

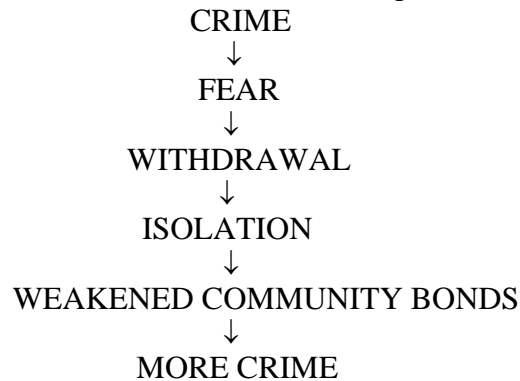
Looking for an Alternative: Sken:nen A'onsonton
Restorative Practices Part 3: A Safe Community

by: Dale Dione-Dell and Davis Montour

In previous articles, we had talked about the breakdown of relationships leading to crime between people. This is an easy concept to understand when we talk about a matter between two people, but what happens to a community when people's relationship with their own community, and the people in it, starts to break down? With all the talk of the presence of organized crime in our community, how do we keep our community safe?

The first step in creating a safe Kahnawake, is that we must recover the sense of interconnectedness we once had. The bonds of family life provide a solid foundation that children and adults need in order to learn and grow. These connections also provide a way of passing along values to our youth. A sense of interconnectedness helps to provide a sense of safety, as well as resiliency that will help those in trouble to bounce back. In the past, if someone were getting in trouble, the neighbors would likely know about it and take steps to correct the situation. Today, people are quick to say, "It's not my problem". When these community bonds begin to fail, people come to fear, rather than rely on their neighbors for support, and people begin to isolate themselves from each other.

In our community, as is true elsewhere, television and the internet are a big part of our lives. As a result of this powerful influence, values begin to come from the media, rather than from the elders and from our traditions. Children raised with little experience of human interconnectedness feel little empathy for others, and there is a distinct lack of connection to other people. This goes strongly against our cultural value of collectivity. Those who want something they do not have, may have little guilt about taking it by force. As our community breaks down and the "community" of media takes its place, the danger of crime can only increase. As a result, we see a pattern occurring;



Victims, offenders, and community members, are all caught in a downward spiral where crime leads to greater fear, creating increased isolation and distrust among community members. The connections we have to each other begin breaking down, which in turn leads to more crime. The western system of justice is one that separates and isolates people, while Restorative justice seeks to include people, and to give them a voice. Neither system is perfect, but in one system the people can have a voice, and can connect with each other. Once people have that connection, it can help reduce the reoccurrence of crime. In other words, if people care about each other, it lessens the chance they will hurt each other, and by extension the community.

If we are going to talk about what can be done to make Kahnawake a safe community, the first step is participation. By this, I mean people need to begin making the community theirs again by getting involved. The more we say “It’s not my problem”, and the more we turn to outside courts and other systems to handle our matters, the less connection we have to each other. The further we go in this direction, the further we stray from our values of collectivity, and community. The philosophies of Restorative Justice, and Restorative Practices, are built on the concepts of getting people together, and having a voice in their lives and their community. These concepts can be applied anywhere, from Justice, to education, to parenting.

For more information on Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices, call the Court of Kahnawake at 450-638-5647 to speak to Dale Dione-Dell ext. 224, or Davis Montour ext 231.