



# **Vancouver Island Region Restorative Justice Association**

## **Strategic Plan 2016-2020**

**Approved, Monday, February 15, 2016**

In February, 2010, VIRRJA undertook a strategic planning exploring its values, vision and goals for the next five years from 2010 – 2015.

The Vision Statement adopted at the time was clear and inspired much of the work undertaken:

### ***Vision***

***Vancouver Island Region Restorative Justice Association sees a future in which restorative justice is the first response to community conflict and where restorative practices are embedded throughout the community, in organizations, agencies, schools, and all aspects of local government.***

Under this Vision Statement, a set of goals for implementation between 2010 – 2015 were adopted. Not all of the goals adopted under this Vision have been achieved, but much has! Importantly, the values and vision which VIRRJA articulated have become more established in each of the restorative justice programmes in our region. As a region, we have moved from a loose grouping of programmes gathering to share our understanding and beliefs, into the strongest regional organization of RJ programmes in the province.

In 2010, VIRRJA established the following goals for the five years following:

- 1 increase its representation of restorative justice to government ministries, agencies and organizations to heighten awareness of its positive contributions to community and to enhance and stabilize funding within the justice system
- 2 establish regular networking functions between member organizations to spread knowledge of best practices and unique responses to common issues and concerns

- 3 promote municipal and regional government support for restorative justice as a local option which engages community in a leading role in the justice system
- 4 encourage the formation of regional associations in other areas of the province with an objective of developing a single, province-wide voice for restorative justice
- 5 enable and facilitate co-operation among and between member organizations to increase the opportunities of training and development of all programme volunteers.

There seems to be agreement that these have been the results:

*Goal 1* VIRRJA has met with:

- senior officials in the Justice Ministry (Attorney General);
- Opposition critics for Attorney General and Public Safety;
- Administrative Crown Council for four areas (Greater Victoria, Nanaimo, Comox Valley, Port Hardy);
- made submissions to the BC Blue Ribbon Panel on Crime Reduction.

Community RJ programmes have met with a wide range of officials and media in their communities and secured considerable local political support and encouraging media coverage of our issues and concerns around RJ.

We can also claim some level of success in stabilizing funding from the Ministry (The plan to eliminate annual funding of \$2,500 per programme was reversed as a result of lobbying by programmes in our region and other areas of the province). It is also important to note that funding has actually increased for one-off projects such as the provincial study of enhanced victim-focused RJ being undertaken by CJI in Langley and RJ Victoria; the provincial funding of regional network “strengthening events” such as the VIRRJA Conference (October 3 & 4, 2015); and the provincial meetings last year on enhanced relationships between Victim Services and RJ.

*Goal 2* This goal has been achieved through the quarterly meetings of VIRRJA and regular incorporation of an educational component with either outside presenters or through sharing among attending VIRRJA member and through the Annual conference associated with the AGMs.

*Goal 3* This goal too has been very successful through the local action of community RJ programmes (with the notable exception of Oak Bay which saw its programme closed). It is doubtful that any community with an RJ programme doesn’t enjoy the support of its local political leadership.

- Goal 4 The achievement of this goal has been very “spotty”, and there are no functioning regional associations of which we are aware that have regular and continuing functioning and activity on the scale of VIRRJA.
- Goal 5 This goal has also seen remarkable success. Local training events are well publicised through the VIRRJA website and e-mail, members of programmes frequently attend training opportunities offered by other local programmes and VIRRJA provides annual and quarterly opportunities to learn and expand the region’s knowledge and skill base.

## **Rushing towards the Present**

While VIRRJA has made much progress in its five year goals, there remains much to do. There remain issues related to enhanced funding, locally sensitive programme evaluation, the ongoing discussion of the meaning and content of standards of practice, the desire for enhanced referrals, the evolution of the relationships with other parts of the justice system (Victims Services, MOUs with Crown, etc.) and the enhancement of public understanding of the possibilities of RJ as an embedded approach to resolving conflicts and disputes within community.

