



## The Data on Restorative Justice

A Report by the Restorative Justice Coalition of Oregon

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Though Oregon's restorative justice programs are in their early stages, similar programs have been developed across the United States and the globe. Research from these programs demonstrates three primary benefits from the use of restorative justice:

- 1) Restorative justice programs center around the needs of the most impacted and lead to enhanced feelings of ***satisfaction for victims and survivors***.
- 2) Restorative justice programs enhance ***community safety*** by creating true accountability and by reducing recidivism more effectively when compared to the criminal legal system.
- 3) Restorative justice programs accomplish these things while still boasting an extraordinary degree of ***cost-effectiveness***.

**Restorative justice produces better outcomes for everyone involved while costing substantially less.** These effects are observable in programs administered nationally and in programs that are being implemented right here in Oregon. Though the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program is new, having made its initial grant awards just last year, several of the funded programs have partnered with experts in restorative justice, who have been implementing similar programs for many years. These experts are known as Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Providers.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the national data regarding restorative justice's efficacy, while focusing on data from Oregon's three primary TTA Providers:

- Impact Justice's Restorative Justice Project – partnered with the Restorative Roots Project in Multnomah County
- NYU's Center on Violence and Recovery (CVR) – partnered with Six Rivers Dispute Resolution Center in the Gorge
- The Longmont Community Justice Partnership – model for the Lutheran Community Services NW program in Multnomah County

## Survivor Satisfaction - - - - -

### *National Data*

Restorative justice provides greater feelings of safety and satisfaction for participating survivors. Restorative justice responds to the unique needs of individual survivors, through an individually tailored approach that asks those who have been harmed what they need to heal. One [qualitative study](#) of survivors found that the criminal legal system not only fails to meet their most pressing needs, but can also be actively traumatizing. As the study's author put it, "if one set out intentionally to design a system for provoking symptoms of traumatic stress, it might look very much like a court of law."

In contrast to the criminal legal system, restorative justice programs seek to generate accountability for the person who caused the survivor's harm, while providing emotional reconciliation that many survivors see as [the most important element of their recovery](#). A [national survey of crime victims](#) revealed that survivors of harm prefer alternative forms of accountability by a margin of 3 to 1. Restorative justice has proven to be an effective alternative to the criminal legal system for survivors, and [several studies](#) have shown that participation in restorative processes increases victims' perceptions of safety, security, and closure, and substantially reduces post-traumatic stress symptoms.

### *Oregon TTA Provider Data*

Data from Oregon TTA providers mirrors the success demonstrated in the national data. A review of one Impact Justice program found that [over 90% of survivors](#) reported that they would participate in another restorative justice process and would recommend it to a friend.

[Data from the Longmont Community Justice Partnership \(LCJP\)](#) also confirms that survivors' needs are consistently being met in restorative justice processes. LCJP's programs focus on creating "reparative contracts" between a survivor and the person who caused the harm. These contracts describe what the participating survivor needs and can include various requirements, ranging from direct restitution to written and verbal apologies. LCJP's data on nearly 2,000 cases has yielded a remarkable overall contract completion rate of 84%. The success rate remained high across all ages, ethnicities, and categories of crime.

High levels of survivor satisfaction with restorative justice are confirmed not just by statistical surveys, but also by in-depth interviews. A [qualitative review](#) of one of NYU CVR's programs found that survivors consistently reported that their experiences in restorative justice programs helped them to move forward following their experience of harm and gave them a greater sense of confidence and self-reliance.

## Community Safety - - - - -

### *National Data*

Restorative Justice creates safer communities primarily by producing substantially lower recidivism (re-offending) rates compared to prosecution.

- A study of restorative justice programs in the [rural Midwest](#) found that persons who received restorative justice interventions re-offended at significantly lower rates than those who were processed through the criminal legal system, even after controlling for age, sex, race, area of residence, number of prior contacts with the system, and level of seriousness of the most significant charge.
- A [meta-analysis](#) of restorative justice programs in Tennessee found that recidivism rates were 32% lower for participants in restorative justice processes when compared with non-participants.

This remarkable reduction in recidivism can be attributed to the development of true internal accountability within the responsible party. Responsible persons who participated in restorative justice have also [reported](#) improvements in their family relationships, ability to deal with conflict, and communication skills.

