



Youthful remorse key to successful mediation

Youthful remorse key to successful mediation Forty to 50 local youth are part of a restorative justice program that each year saves the criminal justice system thousands of dollars and brings closure to victims. The Community Youth Justice Program (CYJP) is operated by CERA as an alternative to the criminal courts for youth whom the police and RCMP consider to be genuinely remorseful and open to the principals of restorative justice. We have close to 100% success with the youth, says CERA's executive director Gurinder Mann. He says the offences committed by the youth generally involve theft under \$5,000; minor assaults break and enter mischief and even bullying. CYJP's resolution conferences are attended by the youth, the victim, their families and/or supporters. The offender hears first hand from the victim the personal harm they have caused and the victim has a chance to learn about the circumstances surrounding the incident. The resolution focuses on repairing the impacts of the crime rather than punishment. During the process, the youth learn of the real and perceived harm –long and short term –suffered by the victims and their families. Youth are able to explain their actions and express remorse directly to the victims who are able to ask questions and work out fair compensation directly with the offender. Usually, the youth will perform some community service, volunteering with the Food Bank, at the SPCA or perhaps for a cause they are passionate about, Mann says. Once the process is complete - usually three to four weeks - and an agreement reached, the youth is diverted out of the criminal justice system without a record for the incident. The process enables youth to learn from their actions and, Mann points out, is faster and more cost effective than the traditional court system with the healing process providing an opportunity to restore relationships and build community. Each case processed saves about nine hours of police time, Mann says, and close to all the youth who go through the process, once they gained a fuller understanding of the harm caused, said they would not commit further crimes.

CERA works closely with the Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam RCMP and the Port Moody and New Westminister Police departments, as well as Crown Counsel and School District43. It has 16 years of experience in restorative justice and mediation and its CYJP is the only one serving Port Coquitlam.

For information, go to www.cerasociety.org