

Guide To Creating  
A Successful  
*Neighborhood Association*



**THE COMMUNITY  
RESTORATIVE  
JUSTICE CENTER**



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## **WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION AND WHAT DOES IT DO?**

A neighborhood association is a group of residents who meet regularly to accomplish specific goals in their neighborhood. The association may include homeowners, renters, business owners, school faculty or staff, church officials and members of non-profit organizations. Depending on the goals of the group, meetings may be held twice a year, once a quarter or every month.

Neighborhood associations help identify challenges and concerns, support change and improvement efforts, help resolve conflicts, provide volunteers for community initiatives, represent the neighborhood as a whole to elected officials and find resources to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

Before forming a neighborhood association it is important to define or understand the goals of the proposed neighborhood association.

Some goals may include:

- ✓ Helping neighbors get to know each other by hosting social events
- ✓ Making physical improvements such as painting a mural, installing
- ✓ Assembling a Block Watch to reduce crime
- ✓ Organizing to share opinions with public officials.



## HOW TO FORM A NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

### 1. START WITH A CORE GROUP

Start your neighborhood association by finding a core group of people who agree to meet regularly. Ask some neighbors you already know and ask those neighbors to speak to other neighbors. Once you have 5 or so people interested, schedule a meeting in a central location; school, church or community center in the area. Set up the meeting very quickly before people lose interest.

The core group should agree on ground rules for meetings:

- ✓ Try to attend every meeting.
- ✓ Act for the benefit of the group.
- ✓ Be polite and make constructive comments.
- ✓ Treat other members with respect.
- ✓ Discuss ideas, concerns, not personalities or people.
- ✓ Accept group decisions after a vote has been taken and consensus is reached.

### 2. SET THE NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDRIES

It's important to determine the boundaries of your neighborhood association. Boundaries might be roads, residences within a certain distance of a neighborhood landmark or a community facility. You can take a look at a neighborhood map or take a community stroll to identify boundaries for the neighborhood association. Call The Community Restorative Justice Center to see if there are any existing neighborhood associations. If so you will want to contact this neighborhood association to partner with an existing group on common issues.

Once you have set boundaries, establish a list of households in the area. This list will help you get more neighbors involved in the association and its activities. You may need to go door to door to obtain this list; information on property owners is available at the St. Johnsbury Town Offices.



### **3. DEVELOP A NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN**

A neighborhood plan will help your neighborhood association make decisions and take action. The plan could include:

- ✓ The reason the association was formed
- ✓ The principles that will guide the neighborhood association and its work
- ✓ When and how often the members will meet
- ✓ How many meetings will be conducted per calendar year
- ✓ The goals and outcomes of the neighborhood association

## **HOW TO HOLD MEETINGS**

### **PLAN THE MEETING**

People will be more likely to attend meetings if they are organized, brief useful and in a convenient location. Set the time, date and location by consulting with the core group of members. Plan the meeting to last no longer than an hour to an hour and a half.

Pick a location that is centrally located and familiar to your neighbors, and then remind them of the time and date, by email, phone call, flyer, or letter. Before the meeting begins arrange the tables and chairs, have all handouts, resource materials available at the entrance of the room. Don't forget a sign in sheet, you will be able to keep all information up to date and keep new members involved.

### **SET THE AGENDA**

All meetings should have an agenda. The agenda lists the order of business at the meeting, including any committee reports, etc. Example of typical agenda.

1. Welcome and initial check in  
Check on the agenda to see if there are any additions. Use a Circle Process to check in. The group should choose a facilitator for the circle – see Community Circles on pages 8-11
2. Reading minutes/notes of last meeting  
If minutes were kept from previous meeting, those minutes should be read aloud to the association. This could serve as a refresher of the topics at hand.



3. Reports from any assignments given at last meeting  
A designated person from each assigned task should be prepared to report on the progress of the goals and objectives. The individual should all discussion or feedback from the entire group. Make sure each reporting person keeps the debate/discussion time to 5-10 minutes.
4. Unfinished of new business  
The moderator of meeting will ask for new ideas or topics and opens the floor for discussion, limiting discussion to 5-10 minutes.
5. Announcements  
On most occasions this is an opportunity for non-profits, city departments, or other agencies involved in the neighborhood association to speak. Next meeting date and time with location should be announced.
6. Adjournment  
The moderator adjourns the meeting.

## **PUBLICITY**

Communication is very important to the success of your association. Sharing information is a great way to build a sense of community in your neighborhood, get new people to join you association and enlist support for your events.

