

Restorative Justice



The Issue

Overall, crime has fallen steadily since 1991 and is still much lower than it was in that peak year. However, the last four years have shown spikes. Winnipeg's 2018 crime index was up 10% from 2017 and is highest in the country. The previous federal government made sweeping changes to the criminal justice system in the name of being "tough on crime." The current federal government has not made any substantial changes. In 2017-18, Manitoba jailed 19 for every 10,000 children. 8 out of 10 other provinces jail less than 5 children per every 10,000. Across Canada, we jail 83 adults for every 100,000 but in Manitoba, it is 231 for every 100,000. Most troubling though is that of all those serving federal, provincial and community based sentences in Manitoba, 75% are Indigenous. From 2007 to 2018, the number of Indigenous men and women entering custody in Manitoba rose by 60% for men and 139% for women.

The Province's Role

The administration of justice is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. Simply put, the federal government creates the laws while the province administers them. Manitoba is the only province with a Restorative Justice Act. The provincial government can better fund community-based programs that are proven to be both less expensive and more effective than jail. The Restorative Justice Association of Manitoba (RJAM) defines restorative justice as:

An approach to crime and conflict which has its roots in Indigenous and other cultures worldwide. RJ involves those who have been harmed, those who have done harm, and the affected community in a search for outcomes which promote accountability, reconciliation and reassurance. RJ is not a specific model, instead it is a set of principles that can be adapted and applied to a variety of situations.

More specifically, restorative justice:

- o Focuses on harms and the needs of all those affected by crime or conflict, including the community*
- o Addresses obligations resulting from those harms*
- o Uses collaborative processes*
- o Invites voluntary participation by those with a stake in a situation*
- o Emphasizes healing as it seeks to repair harms and put right the wrongs to as full an extent as possible*

Questions to Ask

- What is your understanding of the links between crime, poverty, mental health, addictions and involvement with Child and Family Services?
- What are you going to do about poverty, mental health and addictions?
- What will you and your party do to increase the use of restorative justice?

