

Practitioner Spotlight - John Ducksworth

Veronica Agard: Welcome to the Practitioner Spotlight with Restorative Justice Initiative. In this series, we profile champions and practitioners of restorative justice to learn more about their stories and what sustains them.

I'm your host, Veronica Agard. Communications Associate at RJL.

John Ducksworth was born in Harlem, USA, attending the New York City Public School System. He has acquired an Associate's Degree from Dutchess Community College, a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts from State University of New York, a Master's Degree in Professional Studies from the New York Theological Seminary with a concentration in Counseling, and a Master's Degree in Public Administration from John Jay College of Criminal Justice with a concentration in management and organization. John is a licensed practitioner in restorative justice principles and practices from the International Institute of Restorative Practices, also known as IIRP, as well as trained at the Training Institute for Restorative Justice in Washington, D.C., Community Justice Youth Institute, Chicago, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and the U. S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections in Longmont, Colorado. He has provided leadership to court-based programs, community corrections, probation, and juvenile justice agencies, private corrections corporations, and social service agencies for New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, D. C., and most recently in Connecticut.

Veronica Agard: So thanks again John, for joining us. Just to start, can you tell us how you first got involved or introduced to restorative justice?

John Ducksworth: I got involved or I got introduced to restorative justice in the early 1990s. I saw, I saw a movie dead man walking. Which is about a man on death row, and it's more about a nun on death row who works with prisoners on death row.

Susan Saran stars as the star, and the nun's name is Sister Jean Perjean. I believe that's pronounced Perjean. And at the time, I was a pastor in Philadelphia. And for years, due to my own, due to my own individual journey dating back to the 1970s, I'd always been an advocate for those who were directly involved by the system, and the courts, court system I'm talking about, courts, incarceration, you know correction systems.

So I'd always been an advocate for those who were in those systems. But when I saw the movie, Dead Men Walking, there's a scene in the movie, Where the nun knocks on the door, trying to get petition people in the community to sign a petition for this man that's on death row. She knocks on this one particular door, and it's the father of the girl who was murdered.

John Ducksworth: And so the father says to the nun, I've been a Catholic all my life, and when my daughter was murdered, no one knocked on my door. Would you please leave my house? At that moment, that was an epiphany for me. That if I was going, if I was going to be a person of faith, which I claim to be, that I had to be willing to be argue and advocate on both sides of the table for both the victims and the offender, if the real problem.

What is our court system, our existing court system and our criminal justice system criminal legal system. So that was my first introduction to restorative practices, knowing the fact that it proved a way that I could advocate for both sides of the table. So that, that was my introduction to it as, as a man of faith.

Again, that was my introduction to it.

Veronica Agard: That's beautiful. I'm definitely gonna have to go watch that movie and double check the ok, the, the resource list and see if it's on there somehow, or, you know, if I can finesse it being on there. But can you share a little bit more about your, your background. You just touched on it a bit in terms of being in Philly for a time.

John Ducksworth: Well, when I was 17 years old, I was arrested for a felony. I would end up, I would be sentenced to a minimum of 15 to a maximum life in prison. When I came home 15 years later, I was 33 years old.

At the time I saw the movie. I was in my, I was in my mid-thirties, anyway I got, I finished college while I was behind the wall. I got my first master's degree while I was behind the wall. And then when I came home, I got involved with the Salvation Army. A lot of people don't know the Salvation Army is a church.

It is after three or four years working with the Salvation Army in a lay position, what's called the lay position. I went back to seminary. And became an ordained Salvation Army, Salvation Army officer. I rose to the rank of captain. And then in 2000, after 9 11, I, while I was still a Salvation Army officer, I was sent to 9 11 ground zero.

