Examples of Restorative Dialogue

Small group conferencing

The Situation
Joan, a burglary victim, chose to participate in a community-based victim offender mediation program and met with the young offender and his father.

The Results
With the help of the facilitator, she was able to express the full impact the crime had on her, get answers to many questions, and help develop a plan to repair the harm. Her participation in the mediation led to a deep sense of satisfaction, fairness, and the ability to move on with her life. “I used to be afraid to go out at night, but after having met the young man who broke into my house, I’m really not afraid anymore.”

Larger group conferencing

The Situation
A rural community had been distressed for some time about a group of vandals who had been knocking over mailboxes around the area. One older man, whose mailbox had been knocked down several times, told the police he was ready to wait in the ditch with his shotgun. When the young men who were responsible were caught, feelings ran high.

Decision to Use Restorative Dialogue
But the authorities felt strongly that they wanted these young men reintegrated into the community and recommended restorative dialogue. The facilitator assigned to the case invited the offenders, their parents, the victims, and the larger community to the meeting.

The Results
When the young men heard the impact their “pranks” had on the victims and the shame their parents experienced, they felt heartbrokenly sorry. They wanted to know what they could do to make retribution. The older man with the shotgun heard their true remorse and forgave them. The community was able to heal and welcome the young men back as contributing members.

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Peacemaking circles

The Conflict
In a large urban community on the west coast, conflict had been developing between local Palestinian and Jewish residents. This had been building for many years and was inseparable from the ongoing conflict and violence in the mid-east. A restorative dialogue process was initiated by a leader in the Jewish community and a leader in the Palestinian community.

The Meeting
Participants from both sides were invited to the session in the living room of a facilitator from neither the Jewish or Palestinian community. A talking piece was used to invite participants to tell their perspective of the conflict in their local community. Each person shared his or her concerns, often with a great deal of emotion. Yet, all listened to the person with the talking piece and did not interrupt.

The facilitator invited participants to talk about their hopes for managing the conflict in the community. Many gave specific recommendations, such as organizing monthly community meetings, or perhaps jointly working on a service project. At the end of the first restorative dialogue, participants left feeling more relaxed, understood, and open to further meetings.

The Results
The dialogue process humanized the dispute and reduced the toxic energy that was driving the conflict. This dialogue group has been meeting monthly for many years and together they have established bonds of respect and friendship that no one thought would ever have been possible.