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Communities for Restorative Justice film makes debut

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C4RJ, as it is known, aired “Finding Courage: Addressing Harm with Restorative Justice Circles” to a full house at Kerem Shalom on Oct. 23.

Restorative justice responds to crime by inviting those most affected -- victim, offender, supporters -- to address what happened and the needs arising from the crime. A circle is made up of offender and family, victim and family, a police officer familiar with the case, and a volunteer from C4RJ to guide the frank discussion, eventually leading to a plan of repair.

It is an emotional journey, as depicted in the film. Professional actors played the roles of victim and offender, unraveling the motives behind the crime and hearing the hurt that was inflicted. The film was produced by an Arlington company, Reflection Films, with a script by C4RJ case coordinator Christy Barbee.

Police officers from Concord, Bedford and Acton said at the opening reception that embracing the concept of restorative justice was difficult at first, but after seeing the result, they were onboard.

“We thought it was just ‘hug a thug’ in the beginning,” said Acton Officer Keith Campbell who fielded questions after the film.

According to retired Concord police Chief Len Wetherbee, cofounder of C4RJ with residents Jean Bell and Joan Turner, 600 cases have been resolved through the circles since 2000. Executive Director Jennifer Larson Sawin said the program may expand into Malden next year.

State Sen. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton, introduced a bill into the state Legislature (SB52) that would give judges and prosecutors the option of referring cases to restorative circles alongside the traditional court system.

“It’s another tool in their tool belt,” said Concord’s interim police Chief Bill Chase.

Bedford’s Chief Robert Bongiorno acknowledged he wasn’t convinced at first. “As a police officer, I was a skeptic,” said Bongiorno. “But I quickly became a believer.”

Larson Sawin said the film will be shown in Acton, Littleton and Bedford in the coming months. It will be offered to church and school groups and cable access channels in 2014.

The directors of C4RJ said they wanted to thank Dane Brady & Haydon LLP for sponsoring the event, as well as in-kind donations from Debra’s Natural Gourmet for the refreshments, Cataldo’s Gift and Garden, Colonial Gardens, Crosby’s Marketplace, Betsy Levinson, Rogers Printing Co, Inc; Jeremy and Max Rosenzweig and Temple Kerem Shalom.



PHOTO/ COURTESY PHOTO / KATE CARR

Concord interim police Chief Bill Chase, left, stands with event sponsor Henry Dane at the premier of the film.

To learn more about C4RJ and future screenings of “Finding Courage,” visit www.c4rj.com.

<http://www.wickedlocal.com/article/20131102/NEWS/311029784>

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