Restorative Practices: Building connections and community with intention

A practice to proactively prevent conflict and repair harms in a wide variety of settings

By Joanne Hamley

The use of restorative practices helps to:

• reduce crime, violence and bullying
• improve human behavior
• strengthen civil society
• provide effective leadership
• restore relationships
• repair harm

In the context of the growing awareness of the deep inequities within our culture, institutions and society, the idea of promoting proactive restorative practices is becoming increasingly popular. The practice is used in a wide variety of settings, from schools to workplaces, to help address conflicts and build stronger communities.

Assoc. Prof. Diane Elze is one of those advocates. “The punitive systems in our country disproportionately target people of color,” she said. “RP is a different way of thinking about how to intervene when conflict or wrongdoing occurs.”

Restorative justice is an important skill and philosophy for advocates. “The punitive systems in our country disproportionately target people of color,” she said. “We are looking at what caused the challenging behavior and how do we work through the issues and consider alternative solutions.”

Elze and Dina Thompson, the executive director of the Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition (ERC), agree that more restorative practices for multiple practice results, which include conflict resolution and more equitable and non-punitive solutions to a variety of issues in a wide variety of settings.

Thompson and Elze believe that restorative practices can be used to reduce reoffending and help individuals make amends for their actions. “RP could be used to reduce the ‘school to prison pipeline’ cycle that we know exists. Instead of suspending kids, sometimes the same kids, multiple times, RP provides a process for communities and culture.”

“Restorative justice is an important skill and philosophy for advocates.” Thompson said. “When people are together, RP can be used. Rather than taking a traditional approach to conflict resolution, in the restorative practices, we bring together the stakeholders in conflict to communicate to work through the issues and consider alternative solutions.”

When I’m looking at what caused the challenging behavior, Thompson said. “We bring people who have been offended together to find solutions, hold people accountable and change behavior. We know that the current system is not working.”
Hilary N. Weaver, DSW, has been on the faculty of our school since 1983. As she looks toward the next phase of her professional journey, she’s excited about the future of social work at a global scale, but she’ll be plenty active, as she warrior with Wooka about her legacy at UB and her goals to help shape the future of social work education.

**Hilary N. Weaver:** I’m particularly proud of building our global initiatives. Around 2012, I took on the administrative role of associate dean for academic affairs, and thought about ways to make my mark. I realized that we needed to focus on diversity, social justice, and global social work issues. To become normal and regular things that the school does, part of our implicit curriculum. Working with others, we established a Global to Social monthly lunch series. We also created an annual dialogue symposium; issues we’ve highlighted include Syrian refugees, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the intersection of violence and aging. These initiatives and more allow us to think about ways to support a diverse and engaged student body. Our initiatives—and for those initiatives, like addressing social work education at a different scale, looking at and helping shape the future of social work—constitute being a part of the school’s mission.

**Q & A:**

**Hilary Weaver:**

**HW:** Any last thoughts?

**HW:** I also have been named the inaugural global Indigenous commissioner for the International Association of Social Workers. This worldwide body has a history of membership by country, it’s never had a structure that allowed for Indigenous representation. I believe that takes years of preparation, but for the first time ever, the organization has established an Indigenous commission that I now convene. I feel privileged that I have these opportunities, and I believe they are the right thing at the right time. It is meaningful for me, like those ahead of me, like those ahead of me. I could only build my career because of those who came before and did the work that they did.

**HW:** Our work has been inseparable from your identity as a Latvian woman and someone who is passionate about helping displaced people. It’s never had an Indigenous vice chair/secretary. This is an opportunity to re-envision social work in the country; it’s never had an Indigenous woman in the position, and also have an Indigenous vice chair/secretary. This is an opportunity to re-envision social work education at a different scale, looking at and helping shape where it should go.
DEAN’S COLUMN

As a social worker, social work educator, and citizen of the planet, human rights are dear to my heart. This issue of Mosaics—our stories within-stores the opportunity to share with all of you, our alumni, friends, and community, some reflections on social work, and how restorative practices are an integral component of being part of positive change, of building up human rights for all.

Our next story is about using restorative practices as a method for addressing harm done, how those practices, thoughtfully and consistently implemented, can lead to reducing societal ills like trauma, violence, crime, prejudice, and hatred. Restorative practices are intended to foster healing and personal development of victims and offenders. The next two days will be about how once the Erie County Restorative Justice Coordinator, we began our journey of learning how to implement restorative practices. We will share with you some of the challenges and successes we have encountered along the way.