Here are some ways to get the word out:

- ✓ Publish a neighborhood association newsletter 4-12 times per year. Collaborate with other neighborhood associations to share the cost and assist in design if needed.
- ✓ Announce your meetings and events in weekly area newspapers, in schools, churches and club activities.
- ✓ Distribute fliers door to door.
- ✓ Distribute a neighborhood survey and send the results through mail, email, phone or door to door.
- ✓ Ask local business to place fliers or posters in their businesses.
- ✓ Send letters or emails to all within the neighborhood boundary.
- ✓ Social Media: Set up a Facebook Page for your neighborhood association and post events, meeting times, and news frequently. Set up a twitter account and post news frequently.



## **LEADERSHIP: FINDING AND SUSTAINING IT**

Part of the neighborhood organizer is to identify and develop neighborhood leaders. People in leadership positions are responsible for coordinating a group, including activities designed to help the group achieve its goals; and help all members stay involved and feel good about working together.

It is important for leaders to involve all group members in the decision making process and to be sure everyone is heard before the group votes on an action or makes a decision. The qualities of good leaders include flexibility, the desire to listen and consider the opinions of others, the ability to clearly state goals and expectations and willingness to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of other individuals. Part of being a leader is helping others to grow.

## **WHEN MEMBERS OR NEIGHBORS DISAGREE**

*“Peace is not the absence of conflict,  
it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.” ~Ronald Reagan*

Neighborhood associations, like any group of people, can run into problems with personality conflicts, burnouts and leadership or direction issues. When problems occur, encourage an open and respectful discussion among members, make sure the discussion does not become a meeting of personal attacks, try to guide the group towards the desired outcome.

Some people try to avoid dealing with conflict because it makes them uncomfortable and some people try to approach conflict as if they were in a battle and determined to win. It is best to resolve conflict immediately so it won't damage personal relationships or the association, and many disagreements can be resolved through the Circle Process. Disagreements among association members can be an opportunity for growth, change and new understanding. Remember everyone's opinion matters and everyone has a different perspective and skill level that varies in dealing with conflict. If things get to a point where you cannot move forward The Community Restorative Justice Center has many ways to help you build skills in leading, helping associations navigate through conflict, and mediators that can build a bridge for better resolution.



*“Patience and perseverance have a magical effect  
before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.” ~John Quincy Adams*

## TIPS FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

- ✓ Talk directly to with another, face to face. Direct conversation is more effective than sending a letter, emailing or complaining to someone else.
- ✓ Choose the right time to talk and have a neutral third party present if there is high tension between parties. Find a neutral place where you can both talk undisturbed for as long as it takes. Approach the other person and ask for their time.
- ✓ Think about what you want to say ahead of time and even make bullet points to keep things on track. State the problem how this makes you feel or how this is affecting outcomes and offer a solution. Don't blame or interpret others' behaviors. Only speak for yourself and your feeling toward the issue. Do not assume others agree with your position or that this person will see it the way you do.
- ✓ Do not place blame on anyone, do not personally attack anyone, only discuss the problem and how that affects your feelings or outcome. Be responsible for your actions and reactions during the meeting – you are not responsible for their actions or reactions – stay calm. If emotions are running high then take a break or end the meeting and come back at a later time.

People who cannot resolve serious disagreements on their own may want help from a trained mediator or speak to the CRJC's Director. A Mediator is a neutral person who can help neighbors in conflict create their own solution to the problem/conflict. For help finding a trained Mediator contact:

The Community Restorative Justice Center, Inc.(802)748-2977 or email Susan Cherry directly [scherry@communityrjc.org](mailto:scherry@communityrjc.org).

The CRJC is here to help your Neighborhood Association thrive. We frequently set up trainings on community development, restorative practices such as; circle processes, group mediations, etc. and can network your group with local and state contacts for further needs or interests that may arise.

For further information on Neighborhood Associations we have an extensive lending-library at the CRCJ. Stop in and browse our selections during normal business hours.



## **COMMUNITY CIRCLES** **(An authentic dialogue process)**

### **An Overview of the Model**

**Authentic Dialogue:** The practice of speaking one's personal truth and listening well to others for deeper understanding.

**Debate:** Comes from the Latin "dis" – apart, against each other and batter– to fight, beat.

**Discussion:** Comes from the Latin "discutere" – to smash apart (same root as concussion and percussion).

**Dialogue:** comes from the Greek "dia" – which means through and logos – the word, the meaning – or the notion of a free flow of meaning between people (David Bohm).

