RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AS A MODEL FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY:

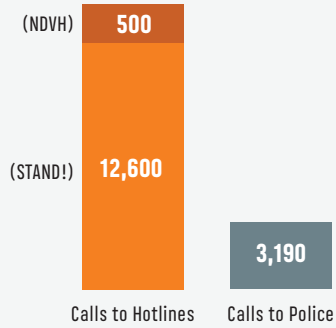
About 1 in 3 California women will be harmed by a partner at least once in their lives.[1] And in Contra Costa County in 2020, **over 13,000 calls** for help with domestic violence were made to crisis helplines and 3,190 reports were filed by police after a call for assistance.[2] Calls to organizations like STAND! and the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) were four-times as high as reports filed by police in that year.

MANY SURVIVORS DON'T CALL POLICE AND NEED MORE OPTIONS:

- For some people, like those who are in mixed (citizenship) status households or do not hold protected residency status, or those who live with the person who caused harm, more options are needed when seeking help in interrupting or preventing partner violence.

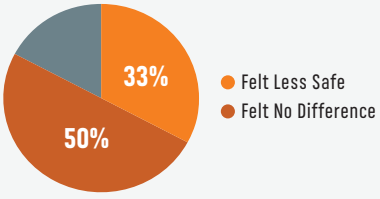
- For many survivors, calling police is often more harmful than helpful. A national study of survivors who contacted police found that many felt less safe after calling police for help.[4] Many survivors stated that they feared that police wouldn't believe them, that calling police would make things worse, or that they would suffer repercussions themselves such as a dual arrest or losing custody of a child. That same study found that **1 in 4 women** who called police were arrested or were threatened with arrest while reporting an assault.

- Similarly, research shows that relying on the criminal legal system can be dangerous for survivors. A 2014 study found that victims of domestic violence were 64% more likely to die if their partner was arrested for domestic violence, compared to those who only received a warning. For Black survivors, arrests increased mortality by 98%.[5]



In Contra Costa County in 2020, 4x as many calls for assistance with domestic violence were made to crisis hotlines than calls to police that resulted in a report.[7]

1 in 3 adults in the Bay Area say that they would not call the police if they were harmed by their partner.[3]



Nearly 75% of survivors said that calling police was harmful or not helpful, according to national data.

"There's nothing wrong with looking for a healthier, peaceful way of living and communicating."

- Collective Healing and Transformation (CHAT) circle participant

The CHAT Project · STAND! For Families Free of Violence · Alliance for Boys and Men of Color Healing Together · RYSE Center

COMMUNITY-BASED, HEALING-CENTERED, NON-PUNITIVE RESPONSES TO PARTNER VIOLENCE:

A recent poll of Bay Area adults showed that the **vast majority of people (81%) support alternatives to jail for people who have caused domestic violence.**[6] One solution is using restorative justice (RJ) practices to address intimate partner and community violence.

Restorative justice is an approach that **centers healing, prevention, and accountability** to repair harm without involving the criminal legal system. It can take many forms, but often it brings together people who have caused harm, and the people and communities impacted by those actions. Many restorative processes have roots in indigenous traditions and values, like circle and ceremony, and have been used—and validated—for many types of harm, including preventing intimate partner violence. Studies of restorative justice models that respond to partner violence show that **survivors find greater satisfaction with its results, when compared to traditional criminal-legal system responses.**

All across the world, people are using restorative justice practices to address violence, and evidence shows that it works. Restorative justice practices bridge the need for healing-centered solutions that hold parties accountable and build systems of support and care for everyone involved.

Restorative justice programs and practices encompass a range of 'restorative' elements that can include conferencing with families, friends and community members, circles, and an honest acknowledgment of how someone can repair harm caused against others. Fundamentally, restorative programs center and focus on healing, prevention, and accountability. Restorative justice programs are not mandated—all participants willingly volunteer to engage in the process.

> ***"[Bringing in children] was important because they felt like they belonged, that they have the right to be there and the right to express themselves."***
>
> *- CHAT circle participant*

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WORKS:

Restorative justice practices for violence prevention and intervention have been validated through rigorous research in multiple countries, and emerging research shows that it works for partner violence too.[8]

Recent evidence shows that RJ practices:

- Often leave survivors feeling **more satisfied** with the process
- Can be **more effective** than punitive approaches like Batterer Intervention Programs (BIPs)
- Consider a **whole-family** approach to healing

» Circles of Peace is a domestic violence treatment program in Arizona operating since 2004. Mills, et al (2012)[9] studied how this program compared to traditional BIPs by employing a randomized controlled trial. While the number of initial participants was small, the authors saw a decrease in recidivism for the RJ participants, and stated that the evidence shows that BIPs were not more effective than these healing-centered approaches.