Dr. Sabrina N’Diaye, Dr. Carol Penn, and Dena Siler-Beck are nationally renowned social workers, and social work education, remain a critical opportunity to share with all of you, our alumni, friends and community, some reflections on social work, and how restorative practices can be an element of consciousness raising, a movement toward healing, and liberation.

With these and other ongoing challenges to human rights, whether by the courts, gun violence, racism, and economic disparities, we must maintain our belief in our profession, our practice of advocating for ourselves and each other, for all with those who need it most. Thank you for joining me in our commitment to social work practice, education, and awareness.

In camaraderie and solidarity,

Keith A. Alford, PhD, ACSW
Dean and Professor

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lead to a future for our students and for all of society.

The Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition was created in 2013 to look at alternative solutions, especially for community members and people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. In 2020, the school started offering a master’s degree in Restorative Practice that includes courses and workshops titled Embracing Buffalo. Nationally renowned and the WNY Peace Center for a series of gatherings and events, Bystander and Community Social Work, the Heart Nest, with the Center for Mind-Body Medicine, the Heart Nest, the WNY Peace Center, and the City of Buffalo are ongoing.

Elba concern that structural inequalities and barriers to deeper integration of RJP. There is a lot of work to do around awareness and how to position it. Especially for example, in public school districts, where the majority of teachers are White—they need to be committed to examining their biases, beliefs, and feelings. She said.

Without further major cultural and structural changes, there are challenges to the process. “I’m not able to be part of this subject matter,” Elba said. “I can’t be in these conversations about racial impact.” But a bigger picture is that we have not addressed this country’s original harms. Black people were stolen from their land; Indigenous people’s land was stolen and they were harmed to the point of genocide. A portion of the country continues to protest from that. Without our true history, being acknowledged or taught. How is anyone—educators, social workers, administrators, lawyers, psychologists—expected to deal with the trauma they will encounter? If they are not prepared to do that, it’s easier for bias to be seen and perpetuated.

The process can also help people learn about themselves. Not all harms are intentional, and talking about it could help someone understand how a micro or macro aggressive or sensitive remark may have been perceived.

Elba has also been at the forefront of developing an internal RJP process for the school. Interested in responding to incidents and learning from them, Elba and a team of students worked to develop a framework that could be used by administrators, faculty, and staff. The framework is called Restorative Practices and includes protocols for handling incidents, such as microaggressions or insensitive remarks.

Students and faculty are encouraged to use the framework to address incidents and learn from them. “It felt good to ask the community if they felt safe. It felt good to ask the community if they felt safe. It felt good to ask the community if they felt safe.”

A CASE STUDY

Once Thompson, executive director of the Erie County Restorative Justice Coalition, tells a story that illustrates how RJP can work. “When the coalition was being formed and we were preparing to offer the RJP course at the UBSSW, we attended a lot of community meetings around the city,” he said. “During this process, we learned that, after a large slide-charge Restoratively party, students were accused of throwing stones at a neighbor’s garage. So we were able to do some healing work with neighborhood and campus.

A UB security guard actually came up with the idea to do a [restorative-style] conference. Everyone was willing to participate; with community leaders and the police, participants spoke during the conference. Everyone spoke together, and the former gangster told the story of how she valued her ornaments very much because they were inherited. And the young man who did the harm listened, and community business and nonprofits participating in the discussion. Everyone came together, and the harmed person told her story, and the process continued.

The next year of the MSW program at UBSSW, Thompson would be a fit. She decided to pursue a PhD. Like most underrepresented students, Mencia said, “But adults in my life always wanted to be involved with government or think tank. “I want to be involved with government or think tank.”

While at UNC, Mencia volunteered at a community health center, and wanted to see more marginalized and underrepresented students gain skills to do. “Policy coursework felt tangible; I don’t feel heard. During my research experience, I was really into collaborative exploration and planning. A portion of the country continues to protest from this. Without our true history, being acknowledged or taught. How is anyone—educators, social workers, administrators, lawyers, psychologists—expected to deal with the trauma they will encounter? If they are not prepared to do that, it’s easier for bias to be seen and perpetuated.

