



VIRRJA

# Vancouver Island Region Restorative Justice Association

*Advancing restorative justice on Vancouver Island, the  
Sunshine Coast and all Gulf Islands*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT - APRIL 2023

These are interesting times for RJ in BC. There are ongoing frustrations and new opportunities. Since the start of covid 19, many programs, particularly smaller ones, have seen a decline in RCMP referrals.

There is also the ongoing struggle to secure sufficient funding. This leads to a reliance on grants, in which we are competing with each other and with other community based organizations. Lack of funding also makes it difficult to attract younger staff who need to receive remuneration.

At the same time, there is, in general, a growing awareness of the benefits of restorative practices and restorative approaches to harm. BC Prosecution Service has finalized their process for establishing MOUs with RJ programs.

The federal Prosecution Service is developing a process for referring cases that involve violation of federal laws, such as controlled substances, firearms and Fisheries offenses.

First Nations Health Authority wants to see restorative justice used for incidents of racism in the health system, particularly with the complaint process.

The BC First Nations Justice Council is committed to expanding the use of restorative justice in their work with First Nations and in the 15 Indigenous Justice Centres they are creating in BC.

The office of the Commissioner of the Human Rights Tribunal recently completed an inquiry on the rise of hate crimes during the covid 19 pandemic. Their report, "From Hate to Hope" is a comprehensive overview of the state of hate crimes in Canada.

Overall, police reported hate crimes, Canada wide, increased 72% from 2019-2021. BC is one of the provinces reporting the largest increase in hate crimes, 198 incidents from 2019-2020. Interestingly, race or ethnicity related incidents increased by 122%, while those related to religion and sexual orientation did not change substantially.

In their report, the Tribunal advocates strongly for the use of restorative justice for dealing with hate crimes. I believe some of our programs have already provided training and facilitated referrals for these types of cases.

One final note, you may have seen that the Vatican has recently disavowed their 500 year old doctrine of discovery. This doctrine formed the basis for the colonial governments to assert sovereignty in North America. While their statement will likely have no immediate effect on governance and the legal system in Canada, it will undoubtedly contribute to the continued recognition of Indigenous rights, and title and the question of Indigenous sovereignty.