In the winter of 2012 - 2013, VIRRJA returned to its Vision, Mission, and Goals to consider the specific and strategic focus of its work over the next few years. Through a survey of the VIRRJA programmes, a set of specific targets of focus was identified:

- Networking among and between local programmes
- Insight into aboriginal approaches and perspectives on RJ
- Respectful honouring of the diversity of voices at the table
- Provide responsive open-mindedness
- Be more welcoming and accepting and inclusive of new ideas and participants
- Mentor and share resources
- Enhance joint training opportunities
- Utilize client letters to promote benefits of RJ & use a testimonial approach to statistics
- Develop a universal data collection on 5 or 6 key areas for unified statistical reporting

In the closer discussion of these concerns, an additional set of issues were identified:

- Get on agenda of Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM)
- Representation to Government toward goal of more RJ \$\$
- Develop common standards
- Have short term regional goals
- Networking with First Nations & others
- What gets in the way of more representation from First Nations and others
  - Comments
  - Funding differences

- Using political supports collectively
- Clearing house for information in / policy & ideas out (based on VISTA)
- Community programs speak to NDP/all parties through nominated persons
- Use stories/quotes to send out messages
- Re Goal #2 – we lack membership on the island (+prov. +national)
- Approach members to get names of potential members to join
- Need new members, need people willing to take on executive positions to prevent burnout of leadership

## **A Shopping List of VIRRJA work**

- Use available political resources to engage with UBCM
- Strategize useful ways to get our information out there, e.g. doing a workshop re RJ
- VIRRJA could do more local public relations re local media
- Increase membership
  - Take VIRRJA back to the programs – get their volunteers interested as well
- Do cross cultural workshop (Colleen Stevenson – graphic artist)
- Possible board development workshop
- More recognition – public awareness which drifts up to government
- Utilize social media
- Focus on evidence based solid practice & backup with data
- Use volunteer base to market
- Use student skills to collate evaluations, work projects
- “write a book” using positive experiential statements
- Use part of the RJ Victoria evaluation to develop some common data base items for collaborative reporting
- Uniform evaluation tool for all to track same criteria
- Organizational awareness – make sure all our program members are aware of VIRRJA
- Promote equal opportunities to all RJ programs whether CAP or not
- Remember we can’t do it all at once – take Baby Steps.

Overall, these concerns and issues can be broadly grouped together into more generalized “categories” of our work together.

For example, some are related to the **organization** of VIRRJA:

Membership numbers and relationships – there has been some generalized conversation about VIRRJA’s structure as a “federation of member programmes”. We appear to have settled on programmes being the members, but have added the category of “Independent Practitioner” to accommodate those individuals who are not specifically attached to a programme but who have commitment and passion about RJ.

As regards numbers, the attendance at quarterly meetings ranges from around 8 up to 16. The number of memberships seems to hover around 18 programmes and 2 – 3 Independent Practitioners. The number of Aboriginal programmes has consistently been around four, with only one attending and participating in quarterly meetings on a regular basis. There are often 3 – 4 engaged in our annual conference and AGM.

There has been discussion of the needs of VIRRJA for board development work, executive member succession, and engagement of the local programmes' membership and volunteers in the broader work of VIRRJA.

There is also a strong desire to enhance the nature and quality of the interactions between programmes through shared training, collaborative referrals of files where geography is a factor, and by means of joint work on VIRRJA projects.

Another general group of concerns relates to the work of **lobbying**. There is the obvious focus on the provincial government, but there is also an expressed interest in lobbying local government and lobbying the municipalities at the provincial level through the UBCM (particularly in the area of pressuring the provincial government to be more supportive of RJ). To this end, VIRRJA gathered information and stories from local programmes and produced a resource for them to use in their lobbying efforts with school boards, municipal councils and regional districts. At the provincial level, lobbying has been manifest in direct meetings with government officials, elected MLAs, and through presentations to Legislative Committees and other groups. As well, VIRRJA has presented on a variety of issues at provincial conferences, and been an invited participant at various provincial consultative meetings. It may be ambiguous whether it is VIRRJA specifically, a particular programme, or a specific individual which has been involved, but that kind of recognition and built respect redounds to VIRRJA's credit.

At the national level, VIRRJA was an early participant in the founding of the Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium, with one member serving on the By-Laws & Membership working group. When the first Board of Directors was being recruited, VIRRJA nominated Michael Jacobson-Weston to serve as a representative of regional associations and the West, a position he still holds.

There has also, over the years, been a shopping list of **VIRRJA tasks** proposed, endorse, and sometimes undertaken and completed.

Suggestions that VIRRJA should have an internal educational function have been responded to through speakers/presenters at the quarterly meetings and the annual conference. The list of topics that should be dealt with is long and includes cross-cultural training, approaches to enhanced relationships with First Nations, the value of a set of "best practices".