#### **Foundational Values:**

The Community Circles model is built around a framework of core values. As Kay Pranis notes in "*The Little Book of Circle Processes* (2005), "Circles assume a universal human wish to be connected to others in a good way. The values of a Circle derive from this basic human impulse. Therefore values that nurture and promote good connections to others are the foundation of the Circle." These values include: the dignity and worth of each person, respect and non-judgment, inclusiveness, understanding, compassion, honesty, openheartedness, courage, and trust.

#### **Purposes for conducting Community Circles:**

- Build and strengthen community
- Promote understanding of self and others
- Break down barriers between people and groups
- Provide a safe space for addressing difficult issues or conflicts
- Foster authentic connections and relationships
- Process a particular event, video, presentation, or activity
- Shift climate toward a more "relational" environment
- Elicit wisdom, ideas, points of view, information
- Offer a process for democratic decision-making

#### **The Dialogue Process:**

- This is a "structured dialogue", not a back and forth discussion or debate
- One person speaks at a time, using a talking piece
- A facilitator guides the dialogue
- The Agreements help create a safe space
- Time is shared equally by all
- This is an opportunity to use "intentional and respectful" listening (i.e. listening for understanding, meaning and connection, not necessarily for agreement or solutions) and "honest and courageous" sharing.



### **The Role and Responsibilities of the Circle Facilitator**

A facilitator works to maintain an atmosphere of trust and respect and to guide the sharing of experiences and insights in productive ways.

#### **This role *is* about:**

Sharing power  
Guiding  
Modeling  
Non-judgment  
Listening

#### **This role is *NOT* about:**

Power over others  
Bossing  
Bullying  
Hurrying  
Avoiding

1. Be clear on the purpose for the Circle.
2. Introduce yourself as the facilitator and briefly describe the Circle process.
3. Emphasize the importance of the talking piece: *This talking piece helps focus our attention on the person who is speaking, and gives everyone an equal chance to participate.*
4. Review the Agreements with the group. Add any new ones that come up.
5. Begin the Circle asking one question at a time. Allow silent time for reflection before passing the talking piece to the person on your right or left.
6. Make sure everyone has a turn to speak, including those who have passed.
7. Informally monitor time so no one monopolizes the Circle. Remind the group about this if necessary. (For example, *"Before we move on to the next speaker, I'd like to remind the group that we all agreed to share the speaking time. Please try to remember that. If you feel you have more to say, there is time at the end to elaborate."*)
8. After everyone has had a chance to speak, repeat the Circle if people need to elaborate.
9. Repeat the Agreements if necessary. (For example, *"I would just like to remind the group that we agreed to ..."*)

### **The Agreements:**

We use Agreements during Circles to help create a safe atmosphere of trust and respect. The Agreements are clearly stated and discussed at the beginning of a Circle and can be revisited at any time if the facilitator finds the participants need to be reminded of the intention of the Circle process. After reading the list, ask if anyone wants to add something or if anyone has a problem with something on the list.

1. Bring your full attention and presence to the Circle.
2. Everyone will have a turn to speak, and we agree to share the time we have equally.
3. It's okay to pass, and you will have another chance to speak at the end of the Circle.
4. Address your comments to the whole group or to the center of the Circle.
5. Stay on the topic.
6. Be as honest, open-minded and non-judgmental as possible.
7. Listen and speak with respect for others.
8. Please do not interrupt a speaker or have side conversations during the Circle.
9. Respect privacy by keeping the dialogue confidential.

(\* Note – When necessary, for example, during a Circle to resolve a conflict or when addressing a difficult issue, include this as another Agreement: *"Use 'I' Statements to express your own feelings or beliefs and avoid 'You' Statements that blame or attack others."*)



### **The Importance of the Talking Piece**

As previously noted, the talking piece is an important element of the Community Circles process. It encourages careful listening, patience, and thoughtful responses. It helps to maintain a sense of order and calm, especially in Circles addressing problems or conflicts. In *The Little Book of Circle Processes* (2005), author Kay Pranis describes the talking piece in this way:

*“The talking piece is a powerful equalizer. It allows every participant an equal opportunity to speak and carries an implicit assumption that every participant has something important to offer the group. The talking piece facilitates the contributions of quiet people who are unlikely to assert themselves in a typical open dialogue. As it passes physically from hand to hand, the talking piece weaves a connecting thread amount eh members of the Circle.”*

*“Everything in the Circle is an invitation – when you have the talking piece you are invited to speak, but you may pass. When you do not have the talking piece you are invited to listen.” (Greg Lewis, Teaching and Learning in Circle, 2003).*

Things to consider when crafting questions:

Questions are driven by the purpose of the dialogue.