And I spent about 45 days. Down at ground zero, and it just gave me a particular perspective on life. This was immediately following nine 11, September 11, I think I arrived at ground zero around September 13th or 14th. So this was very early. And then, and that's when, like I said, about 40 days there. And like most people, it had its impact on me. One of the impact that it made, 9 11 made for me, is that no one knows what tomorrow has in store. Let's make clear. On September 11th, all those people in the World Trade Center went to work. Some went to work saying, I have a meeting today I can't miss. I have a deadline today I can't miss.

John Duckworth: I have a date tonight that I can't miss. Whatever it was. All of those people had something planned for that day, and yet, within the blink of an eye, through no fault of their own, it changed or ended. And so it was, it was just so visible to me, you know, I wasn't a kid, I wasn't a teenager, as I said, I was in my early 30s, I'd seen life you know, both inside and outside, but it made me realize just how precious life was. We got one shot at this. And I wanted to make sure and one of the things I wanted for myself at that time. And so once I left ministry full-time. Now, even in ministry, I did restorative justice work or really at that point. I didn't I was learning about restorative justice. I was still a Salvation Army officer and I went to my first formal training, which was in Colorado. At the National Institute of Corrections and I did a 10-day training there about restorative practices. And I was the only person in that training of about 35 people who was of color and who didn't work in law enforcement. What, what you might not know about restorative justice in this country. So Howard Zehr writes the book *Changing Lenses* in the early 1990s, 92, 93. And it's addressed, it addresses our judicial system, so the people who pick it up is law enforcement, judicial and law enforcement.

They're the first persons to look at this up close. That's why the National Institute of Corrections, which is a training academy for law enforcement, even to this day. So they looked at, they're looking at it, you know, they're critiquing it, some of them are drinking the Kool Aid. But within a year or two, law enforcement rejects restorative practices because law enforcement as an institution, as an industry, and I don't mean that in a bad way, but as a profession felt that you commit a crime and you say, I'm sorry. And then you go on about your way. That's unacceptable to us. We are a country of punishment. You know, we are, we still are a country of mass incarceration and all of these things.

So restorative practices didn't catch on within law enforcement. So they pushed it aside. However, within a very short, unrelated what we were finding, we were failing in our school systems. And zero tolerance and pipeline to prisons and also suspension rates were off the charts. So educators knew they needed to find something. So they began to look, they took a turn at restorative practices and that's when it begins to jump off. And that's why even to this day, it is so prominent within school systems. They, oh yeah, school systems invited in courts. And then about 10 years later, the courts, because of mass incarceration, because of the cost of the economy, of incarcerating people, because of advocacy, for a host of reasons, criminal justice system said, now we got to look at this again.

Maybe we should look at this again. That puts us into, you know, 2005, 2006, somewhere in, in that timeframe. Throughout all of that, those, and from the 1990s, I'm going to trainings all around the country. I'm going to Min Minneapolis, sitting down with Kay Pranis. I'm going to Minnesota with Howard Zehr and Mark Umbright, you know, these are all, you know, like what do you call it? Of restorative justice here in the United States, you know, mountain Mount Rushmore. That's what I'm thinking about. These are Mount Rushmore folks here in the United States. And I'm going, I'm

actually in Mark's house where he's doing a training one weekend, you know, So I'm just spending time.

John Ducksworth: And the truth about it is, in those sessions, they're not talking about circles, how to conduct the circles. You know they're talking about how restorative practices and, and how the idea of healing and how the idea of justice is so prominent. And that's what makes this tool work. It's not until a little bit later that we really begin to see what people confuse or begin to think that restorative justice is simply doing circles.

With the truth of the matter, it's not. There's so much more. Now, the methodology of restorative practices is often facilitated in circles, but, and I get that, but that's not, if you do circles, that's, that's not necessarily doing restorative practices. So so again, so I spent maybe the first 10 years not even being in any forums about restorative practices, but just learning about it, getting more, you know, more and more. And then I try to find ways over that course of that time, you know, I find ways to bring it within my faith community. Again, I'm still an active member. I'm not a pastor. I don't pastor a congregation.

