

# Restorative and transformative justice system in Seattle

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing July 15, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing* 

Reprinted in today's *Morning Call*. Apropos of Gadfly's train of thought over the last several posts, thanks to Mr. Crownfield.

*from Naomi Ishisaka, "Envision a criminal legal system that doesn't throw people away." Seattle Times, July 13, 2020.*

Our existing system of criminalization and mass incarceration is not working, by any measure.

These poor outcomes are leading more and more people to look at community-based alternatives to the legal system and incarceration, such as restorative and transformative justice.

Restorative and transformative justice practices are not new. Indigenous cultures around the world have practiced some form of restorative justice for millennia, rooted in the belief that no matter what a person may have done, none are disposable. More recently, efforts to extract ourselves from our current failed system of punishment and retribution have led to more interest in how those principles could be more widely implemented.

In a nutshell, restorative justice looks at incidents and harm between people. It asks who was harmed and how to address and rectify the harm and requires participants to take accountability.

Transformative justice seeks accountability but also looks at underlying conditions and social structures that created the conditions for harmful behavior and works to change or transform them to prevent future harm.

How could transformative justice work in practice? Seattle's **Creative Justice** program provides an example.

Creative Justice started in 2015 as an arts-based approach to end youth incarceration and the dramatic racial disproportionality in youth detention. Co-directed by attorney and community organizer Nikkita Oliver and lead engagement artist Aaron Counts, the program uses art as an alternative to incarceration.

Why? Because incarceration doesn't help young people, Counts said, nor does it make communities safer.

With a majority of the city council now pledging to support defunding the Seattle police by 50%, we have an opportunity to invest in different solutions. We can take a transformative approach and tackle some of the root causes of crime, such as generational poverty, housing instability and unequal education, as we overhaul the legal system at the same time. In fact we must, because there is no "them," there is only "us."