» RESTORE in Pima County, Arizona works on cases of sexual assault referred by probation courts. Koss (2013)[10] performed a rigorous, peer-reviewed outcome evaluation of the program and found that the program created safety for victims and saw no increases in reporting of negative symptoms like PTSD. Likewise, 90% of victims who attended the program reported feeling satisfied that 'justice was done' and 95% recommend the program to others.

» Mills (2019) compared the efficacy of a traditional BIP in Salt Lake City, Utah with a hybrid program that included restorative justice practices. While the program was not a full RJ model, the research showed that the hybrid using healing-centered practices was more effective in reducing harm and preventing future incidences of violence.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY'S CHAT PROJECT:

Community-based organizations in Contra Costa County have come together to create the **'Collective Healing and Transformation'** (CHAT) project—a community-based, voluntary program for addressing and interrupting intimate partner violence, family conflict, and sexual violence through restorative practices.

Key elements of CHAT:

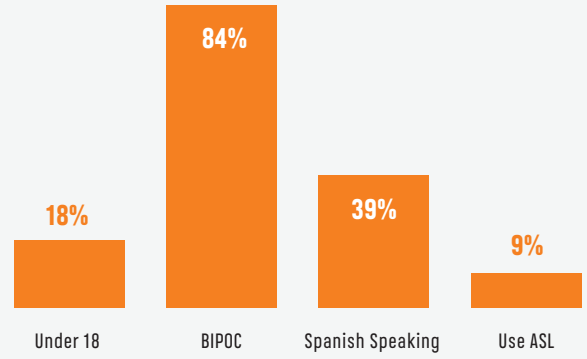
- Voluntary and confidential participation
- Non-law enforcement
- Collective process including family members, children, and friends

The program offers community members effective and safe means of addressing and preventing violence. Data shows that almost all (92%) people participating in the project's evaluation found the process to be 'helpful' or 'very helpful.' And for those who went into circle, 94% said they felt the circle was meaningful. 86% of participants responding to the evaluation said they felt there had been resolution to a conflict or harm. A majority of CHAT participants identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC); about four-in-ten speak Spanish; and one-in-ten use American Sign Language (ASL).

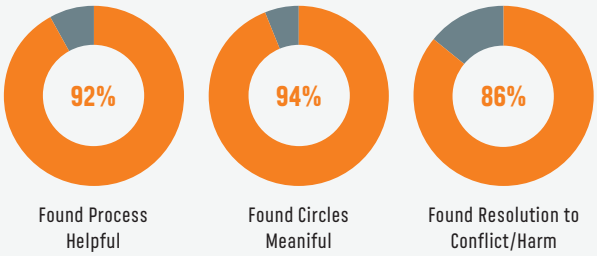
Through safe facilitation by RJ practitioners, CHAT provides the opportunity for restorative dialogue between survivors of violence, community allies, and the person who caused that harm.

> *"We had tried to have conversations in the past with my family, but it just never worked out. [During the circle], everyone took a second to breathe...i feel like everybody still said what they needed to say, but wasn't disrespectful in any way."*
>
> *- CHAT circle participant*

Key statistics from the CHAT Pilot Project:[11]



Participant demographics



Programmatic Feedback

Notes and Sources:

1 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. 2 California Department of Justice data accessed through the OpenJustice data portal. 3 BlueShield of California Foundation Survey. Bay area results include responses from Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano counties. 4 TK Logan, The National Domestic Violence Hotline. "Who will help me? Domestic Violence Survivors Speak Out About Law Enforcement Responses." 5 Sherman & Harris, 2014. "Increased death rates of domestic violence victims from arresting vs. warning suspects in the Milwaukee Domestic Violence Experiment." Journal of Experimental Criminology. 6 BlueShield of California Foundation Survey. Includes responses for people who "strongly support" and "somewhat support." 7 National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH) data are for phone calls made to the hotline; only includes calls where the caller identified their city within Contra Costa County. STAND! data are calls made to STAND! For Families Free of Violence's 24-hour crisis hotline. These calls represent events, and not single individuals. Reports to police data are calls for assistance made to local law enforcement agencies within the county as reported to the California Department of Justice under the Domestic Violence Related Calls for Service series. Only calls that resulted in a report being written by the responding officer are included in these data. 8 Ptacek, James, 2014. "Evaluation Research on Restorative Justice and Intimate Partner Violence: A Review and Critique." 9 Mills, Barocas, & Ariel, 2012. "The next generation of court-mandated domestic violence treatment: a comparison study of batterer intervention and restorative justice programs." 10 Koss, Mary, 2013. "The RESTORE Program of Restorative Justice for Sex Crimes: Vision, Process and Outcomes." 11 Data for CHAT project participants are from a 2019-2021 evaluation conducted by Dr. Mimi Kim.