But I'm often asked to preach in different congregations. The worship at the Salvation Army that is a pastor or just, you know, a soldier in the church. And so I wanted to bring restorative practices. I wanted to, to experience it and find a place for it in the faith community.

I've been very active in that. To date, I have facilitated circles. In major Catholic congregations, one being Holy Trinity, which is right across the street from Georgetown University. I've done it in numerous Protestant churches. I've done a few at the Salvation Army. I've done it. I spent a couple of years working in the Jewish synagogue.

So I've done circles there. So I've been able to find ways to make it happen in the faith community. Right now, my nine to five I work for a law firm in Connecticut and I coordinate restorative practices. Within their network. I can send you a link to the law firm that I work to so you can get to see it really talks about the work that they do.

Veronica Agard: Yeah, that would be really great. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that looks like, like supporting restorative initiatives or works within the legal practice? I think that's something that folks talk about when they're talking about imagining different ways of, you know, and different forms of justice.

John Ducksworth: The name of the law firm that I work for is the Center for Children's Advocacy. They don't handle legal cases. The criminal cases. Let me say that. No, it's better. They do handle the legal cases. They don't handle the criminal

cases. That youth find themselves in in Connecticut, but what they do as a law firm, and it's about maybe 10,15 lawyers, and you'll be able to see that from, the clip I'm going to send you they deal with where kids are discriminated against and when in cases where kids are violated, meaning let's take a case in point where kids who are homeless can't get medical care because they don't have insurance. You know, that's something that the law firm would pick up.

John Ducksworth: If a kid is suspended from school And can't get back into school, they would pick that up where their rights are being violated, where their rights is, you know, if they're a migrant and their rights are violated, getting medical care, getting into schools, getting housing, a host of different things. Again, that's what, that's what this team of lawyers do. And they've been doing it now for about 25 years. And as I'm, I'm glad to be, I'm one of the newer members to the team. Just started in December of last year, but I, I feel excited about it. Now, what last year did the firm made, the agency made a decision to work with youth while they're still incarcerated or while they were in group homes. So, what I do... Is between the Department of Corrections, the DCF, which is similar to ACS here in New York State. DCF is the Department of Children and Families, and CSSD, which is the Center For support court services and support division of the court system, which is equivalent. Department of Probation here in New York City. Okay, we teach their staff how to do how to do circles how to see restorative practices. We try we're at a place now where we're looking at. I've been able to advance the idea that each of those agencies can take. One site under their jurisdiction and try to convert it into a restorative environment.

That means one group home could be completely restorative. One cell block in one of the juvenile detention centers in the state of Connecticut would be restorative. That those are some of the things that I do. I mean, I work with the staff both the clinical and the direct service staff in all three of those agencies to help them get to a restorative set of lenses. And the other thing that we do along with teaching is we monitor them. Okay, so we monitor them. We coach them. I say we, it's the agency, but I'm the only one doing it, but that's okay. But I mean, I'm very comfortable saying we as an agency. So we monitor them. We coach them. We're trying to help them reimage their policies to put them to use restorative languages and maintain restorative practices, you know, so that's now having said all of that, if we go back five years I don't know if you ever sort of the movie burning bridges in Bucks County it's, it's right on YouTube and it's about six kids who in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, burned down a bridge and Yeah. It's in a white neighborhood and all defendants are white. And in this 30 minute clip, you can look at it right on YouTube, called Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Burning, Burning Bridges, Bucks County. That's the name of it. And outside of the circle, you can see a couple of people sitting way in the back. Those are actually their lawyers.

Because in 2004, lawyers were not in favor of their clients. Participate in the restorative circles because the fear was if a client said something about another

case. That could be used against them, they would, that was a fear like you take in many cases, a client could be, you know, on, on, on drugs or selling drugs to one person, and they may say something well I sold drugs on another time.