### *Oregon TTA Provider Data*

The data from Oregon TTA providers is perhaps even more promising than the national data. For instance, one [randomized control trial](#) experiment found that responsible youths who were assigned to an Impact Justice program were 44% less likely to be arrested for another offense in the six months after their assignment to the program as compared to the prosecuted control group, 20% less likely to be re-arrested within three years, and 32% less likely after four years.

Furthermore, the study found that **“youth who have completed the program have a 24-month recidivism rate of just 13 percent – while similar young people who experienced the traditional justice system response had a recidivism rate of 53 percent.”** Put simply, the results show that restorative justice programs reduced recidivism for these young participants, and that these effects persisted over time.

[Another Impact Justice program](#) studied between 2012 and 2015 found that only 13.7% of RJ program participants were convicted of a crime within 6 months (as compared to 20.8% for the prosecuted control group), 18.4% were convicted within 12 months (32.1% for the control group), and 19.6% within 18 months (36.7% for the control group). Overall, [this study](#) found that a young person who participated in the Impact Justice program was 44% less likely to be convicted of a new charge than a young person who was prosecuted through the legal system.

Impact Justice is not alone. A 10-year study on the [Victim Assistance, Youth Accountability](#) program run by Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice in Jackson County, Oregon, found that participants' recidivism rates were 10% lower than the county average. [A 2012 study](#) of another Oregon TTA Provider's restorative justice program (the NYU Center on Violence and Recovery) found that participants in this program were significantly less likely to experience recidivism than non-participants. And a [follow-up study](#) in 2019 found a decrease in recidivism of more than 50% among those who participated in restorative justice based programming compared with those who participated only in the standard probation program.

These results, like the ones observed in the national data, are reflective not only of a reduction in recidivism but also of a deeper change in the participants who had committed harm. The [same study](#), cited in the paragraph above, found that NYU's program addressed participants' underlying "attitudes and beliefs" about the harm they had caused. And a [study on another Impact Justice program](#), which focused more directly on participant responses, found that 94.9% of participants said they would participate in the process again. Of the participants' parents or guardians who participated in the process, 98.8% indicated that they would participate again. These broader achievements demonstrate how restorative justice programs foster true accountability and improve the lives of the people who have done harm, therefore reducing the likelihood of re-offense and improving the safety of the community.

## Cost-Effectiveness - - - - -

Restorative justice programs provide all these benefits for a small fraction of the cost of incarcerating a person. Restorative justice programs and prosecution differ somewhat in cost depending on the jurisdiction, but the best data comes from the TTA providers working here in Oregon. The Longmont Community Justice Partnership found that their restorative justice program operates at [less than a tenth of the cost](#) of incarceration – roughly \$10,000 for the restorative justice intervention as opposed to over \$100,000 to process someone through the criminal legal system. Even more dramatically, Alameda County in California spent an average of [\\$493,000 per person](#) to incarcerate a young person in 2018, as well as \$23,000 per person for juvenile probation expenses yearly. By contrast, the restorative justice program administered by Impact Justice in Alameda County cost just \$4,500 per case.

Considering that restorative justice reduces recidivism rates and improves mental health outcomes for survivors, these programs likely provide Oregon with a variety of cost savings in other sectors.

## Conclusion - - - - -

The data from restorative justice programs around the country, including data from Oregon's own TTA providers, consistently tells the same story: restorative justice leads to higher levels of **survivor satisfaction** for those who choose to participate, creates **safer communities** in the form of reduced recidivism rates, and produces a greater degree of efficiency and **cost-effectiveness** over prosecution. Put another way: **restorative justice produces better results for a fraction of the cost.**

Continuing to invest in restorative justice is vital. The Restorative Justice Grant Program has planted the seeds of Oregon's restorative justice future. In just over one year, eight programs have emerged and/or expanded in counties across the state. Early results are promising and the support of TTA providers with data driven models of restorative justice makes the future of restorative justice in Oregon extremely bright. **It is crucial that Oregon continue to invest in restorative justice by appropriating \$4 million to the Criminal Justice Commission's Restorative Justice Grant Program.**