How much time is available?

What outcomes are you looking for?

What is the best sequence of questions?

Understand the needs of participants, including safety concerns.

Try to create questions that are:

- Inclusive
- Challenging and inviting
- Open-ended (avoid questions with “yes/no” answers)

### **Useful Quotes:**

*“Circles bring us together to share who we are beyond our appearances. They’re places of listening – of hearing what it’s like to be someone else. They’re also places for being heard – for expressing what’s on our minds and hearts and having others receive it deeply.” (Pranis, Stuart, and Wedge, “Peacemaking Circles: From Crime to Community”, 2003)*

*“Dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.” (Harold Saunders, “A Public Peace Process”)*

*“People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other; they do not know each other because they have not communicated with each other.” (Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.)*

*“Circles are about practicing a new way to be in the world. They are about incrementally shifting habits and practicing to be in a different way with one another and ourselves. Circles develop skills at participation, consensus, shared leadership, and problem solving, all of which are...essential tools for genuine democracy and social justice...They...help us see ourselves as a part of a connected whole.” (Carolyn Boyes-Watson, “Healing the Wounds of Street Violence”)*

**The Community Circles model was developed by the Peace and Reconciliation Studies Program, University of Maine, inspired by the work of the Boston Research Center, the Public Conversations Project, Roca, Harold Gatensby, Gerry Dunne, David Bohm, Margaret Wheatley, Kay Pranis, and Christina Baldwin.**



## Facilitating the Dialogue (The Script)

1. **Welcome the group.** Introduce yourself as the Circle facilitator.
2. **Mention the purpose of the Circle.** (The purpose of this Circle is to build a strong community in our classroom, OR....)
3. **Explain the Circle process.**
  - a. This is a “structured” conversation
  - b. One person speaks at a time without interruption.
  - c. We will use a talking piece, which helps to focus our attention on the person who is speaking, and gives everyone an equal chance to participate. We can think of this talking piece as an invitation: When you have the talking piece, you are invited to speak, but you may pass. When you do not have the talking piece, you are invited to listen.
  - d. If you choose to pass, we will come back to you at the end of the Circle.
  - e. We use a set of Agreements to create a safe space for sharing. I'll read them in a moment.
  - f. First, what are your questions about this process?
4. **Review the Agreements.**
  - a. Bring your full attention and present to the Circle.
  - b. Everyone will have a turn to speak, and we agree to share the time we have equally.
  - c. It's okay to pass, and you will have another chance to speak at the end of the Circle.
  - d. Address your comments to the whole group or to the center of the Circle.
  - e. Stay on the topic.
  - f. Be as honest, open-minded and non-judgmental as possible.
  - g. Listen and speak with respect for others.
  - h. Please do not interrupt a speaker or have side conversations during the Circle.
  - i. Respect privacy by keeping the Circle confidential. What we say in this room stays in this room.

Would anyone like to add any other Agreements? Will everyone follow these Agreements?

5. **Ask the first question.** Allow silent time for reflection. Pass the talking piece to your right or left.
6. **Review the Agreements at any time if necessary.** (I would just like to remind the group that we agreed to...)
7. **Close the Circle.** “I want to thank everyone for participating in the Circle and for sharing your thoughts and listening to each other with respect. Please remember that we agreed to keep what happened in this Circle confidential. Thank you!”)



## **Current Neighborhood Associations in St. Johnsbury, VT**

### **Arlington Neighborhood**

### **Arnold Park**

### **Colonial Apartments**

### **Depot Square Apartments**

They meet every 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of every month in the Catamount Arts downstairs meeting room at 4:00pm  
Website: <http://dsna.webs.com/>

### **East Village**

Joan S. Weston, Note taker for the East Village Association  
P.O. Box 76  
E. Saint Johnsbury, VT 05838  
802-748-9638

### **Four Seasons**

### **Mountain View**

### **Summerville**

## **St. Johnsbury Contact Numbers**

St. Johnsbury Town Offices: (802)748-3926  
St. Johnsbury Zoning Department: (802)748-3926  
St. Johnsbury Police Department (non-emergency): (802)748-2314  
St. Johnsbury Fire Dept. (non-emergency): (802)748-8925  
The Community Restorative Justice Center, Inc.: (802)748-2977

Much information for this publication was found in a publication entitled: *Neighborhood Association Toolkit*, handed out by office of Angel Tavares, Town Manager in Providence, RI.