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## Restorative Justice Project offers volunteer mentor training

Aug 30, 2010

Belfast — The Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast will offer training for volunteer mentors starting Thursday, Sept. 23, and continuing through Thursday, Oct. 21. The trainings will take place at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 81 Court St., 5:30-8 p.m. A light dinner is provided and attendance at all evenings of the training is expected. For more information about RJP and to download an application, visit online at [rjpmidcoast.org](http://rjpmidcoast.org) or contact the RJP office at 338-2742. Deadline for applications is Sept. 17.

The mission of the Restorative Justice Project is to bring about a cultural shift in the way that the community, law enforcement and the justice system work together to address crime and punishment. Through community conferencing RJP creates a forum for victims to have a voice and gives an opportunity for offender accountability and to acknowledge the impact of their crime on the community. The work of RJP has resulted in significant decreases in recidivism, healing of victims and transformed lives — rarities within the traditional criminal justice system.

Participation of community volunteers is critical to the success of this approach to personal and communal healing.

As mentors the volunteers have the opportunity to work with adolescents or adults involved with the criminal justice system. "We have a need for more volunteers in Waldo County," reported Margaret Micolichuk, executive director of RJP. "With the new Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center in Belfast, we could easily double the number of persons who could benefit from mentoring. We currently have approximately 30 mentors in Waldo County who are actively committed to meeting this tremendous need."

Working in partnership with the recently created Maine Coastal Regional Reentry Center, the former Waldo County Jail located in Belfast, RJP wants to recruit and train additional volunteers.

Through mentoring, RJP volunteers help provide the support and direction that an individual needs to complete a more successful transition back to the community. Residents at MCRRC are classified as minimum or community-level security risks who are six to 18 months from completion of their sentences and will be returning to Waldo County.

These individuals are considered to be high risk to re-offend without a supportive community. Nationally, 66 percent of individuals released from incarceration re-offend within three years. With support those numbers are reduced to approximately 40 percent.

Through their participation with RJP, MCRRC residents are involved in mentoring groups where they learn about restorative justice practices and reflect these practices back to their personal life experiences. Other restorative practices include participation in Community Resolution Conferences and Healing Circles, which provide the opportunity for a facilitated conversation to better understand the needs of the resident, their family and the community upon release.

Volunteer mentors receive training in all program areas in need of volunteer mentoring. They may be involved with an individual for anywhere from eight weeks up to 12 months, depending on the program and the participant's individual needs. Training and support are offered throughout their volunteer time.

Other program areas within the Restorative Justice Project include the Community Resolution Team that provides juvenile offenders an alternative to arrest, adjudication, jail and probation.

Court Deferred Dispositions provide adults facing potential jail time the opportunity to address their crime through a community conference process.

Restorative School Practices works with schools to change the school climate with regard to behavioral issues resulting in detentions, suspensions and expulsion. For more information, visit RJP's Web site at [rjpmidcoast.org](http://rjpmidcoast.org).

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