



# NCYOJ's School Responder Model Podcast Series

## EPISODE 1: RESTORATIVE APPROACHES



### INTRODUCTION

Restorative approaches are processes and strategies used in schools, among other organizations, to repair harm and to build or strengthen relationships. In this podcast, Avery Irons, from the National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice, talks with two special guests from New Orleans, Louisiana, about these approaches and how they relate to school responder models. This discussion is part of a National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice podcast series on the school responder model framework.

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### | Avery Irons:

ReNew Accelerated High School is a public charter high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, serving 250 students who are over-aged and under-credited. In this first podcast will focus on ReNew's restorative practices implementation, and lessons learned. In the second podcast, we discuss the school's implementation goals and challenges, such as reducing racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline, and building staff buy in for restorative practices.

### | Avery Irons:

Today, I'm speaking with two staff members integral to ReNew's implementation efforts. Lesley DeMartin is a licensed professional counselor in the State of Louisiana, and ReNew's School Counselor. Alan Delery is a facilitator and trainer for the Center for Restorative Approaches, also located in New Orleans. The Center for Restorative Approaches provides training, consultation, and direct resources around restorative practices to schools, communities, and justice systems.

### | Avery Irons:

The model that we've been working with ReNew on, called the school correspondent model, is a way to connect young people with behavioral health needs to services in their community. A key component of our work with schools around the country on this model has become this conversation about alternative approaches to discipline. Let's just start, since we're talking about restorative practices and restorative justice, Alan, what is restorative justice, what are restorative practices and why are they important?

### | Alan Delery:

Yes, I'm glad you explained it, I'll use the different terms because you will hear it called restorative justice, restorative practices, or restorative approaches, and they can be used interchangeably. Restorative justice actually started in the 1970s, in the justice system, but as the years went on, more as we think about in the nineties, it started coming into the school system as well. But restorative approaches are ways of interacting, that proactively nurture healthy relationships, but also an obligation to the community in order to prevent destructive conflict from happening, but also to address those harmful behaviors in ways that meet the needs of those who are impacted, because we understand that when harm is done or when there's conflict, people are impacted in different ways. We want to be able to repair that harm when people were impacted. Restorative approaches, the three parts of it is building relationships, strengthening relationships, and then also repairing relationships.

**I Alan Delery:**

The restorative approaches is inspired by the philosophy of restorative justice, and is guided by the understanding that relationships are central to learning, relationships are central to growth, and also a healthy community. These approaches shift the focus of wrongdoing from just simply rules that might be broken, and they focus more on the harm to the relationships that were done. That shift gives those who caused the harm an opportunity to understand the impact of their actions, and also the responsibility to make things right. Instead of focusing on blame and doing things to people, this is a big part of what we talk about, restorative approaches, not doing things to people, but we do things with people, to build problem solving skills that result in healthier, more humane communities.

**I Avery Irons:**

Excellent. Thank you. It sounds like, at the heart of restorative practices is, yes, it's building community, and also changing school culture. I'd like to ask both of you from your perspectives, Lesley, from your perspective as a ReNew staff person, and Alan, from your perspective as a facilitator at the Center for Restorative Approaches, what has this transition looked like at ReNew? And thinking about timing and training and coaching, working with families, how have you all made this happen?

**I Alan Delery:**

We developed a partnership with ReNew in 2014. When we first started, we were providing direct services, facilitating restorative circles on the tier three level, or top tier. So when the harm was done, and there was an incident that somebody could have been suspended for or expelled for, that's when they would make referrals to us. I provided those services at that time.

**I Alan Delery:**

I also provided, that first year, simply a staff overview of restorative approaches, but the school did not have what we call that whole school approach that includes the community building circles as well. They had their own community building strategies, but not implementing some of the ones that we recommend, such as community building circles. So year one was more like a phase-in, and the school was getting more acquainted with restorative approaches. We often say it's good to start at the beginning, with the whole school approach, but you always work with where schools are, and they're ready to be able to just jump in.

