

Anti-Racism Action Project Description – Draft 1

August 10th, 2021

In recent years, it has been increasingly obvious for those working within the criminal justice system that racism is a prevalent issue for community members of colour who encounter this system. While this is true at all stages of the criminal justice system, the effects of racism are felt heavily at the sentencing and incarceration stages. As of January 21, 2020, Public Safety Canada announced through a news release that Indigenous persons represent 30% of inmates in federal prisons despite representing 5% of the general Canadian [population](#). Within Manitoba specifically, Statistics Canada states that 75% of inmates in provincial adult custody are Indigenous persons while representing 16% of the Manitoba [population](#).

It is in response to this longstanding racism within the criminal justice system that the Restorative Justice Association of Manitoba (RJAM) applied and received funding from the federal Anti-Racism Action Program (ARAP). Our project, Creating Space for Community Justice (CSCJ) is an ambitious research initiative which aims to engage community organizations in further discussion and promotion of restorative justice practices. Researchers involved in CSCJ will be interviewing both formal practitioners of restorative justice as well as community-based organizations who operate on the basic principles of restorative justice of repairing harm and restoring peace through accountability and transformation. A final report will be developed to highlight the benefits of the restorative justice approach given its ability to address the root causes of criminal activity. The link between poverty, systemic racism, and crime is clear. Restorative justice is both a viable and effective alternative to the carceral system. The CSCJ report will provide a better understanding of the restorative justice services available in Manitoba; draw attention to the systemic barriers practitioners and participants face in trying to obtain referrals to restorative programs; and provide recommendations on how to redefine restorative justice as not simply an alternative measure for a few, but a legitimate philosophy of justice which positively addresses issues of racism in the criminal justice system.

CSCJ is currently operating on a timeline that runs from August 2021 to February 2022. Initial interviews with community organizations will begin in August and run until September. Findings from the first round of interviews will be compiled into a first draft of the final report which is also to be presented to the community in October. Recommendations from this presentation in

October and additional interviews will be reviewed when creating a second draft which is to be presented in November. Comments from this presentation and final interviews will be reviewed as the final draft is being prepared for release in February. We also plan on a series of community engagement activities throughout the life of the project that will aim to further promote restorative justice in the future.

If you are a restorative justice practitioner with a community organization or you work with people who are or are at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system, we want to connect and hear from you re what works and what does not. Please click [here](#) to leave your contact information.