

Appendix 1 Peace Circles

Peace circles in criminal cases are available in many countries within Europe. Practice and many research showed evidence that the participants of peace circles can largely benefit from restorative dialogues. In most of the cases this can be a healing and useful approach when people can sit together in a circle and the facilitator talk about their conflicts, about their losses and pain they have gone through in the past and they find way to move into the future. The demand for peace circles born in Canada where legal stakeholders recognized that traditional methods cannot adequately deal with the crimes in which definite or tribal communities are affected. The solution turned out to be true as an alternative internal tribal conflict management method in which they were trying to harmonize and paste it into the legal environment. The success of peace circles is now open to non-tribal communities in this approach.

When a crime is committed or if there is an ongoing conflict between people it has an impact on the whole community as well. So the involvement of the community is necessary. Or in other words: if a conflict affects the entire community (as it does most of the time), how can we involve members or leaders of the community/village/church/congregation/prison institute into the restorative dialogue process. What are the beneficial parts of involving the broader environment/community? Peace circle can be a unique way to address the conflict. It is an inclusive, non-hierarchical way to conflict resolution. In our context we can say that peace circles are able to offer a way to include those who harmed by crime, those who commit crime and the community to find out and later on determinate the most effective response to a crime that would promote and lead towards healing and safety for everyone. So, one of the differences between Building Bridges and the peace circles is that as an addition the community, the wider members of the community are present. The circle as a format of the dialogue creates a special dynamic of the restorative dialogue. Other positive effect to include the wider community is that we can “use” the potential of the circle participants to create values for the process. It is beneficial to give every participant equal right to speak and to create a safety environment and atmosphere to have an opportunity to bring the emotional and even spiritual aspects of the crime/conflict into focus. Everyone gets an equal voice: the framework as a circle equalizes the individual contributions to the process. The more people are involved in the solution of the conflict, the more likely they will find the most adequate solution, action plan and answers to the crime. The various perspectives of the participants also help towards the best possible restorative outcomes as well: responsibility-taking, better understanding of each other, etc. Our attitude is that every participant has a positive effect on the group and has gifts to offer in finding good solution to the crime. Any case suitable for Building Bridges is also suitable for peace circles. The main purpose of the peace circle dialogue is to provide time and space for all concerned people to share with each other what they think and how they could move on.

The participants:

The victim and offender -> friends and family members as supporters -> case related participants -> issue related participants (former victims or offenders) -> local community



This publication has been produced with the financial support of the JUST/2013/JPEN/AG Programme of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and partners and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

members -> professionals. It is clear that the participants of peace circles can be positioning in a personal to professional scale. Personal -> professional.

The peace circle meeting should take place in four stages: meeting and introduction -> building trust -> identifying issues -> developing an action plan. It is also important for the facilitator to keep impartial in the entire process, and that the facilitator should support each side as much as he / she can. But balance between the two sides is even more important in this regard.

Framework for peace circles:

1) Introduction

- a) Greet everyone and thank everyone for attending in the meeting. Acknowledge everyone's effort and that they all have decided to come and work together. Explain the confidential and voluntary character of the peace circle. Mention the time frame. Mention the written agreement.
- b) Encourage participants to be open, truthful and authentically and respect each other and confidentiality.

2) Trust building

- a) The facilitator can ensure the members of the circle that their opinion is very important. The facilitator can ask: "Please share what you need from the others in order to feel safe, comfortable and being able to openly and honestly talk in the peace circle."

3) Addressing issues

- a) What happened? Or: What would you like to share with us about what happened?
- b) How do you remember?
- c) How did it affect you, your life and the others around you?
- d) What was the hardest thing or part for you?

4) Developing plans for the future

- a) They have seen the main issues, and how the answers impacted all of them, so it is the time to move on the future. It can be asked: What do you think you would need to in order to be able to move on?
- b) Collect ideas, collect needs. The facilitator must be sure that all raised needs are addressed.
- c) Draft an agreement. If it is complete and acceptable for everyone participants can sign it.
- d) Closure: acknowledge the work participants did.