**I Alan Delery:**

Year two, the school contracted with CRA to teach a restorative approaches class that included community building circles, conflict resolution, and restorative justice to students. I continued to receive the referrals to do restorative circles, in addition to teaching that class. I was actually full time in the second year at the school, contracted, so I was still with Center for Restorative Approaches, as a partner with the school, but I was in there full time.

**I Alan Delery:**

In year three, CRA was contracted to conduct full school professional development to staff that primarily introduced the restorative conversations. Restorative conversations, or conversations between a teacher and a student, or it could be a conversation that a teacher facilitates between two students. We train teachers to be able to have these conversations in their school. That particular year, this was the third year, the school eliminated their demerit system that they had. As a part of the PBIS program that they had before, they had a demerit system as well as a merit system.

**I Alan Delery:**

But in year three, they decided to eliminate the demerit system, but only maintain the merit system. Teachers were tasked with holding and tracking restorative conversations in the class before referring students to the Culture Team. That's what they call the team that worked with the students when behaviors happen. Teachers have to provide services and interventions first, and then refer it to the Culture Team.

**I Alan Delery:**

Year four, professional development was at the beginning of the year, and the school continued with restorative conversations. That year they also include community building circles as a part of their advisory class. They had an extended advisory on Thursdays, and the advisory leadership team provided the teachers with prompts, so everybody in the school had these prompts that conversations were happening around community building circles that year. That was the the four years of implementation.

**| Avery Irons:**

And I love that, because it feels like a graduated approach of, we're going to start something and then just keep building from where ReNew was. From your perspective, Lesley, what did this transition look like at ReNew?

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

Transition. That's the key word. Restorative approaches, I think is something that's tossed around a lot in education. Restorative approaches, trauma-based informed, trauma-informed classroom approaches as well, it's something that, like when you read about it in an article, it sounds great. Everyone's got the buy in. We get into education because we want to help support our students. But it's that translating theory into practice that is the difficult part because it's not like you wake up one day and you're like, "Yep, I'm restorative. I'm going to bring this to every interaction that I have."

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

It's the willingness to try things on. I think it's the willingness for self reflection, as an individual, as a school community, too, to say, "You know what? We could have handled this better." And I think that is the biggest thing that I've seen with the transition of using restorative practices here at ReNew. It's kind of building that skill to try things on, and do something a little different with our students.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

When I first started here, I think we were all just trying to figure it out. We all cared very deeply about our students, but we needed to try on what restorative approaches would look like. Not just in a circle, I think our school understood the importance of community building circles and restorative circles when an incident happens. But having and using restorative approaches into every single interaction we have with our students, and also with our staff as well, because if we can't model restorative approaches with our staff and within our community, how are we supposed to do that with our students?

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

I think one of the things that we were able to see that we needed for our school is building strong relationships with students and staff. We've always had an advisory system, but we've just kind of firmed it up over the years. Advisory used to be a time you would go check in with your advisor about your grades and your attendance, and then send you off to class. Then slowly but surely we've firmed it into a more structured process, and we've built more time within the school day for students to spend time with their advisors. It becomes less of a quick check in, and more emphasizing building those relationships. I think the importance of that is, every time I look at literature about resiliency for students, the biggest key factor is having one solid relationship with an adult, and we've already built that advisory system in.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

I think throughout the years, implementing restorative practices, we've had lots of PDs. Again, we've changed our PBIS system, where we are no longer giving demerits, because really what is a demerit? You take something away, are you taking money out of my paycheck? I always use the example of, if you're in a staff meeting, and you check your cell phone, is your boss going to take \$5 out of your paycheck? No. That's not the reality. That's not how the world works. So trying to find systems that mimic the real world for our students.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