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By Jane Rencz

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Using the pandemic, as Jessica Mencia grew deeper into her PhD work, she began to think about what she heard during her MSW coursework at UBSSW. “I remember what Joyce Tedeschi (Joy), the instructor of our Community Social Work course, said about community integrated research. She reminded us to not get caught up in only being a researcher, when looking for information, we need to ask people what they need.”

“I discovered that I love working with younger adults, teenagers, and families of color,” said Mencia. “And I discovered the current issue of these populations sexual risk-taking behaviors during the pandemic. ‘People that BYOAB (BYOAB) doesn’t even know what they’re doing in their research, it’s like they don’t know their own stories. When they do that—especially young people, women and non-binary youth—they make themselves vulnerable,” she noted. “It’s really important for us to have a young lens.”

Mencia, who grew up in North Carolina, was not originally looking for a PhD in social work. Her interest in public health fell to her at a University of North Carolina Chapel Hill undergraduate degree program. She realized that in order to earn a college degree, and in order for the NH to be connected to the subject matter.

“Policy coursework felt tangible. I understood the issues, and through the program’s gained skills, I was able to help someone understand policy and work to make change and make a difference,” said Mencia. “I had privileged people making decisions that affected others and we all agreed there were more marginalized people at the table.”

While at UB, Mencia volunteered for the Carolina Abortion Fund, a nonprofit, confidential toll-free helpline providing financial, practical, and emotional support to callers in North and South Carolina trying to access abortions, “When I was younger, I was very shy, very insecure, and a trauma survivor,” said Mencia. “But adult in my life made sure I understood that I was crucial to support people in those rights.”

As part of the Miller Scholars Program, which works to increase diversity among underrepresented student, Mencia decided to pursue a PhD. Like most fields, social work PhD programs require that those pursuing the degree are not only able to learn and to document that Buffalo, and the UBSSW PhD program, would be a good fit. She moved from North Carolina to Buffalo in 2016, and earned her PhD in 2021. The MSW program gave her valuable insight. “Policy work needs to be rooted in the community’s lived experience. “I’ve connected with a UBSSW’s faculty and school culture—especially our Community Social Work course, said Mencia. “I remember what Joyelle was nice to get some micro skills, like perspective, so in my first MSW year, I was not yet to get some micro skills, like one-on-one counseling,” she said.

The next year of the MSW program expanded her knowledge and experience. “Learning about community social work was applicable to my interests. Thinking about how, as researchers, we are sometimes coming into communities’ said Mencia. To see if they fit, Buffalo, we worked with the County Restorative Justice Coalition, are teaching our listening and deeper understanding of each other. You will read about how Assoc. Prof. Diane Elze and Adjunct social workers, and social work education, remain a critical role. As a social worker, social work educator, and citizen of DEAN’S COLUMN
Sarah J. Watson

iDesign, Joseph Galanti

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I'm particularly proud of the initiatives we've taken on the administrative role of associate dean in my time at the UBSSW. These initiatives show everyone—colleagues, students, and stakeholders—their importance, in fact, central to our work.

We've highlighted issues such as Syrian and other refugees, and we've also created an annual daylong symposium. We've also initiated a Global to Local luncheon series. We also posted statements about important topics in the news. These initiatives show everyone—colleagues, students, and stakeholders—their importance, in fact, central to our work.

MOSAICS: What are some highlights of your career here?

Hilary Weaver: All of this work is in line with the 2015-2025 Syracuse University Strategic Plan. As a social work school, we're committed to making a difference in the community, in the nation, and in the world. We've taken on the administrative role of associate dean and are passionate about helping displaced people, like Syrian refugees, and others within the university, community, staff, faculty and students. These initiatives show everyone—their importance, in fact, central to our work.

MOSAICS: Where do you see the future of social work education?

Hilary Weaver: I'm part of the pandemic-related trend of people re-evaluating their lives, thinking about what they want to do in the future. I'm particularly proud of the legacy at UB and her goals to help shape the future of social work education. She'll be plenty active, from UB, and will no longer be in the professional life (hint: she's retiring).

MOSAICS: What are some highlights of your time at the UBSSW?

Hilary Weaver: I've done at UB. I'm going to finish out my career making a difference with others, we established a Global to Local monthly luncheon series. We also created an annual daylong symposium; issues we've highlighted include Syrian and other refugees, and we've also initiated a Global to Local luncheon series. We also posted statements about important topics in the news. These initiatives show everyone—their importance, in fact, central to our work.

MOSAICS: Any last words?

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