

*Each year, [Maine Initiatives](#) honors community leaders who embody the spirit of justice and generosity. This year The Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast was a recipient of a "Watering Can" award. The ceremony was held on Thursday, June 17 at the The Belfast Boathouse.*

### Speech made by Ray Porter in making the Award

I began my career as a corrections officer eighteen years ago. Looking back at that experience it strikes me at how isolated corrections was from the community. My job was to securely warehouse people to satisfy the punitive and safety needs of society. Once our judicial system felt it was time, the jail's front door would clang open and the "convict" would be "unloaded" back into society only to return within a short period of time.

I lived this process for thirteen years, an endless, hopeless cycle. I helplessly watched repeats of individual cycles of transformation and regression. It usually began with someone coming in intoxicated and/or high on drugs, violent and out of control. After the person came down from their "high", the process of detoxification would begin, and the resulting frail, human body and broken spirit would be left. Over several days, signs of health would blossom and then, an apology, a smile, and behold, a compassionate human being beginning its rebirth. Finally after weeks of incarceration, a renewed individual emerged, only to be severed from the facility and released back onto the street. For us at the Waldo County Jail, this involved a sad farewell, knowing all too well that the "restored human being", still detached from the community, would be overcome once again by elements beyond our control and the seeds of suffering would once again be watered bringing him or her swiftly back to our establishment of brick, mortar and steel.

It was in the fall of 2004 that the Sheriff called me over and introduced me to Dick Snyder and the "walls came tumbling down". I remember the first group of mentors who came through for a tour of the jail. I was immediately humbled when several from the group took such keen interest in our interactions with the population. I was almost

embarrassed when the group kept thanking me for letting them in. I was unable to express the extreme gratitude that I felt, for in that one moment, I experienced for the very first time, a slight embrace from community.

Since its birth in February of 2005, the compassionate and effective embrace of the Restorative Justice Project has gotten larger and stronger. I have excitedly watched as its mission has reached out into the entire criminal justice system stimulating a new vision and approach which, when applied, is not only more fiscally responsible, but promotes healing. As a community corrections officer, I am able to witness the impact of restorative justice practices first hand. Our work is not easy, and as an individual, leaves me drained and defeated. Yet, hope comes rushing in when I am reminded of those, whom, despite their many seasons of relapse and hardship, have, through the faithful influence of the Restorative Justice Program, finally awoken to a sense of belonging and have grown into our community.

The seeds of this project fell on “good ground” here in Waldo County. I am grateful for all of you who have painstakingly watered the soil as the roots took hold and now are running deep. Thank you to Maine Initiative for recognizing the impact this organization has had and continues to have on nurturing relationships and building community.