I think what we also decided, as a school, is we are working with students, a lot of them don't have to be here. A lot of our students are 17, 18, 19, even 20 year olds. Legally, they don't have to be here. They are choosing to be here. They've been exposed to lots of different challenges of getting their high school diploma, and they choose to come to school every single day. I think our restorative practices builds upon that strength, to see that students are, that they want their diploma. Putting them out of class, being punitive, it really just, it kind of defeats the whole purpose.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

But I think using restorative practices to build upon the resiliency of our students, I've seen students of who they are, and doing things with them, not to them. So, again, like the demerits, it doesn't work. But doing something with them, to build a relationship with an adult so they feel more connected to the school, to building those real world consequences. And also implementing pro-social behaviors and social, emotional learning. Being able to, in the moment, to say, "Hey, you

were in your feelings, let's talk about what that feeling was. Let's talk about the intent versus the impact of your action, and how maybe your action didn't just affect student teacher relationship, but it could have affected the entire class." So, building those skills. That being said, a couple of years ago, we weren't there. It's been a slow transition, and I think the transition is just a willingness, trying to try on building different relationships with students.

**Avery Irons:**

So when you think about the young people and what they're bringing to the table at your school, and the opportunities you're affording them to learn, not just about book learning, but it also sounds like you're talking about a growth mindset. Can you say a little bit about that in terms of healing? And perhaps the role of the school in embracing, supporting students through a growth process?

**Lesley DeMartin:**

Absolutely. We, part of our school values, is to enter every interaction with students, and staff as well. We're talking about a school community, I think sometimes we can focus on students all the time, which I mean, we're in a school, we should, but teacher and other support staff are part of this community. So going into every interaction with a growth mindset. Thinking about that, all of our attributes are changeable with effort and experience. I think one thing that I try to do with every interaction is being able to see the intent versus the impact of the action. That's a phrase that we throw around a lot at the school, and I think that goes straight back to restorative approaches. What did you mean to do? And how did you actually come off in discussing where the harm occurred? I also think that growth mindset really applies to making sure that our school practices and our interactions mimic the real world.

**Lesley DeMartin:**

What we'd like to do a lot is to talk about, "What are your goals?" In every interaction have with students, what are your goals? If your goal is to become a nurse, is the way that you just handled this situation a way that you would handle the situation as a nurse? And being able to go from there. So again, not keeping things completely contained in the school building, but trying to build those skills for after graduation, and looking at that growth mindset, "Where do you want to grow? How can we use this interaction into different aspects of your life and tying it into your own personal goals?"

**Avery Irons:**

Excellent. And going back to the second point, I was thinking about, you said that it's, the school staff and the school community really is kind of transitioning and trying things on and figuring out what works, what have been some of the obstacles that you all have encountered? And any workarounds that you would recommend for other schools as they have progressed through, or want to progress through, these stages of implementation?

**Lesley DeMartin:**

Oh gosh. I mean the biggest one is time. PDs are just such precious times. I feel like every department, math and science, they have their own PD to go to curriculum, English and social studies, there's always so much material to cover, and just not enough time. So one thing that I am really proud of, and excited that our administration did this year, was being able to put advisory into our PD sessions. Our advisory PD sessions could be talking about looking at student's grades, attendance, et cetera, to look at data, but also really talking about forming relationships with students and problem solving. I think, with the time constraints with professional development time, I think what we've done pretty well is figuring out who in the school is very good at forming relationships, maybe who's been here for longer, and trying to set up a mentoring.

**Lesley DeMartin:**

If you're troubleshooting, if you're a newer staff member, you just don't know your students very well, encouraging them to reach out to someone who's been here for a couple of years, or who might know the student. Sometimes I find that you just, if you've never made a parent phone call before, like that can be pretty scary. Just having someone to sit next to you to say, "Okay, we're going to do this together." So finding opportunities, kind of in the moment, to do modeling and training, even if the PD time isn't there.

**Avery Irons:**

We hear that a lot from schools, just time. You think a kid is in school, or kids or students are in schools all year, but really, every minute of that time is taken.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

Right.

