

# Justice, seen to be done

By Diane Strandberg  
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As long as anyone can remember, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth has been the way a community responds to criminal behaviour. And although we don't encourage vigilanteism and public hangings, there remains in the public psyche a sense that people should pay for their crimes with hard time in cold, comfortless jails.

While there might be some satisfaction in seeing criminals locked away for long prison sentences, remedies offered by the traditional criminal justice system provide little relief, if any, to victims.

There is another way, one that can transform people, make victims whole and empower communities. It's called restorative justice and it's changing people's lives, says Jennifer Ingraham, the newly appointed executive director of the Fraser-Burrard Community Justice Society.

"I've seen how it can make a difference," Ingraham said during an interview in her small office on Poirier Street in Coquitlam.

Petite and with a soft voice belying her passion for restorative justice and other social justice issues, Ingraham seems a tiny bulwark against a tide of public opinion favouring a tougher, law-an-order agenda.

But the Ontario-born Ingraham, who started her career resolving student issues in universities and moved to the restorative justice field three years ago, is adamant that at least in minor criminal cases, such as assault, vandalism and theft, bringing people together to resolve their issues is more effective than going through the courts.

In short, it's hard to say 'I'm sorry' but the simple act of saying the words can unlock the human heart.

"An apology goes a long way if there's a sense the offender really means it. It dissipates a lot of anger," Ingraham said.

Forgiveness may be a hard pill for many to swallow but it can bring about closure and end years of pain, especially when the victim is empowered to ask for redress and gets it.

Ingraham saw the power of restorative justice in an extremely sensitive and serious criminal case, and says now the experience affirmed her choice of career.

"It was a turning point for me," Ingraham said.

While a new co-ordinator in a restorative justice program for adults in Kelowna, Ingraham witnessed a conference between the family of a woman killed and the man who killed her.

The man, who was impaired when he plowed into a mother of four while she was working as a flagger at a construction site, was convicted of the crime. But while he was waiting for sentencing, the conference was called by some members of the family even though this procedure isn't typically used for big criminal cases.

During the conference, both the victims and the driver talked about what happened and the aftermath, and some members of the family

## Fraser-Burrard Community Justice Society info

- *Fraser-Burrard Community Justice Society was incorporated in 1999 as an alternative for youth 12 to 17 years old facing criminal charges.*
- *Under FBCJS's restorative justice approach, trained volunteers bring the person who did the harm together with the victim to talk openly about issues, concerns and impacts related to a crime or conflict. The goal is to come up with a resolution agreement with the person who did the harm promising to undertake various actions, which range from completing an anger management course to paying for damage.*
- *About 97% of resolution agreements have been fulfilled. Referrals come mostly from Crown prosecutors and the police, and sometimes School District 43.*
- *Funding for this program comes from the cities of Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, Coquitlam, Anmore, Belcarra and New Westminster, the provincial government and private donations.*



With a mandate to grow and expand, the Fraser-Burrard Community Justice Society recently hired an executive director, Jennifer Ingraham, to oversee programs, fundraise, promote the aims of the organization and recruit volunteers.

### BY THE NUMBERS

*Fraser Burrard Community Justice Society:*

- Number of volunteers: 25
- Length of training: 6 months
- Volunteer commitment required: at least 1 year or six files
- Number of referrals in 2007: 37
- Number of referrals so far this year: 31
- Number of new volunteers needed: 12
- Where to call: 604-931-3165

### IN QUOTES

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**Jennifer Ingraham, executive director of the Fraser-Burrard Community Justice Society, which runs restorative justice initiatives in the Tri-Cities**

expressed forgiveness.

It was a powerful moment.

"In terms of personal healing for both sides, it would never have happened in the criminal justice system," said Ingraham who remembered leaving the conference thinking: "If this is restorative justice, then this is what I want to do."

Working with youth, usually first-time offenders involved in minor crimes, the Fraser Burrard Community Justice Society rarely deals with so serious an issue. But Ingraham said bringing closure and resolution to even small incidents, such as a fight between two students, can have similar positive results.

Getting the community involved in restoring justice by asking them to volunteer as facilitators is also important, she said. Conflicts in the community shouldn't always be left up to police and the courts to resolve.

"In restorative justice, we ask the community to have an active role in helping restore what has been broken."

With Ingraham at the helm, Fraser-Burrard hopes to grow the program by accepting cases involving adults over the age of 18. As well, children are being taught conflict resolution skills so they can resolve problems at their schools.

Fraser-Burrard plans to expand the Talking Peace program from a few School District 43 schools to six. Peace Squads of elementary, middle and high school students are being taught the principles of peer mediation. Porter elementary, Como Lake middle and Centennial secondary have already been using the program with some effect.

Ingraham believes that by introducing the principles of restorative justice early, young people will learn to resolve their problems peacefully.

"In the end, I see real lives changed. I think that's why I want more people to know that it's out there."

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