John Ducksworth: Oh, the VA can pick that up. And now I got, you know, so lawyers, in terms of the spirit of protecting the client. I think we're slowly moving beyond that several states. Are now, you know, putting out legislation that no matter what you say in a circle, you can't discriminate. You can't discriminate yourself. You can't not discriminate. You can't incriminate yourself. But all states have not done that. I don't New York State has not done that. Illinois has probably been the most progressive state in terms of that. The other part that I'll share with you, there are restorative, there is a law firm, the specific state escapes me. I think it's more out in the Midwest, if I'm not mistaken. But there's a law firm that they do restorative practices and they focus on victims. Their, their concern is, their, their primary focus, I should say it that way, are the victims of crimes. And trying to find them healing, trying to find them justice, advocating for them.

So, you have that dynamic. And if you take even a, even if you look at restorative practices, even Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis, or, you know, this, these here. You know, Mount Rushmore people of restorative practices. Restorative practice is about finding healing for the victim as well. Now, we who are people of color, we have a tendency to focus on those of us who have done harm.

And that's not outside the realm of restorative practices. However, it is the very essence of restorative practices impact, you know, what the victim, what are the victims right? What do the victims need? Now, when I'm teaching circles, particularly the people in law enforcement and people in the social justice, and, you know, here again, I say, well, restorative practices is about finding healing for both the stakeholder, all three stakeholders, the community, the person who was harmed, and the person who done the harm.

And for people who work, again, who do this work in social services, I always say to them, you have to be mindful that you're working with the person who has victimized, but you're also working with 99% of your victims, particularly juveniles, have been victimized long before they get to you. So you have to work with on both sides of the equation, you know people who heard hurt, you know, you know, that's, we, we, we, we, we've accepted that as a scientific universal principle, people who heard hurt.

Okay. So the people that you're dealing with in these institutions have heard, and they've been hurt. How do you, who are you talking to when you talk to them? Are you talking to the one who was hurt or you're talking to the one who did the hurt? You have to be mindful you're talking to both simultaneously.

Veronica Agard: Yeah, it's really important that we, you know, continue to address the whole person, right? Because we don't, you know, we don't show up in this world like in pieces or in parts, right? Like we, no matter what works we do, we gotta find ways to address the fullness or the whole humanity of a person. So I appreciate that part.

What additional resources or supports do you think would be helpful in these types of fields in this type of work? Like, what would it look like for restorative justice to be fully funded? Like how, what kind of world would you imagine that to be?

John Ducksworth: I, I don't, I don't know how to answer that. And right now I've just started a book this morning, I just reached out for a book this morning that, that I think it's called Inheritance, I'll have to, let me look it up. And what it does, it speaks to South Africa 10 years later. And it talks about how the people, the inheritors, that's it and what I, the, what I'm going to, what I anticipate in the book is finding that it's very critical of restorative practices because when, when researchers went back into South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of 1994, 1997 to 1997, because whites Africans did not take responsibility for the harm that they have done. There was no accountability. The country is worse off. Even, I haven't read it yet, but again, I just got this morning, I had breakfast this morning with one of the people who reviewed the book. Because they were not held accountable, they like are off the charts. And because, in terms of their mental health, in terms of their, you know, they didn't. They off the chart, "I got away with it." And think about things that you or I may have done and go back over your life. And I got away with that. And if you weren't, if there's not a level, of humanity in you and you got away with it, what, what do you do? It again? You, you, you, you know, it, it only feeds the beast, you know?

It only feeds the demon in us. And that's what the researchers are finding in South Africa. On the flip side, you know, South Africans, you know, we've been duped, you know, we were told that this restorative practice would make us better. No, hell no. And then you look 20 years later in Colombia when this civil war ended. And they wanted to use restorative practices. They took a different stance. Their stance, if you're familiar with it, you may know that if one of the rebels come forward, they won't do more than seven years in prison.