**| Avery Irons:**

It takes a real commitment to try something new and go through the growing pains of figuring it out.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

Right.

**| Alan Delery:**

I wanted to add to that, as I was thinking about the challenges with our professional development, which as she said, is not uncommon with other schools because so much of the emphasis is on the academic side. Professional development is usually around academic teaching. We understand the importance of the social, emotional learning of students, but the space is not always given to be able to do training with teachers as well in the area of social, emotional learning, because of the emphasis being put on the academic. We understand if you're not able to address the social emotional needs of students, the academic side would struggle as well.

**| Alan Delery:**

So it's really trying to find that balance in time, on professional development, to allow that space to build teachers and staff. Not only professional development on how to teach students, but also how to deal with the stresses themselves, as well, because classrooms, if anybody who's taught in the classroom, can be extremely stressful. You may want to act, or teach a certain way, but when a student does something or the pressure's being put on you because of multiple students that might be exhibiting some behavior, you could possibly not act the way you would like to act as a teacher, or respond the way, because you were not able to handle that stress itself. Professional development can also help in that area.

**| Avery Irons:**

That's actually a great segue to my next question. So you've talked about the whole school approach, but you're also equipping teachers, individual teachers in their classrooms, through your professional development, opportunities to use specific restorative practices. So, for folks who are not familiar with the different practices, can you give just a brief, either Lesley or Alan, a brief introduction. What are a few practices that an individual teacher would be expected to use in the school versus something that is a whole school approach?

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

One thing that we, what we've implemented in our classrooms, is the expectation to have restorative conversations with students. We have a Plan A, a Plan B and a Plan C. What we ask for our teachers is to try to redirect the student in the classroom, and if that's not working, to pull them out and have a one-on-one conversation. And if that doesn't work, then we can call in our Culture Team for additional support. But it is having those restorative conversations, I think, is the basis. Instead of just sending a student out for a problematic behavior, trying to take the moment to reset, one-on-one, with the student.

**| Alan Delery:**

I think Lesley did a good job explaining the conversations, as far as expectations in the classroom as well. A big part of it is just being able to listen, when we're so caught up in the work, and what's going on, we don't always have the opportunity to take that time to truly listen to the needs of what the students are going through. And when the students feel like they're not being listened to, they'll act out some other type of way to be noticed, or to be recognized. We want teachers to find ways to just intentionally listen to what those needs of students are, and address those needs. Part of our training is also how do you listen with what we call authentic curiosity. Not just have it go into your ear, but authentically wanting to know what those needs are, so that you could truly meet the needs that the student has, each student that's in your class.

**| Lesley DeMartin:**

I think too, when we write behavior intervention plans, they're about rewarding positive behavior. I think sometimes that's also amiss with restorative practices. Restoring a classroom culture can also be rewarding behaviors that you want to see, and also trying to figure out what are behaviors that you can ignore. When we write behavior intervention plans

and work with our teachers, we talk a little bit about what behaviors are we scaffolding? Is this a behavior that maybe we could ignore right now? If a student is feeling frustrated in the classroom, focusing on that behavior, and maybe not the cell phone. I think one thing that we, as a school, with support from Alan, too, is figuring out how to scaffold behaviors in the classroom. So it's not just, "You're doing something wrong, you got to go", it's being able to see students for their strengths, and writing plans for students that are going to capitalize on their strengths, and not be punitive.

**| Avery Irons:**

That concludes part one of the conversation with Lesley DeMartin and Alan Delery, discussing ReNew's restorative practices implementation process. Listen to episode two to hear us continue the conversation about restorative practice's role in responding to racial and ethnic disparities in school discipline, implementation challenges, and how creating a school responder model strengthened ReNew's efforts to build a more restorative community for its students and staff.

### CONCLUSION

We thank our listeners for tuning in today, and we hope you'll listen to part two of this exciting conversation. To learn more about restorative approaches, please visit our school responder model virtual toolbox at [srm.policyresearchinc.org](http://srm.policyresearchinc.org).