community. Such a conference would increase understanding and be the most likely process to provide a sustainable solution that is mutually satisfying for all parties, and therefore be more likely to be maintained.

## V. CONCLUSION

The events in Baltimore, Ferguson, New York, and Cleveland, as well as the collective fallout from these events, are substantial evidence that the violence and mistrust that plagues communities across the nation must be addressed. The change needs to be one that is both enduring and that restructures how members of society interact with one another, particularly citizens and police officers, by encouraging them to engage in honest discussions with the goal of gaining mutual understanding and respect. The change also needs to be both proactive and responsive. Restorative justice techniques should be used to build relationships before a catastrophic event strains these relationships. Subsequently, restorative circles should be used to fully heal the damage caused by such events. Only once this is accomplished will society be more likely to stabilize, creating the potential to move forward together to tackle more positive issues.