Various proposals have been made for VIRRJA to undertake 'research' projects to advance our goals. VIRRJA and/or local programmes in collaboration with VIRRJA have undertaken:

- A project to gather stories of RJ and its successes that could be used in both lobbying, publicity, and marketing work undertaken by individual programmes
- Data gathering about local programmes' funding structures
- A study of programmes' views of standardized evaluations and statistical data gathering

There have been frequent proposals that VIRRJA should become a “clearing house” for RJ information, training programmes, and resources for community programmes. It has also been recommended that VIRRJA should become an active user of social media.

## **Moving Forward 2016 – 2020: A Draft Strategic Plan**

Where a strategic plan might frame out the work to be undertaken, it is equally important to identify who should carry out the required work. VIRRJA has benefitted from the voluntary gifts of many individuals, who have taken on tasks and brought them to successful conclusions. On the other hand, other goals have not been fully reached for lack of an individual to champion the project and carry it out. VIRRJA's structure as a “loose federation of local RJ programmes” is not capable of insisting upon the completion of any work plan that is adopted. With membership dues set at \$10 per programme, VIRRJA has always depended upon the kindness of others to pay the costs. There will always need to be a balance between low barrier access for small programmes, and the ability to pay of much larger programmes. Currently VIRRJA has chosen an equal, low barrier approach – it may be time to think about balancing this with an “ability to pay” approach. An alternative approach is to encourage individual programmes with the interest, passion and potential access to suitable resources to take on the lead responsibility for specific projects, the results of which can then be deployed by VIRRJA in pursuit of its goals.

Regardless of how VIRRJA decides to approach the implementation of its goals, a possible set of goals for the next period of VIRRJA's development might include:

### **VIRRJA's organization and structure**

1. VIRRJA will continue to be focused as a federation of local programmes, but provide for the inclusion of independent practitioners and governmental organizations and affiliates.
2. Beginning in 2017, VIRRJA Annual dues will be raised to \$25 for programmes and \$25 for individual practitioners.
3. Membership attendance at quarterly meetings will average 60% of paid up membership
4. Membership will reach 80% of all restorative justice programmes operating within the Region's geographic area.

5. VIRRJA will strive to facilitate the membership and participation of First nations RJ programmes.
6. VIRRJA will strive to establish deeper connections between and among the member programmes.
7. VIRRJA will amend its By-Laws to provide for the election of an Executive composed of six Directors each serving a two year term and stagger their terms to provide for ongoing continuity.
8. VIRRJA will seek a grant to provide travel assistance to programmes to attend the regional meetings 3 times/year and the AGM/Conference.

### **VIRRJA's tasks**

1. VIRRJA will establish a model for local programme evaluation that is implementable within local programme limitations, that at least 75% of individual programmes agree to undertake and report outcomes and results to VIRRJA for tabulation on a regional basis, and that assists local programmes in their own progress and development.
2. VIRRJA will, in light of the RCMP's withdrawal from the local training field, seek to develop a training structure that meets local programme needs through inter-programme co-operation and collaboration. It will also seek to expand the understanding and use of RJ models beyond the Community Justice Forums model.
3. VIRRJA will seek to extend the scope of RJ to include a much wider range of referral sources and applications, including files involving Elder Abuse, school-based programmes, community-based referrals (minor sports leagues, neighbour disputes, minor levels of sexual and other assault, etc.
4. VIRRJA will enhance the listing of training resources and programme development approaches on the VIRRJA website.

### **VIRRJA's lobbying goals and objectives**

1. VIRRJA will increase its representation on restorative justice to government ministries, agencies and organizations to heighten awareness of its positive contributions to community and to enhance and stabilize funding within the justice system
2. VIRRJA will focus efforts on extending and enhancing MOUs for Crown referrals.

3. VIRRJA will establish regular networking functions between member organizations to spread knowledge of best practices and unique responses to common issues and concerns
4. VIRRJA will promote municipal and regional government support for restorative justice as a local option which engages community in a leading role in the justice system
5. VIRRJA will take a stronger role in making submissions to government and presentations to provincial and national investigations and other inquiries that address issues of concern to restorative justice.
6. VIRRJA will continue to encourage the formation of regional associations in other areas of the province with an objective of developing a single, province-wide voice for restorative justice