But if you don't come forward, you won't do less than 20. That, that's a completely different, you know, sometimes we forget even using restorative practices. The penitentiary is an option. Restorative practice is not it. It's not posing. It does not say we don't close on all the prison. It's not, we don't send absolution, right? No, it's not. You know, it's not. No, we, we, it says we can reduce. Who goes to prison, we, we can reduce and we can look at all the alternatives, you know, we can use other entities, but it's not saying no one goes to jail. And when you look at what was decided in Colombia versus what was decided in South Africa, it's a totally different spin.

John Duckworth: You know so I, again, I, I just, and that's why I, I just believe there's so much more to restorative practices than doing circles, you know? Right. Like, sure. I, I can do circles. I,, I encourage people to get the book circle forward in a host of other resources, but it's really having a mindset, looking at policy. You know, I, I don't know what, what a world would look like. I don't have the capacity to imagine. Even the United States switching its criminal justice system to be all restorative. I, I, I can't see that. I, I don't have the mind just, just can't see that. I mean, like, I listened to, I was in a workshop about maybe two years ago, and the facilitator said, imagine America without prisons if we just closed all our prison doors.

Well, this may sound strange coming from me, I don't know if you've, I've never seen this movie, but I know what the movie is about. Purge. Are you familiar with the movie Purge, where it's, it's about one night where there's no law and order? Where there's no law, yeah. Okay, that's what I see. Okay, and that frightens me.

Okay, that frightens me. So, I, I can't imagine a world, and, and, you know, forgive me, I just don't have that creative energy to, to see that far.

Veronica Agard: No worries. I think that that's a part of, you know. All of the all of the things that you touched on, right, like thinking about restorative practices and new or, you know, what might be novel approaches, which is really just looking back at other things that have occurred in both local history and world history that may be, you know, restorative practices by another name, right, especially when it comes to the truth and reconciliation, Works in not only South Africa, not only Colombia but when you were talking reminded me some of the goals of what they wanted after the civil war in Guatemala. I studied abroad there in college. So I was like, yeah, I would probably like that book too. Right. And have that similar. Assumption, right, that if not everybody participated fully, right, both the perpetrators and those who were harmed, then there's not there's not a way forward in a way that doesn't just repeat the same power dynamic or just does, you know, exactly like you said about South Africa.

It just, it's acerbated. An already big problem, right? That and understanding that, as you said, it's hard for us to imagine, you know, things outside of what already exists because not only have we not seen it, but we, you know, it might not be what we almost want it to be or aspire for it to be. But I think that's also because we have our, this is my personal belief because we here and also just in the sense of capitalism and all the things in which white supremacy operates, it's hard for us to imagine things that are outside of the norm, right?

Just because we're so used to like, okay, I got to do a, b and c by this time of day in order for me to make this amount of money to afford this house. Like we're so. Boggled down by the things, right?

John Ducksworth: So to pivot I -

Veronica Agard: Hmm, go ahead, ahead.

John Ducksworth: I was, what I was gonna say briefly say I teach a course. I teach for seminaries two one college. And one seminary. And so sometimes I teach courses around faith, obviously. In one of the courses I teach I'm I use a point of view uplifted by Elizabeth Jerome, who's a professor at Harvard Divinity School, which he says we can only see from where we stand. And I think that's a universal principle. I can only see from where I stand, and I look at, I think that applies to you, I cannot see the world, I have two daughters, I still cannot see the world through the perspective of a black female in America. I can't see that. Now I can see it better today than I can the day before my daughters were born, that I can see that, I see it clearer.

Veronica Agard: I completely understand that. Can you share a success story with us when it comes to how restorative justice and restorative practices appear in your work?

John Ducksworth: work? Success stories. I'm not sure this congregation would want their name mentioned. But I'm going to say it here, but I have second thoughts about mentioning their names on the sake of confidentiality, but that being said, you know, anonymous congregation, they had a church function. And it was Catholic and they, they served alcohol and at the end of the church function, you know, they expected everyone to drink reasonable, drink responsibly. At the end of the function this one member who happened to be the church secretary and she went to a car and was pulling out of the garage, still in the parking lot.

And she hit another car, another member in the congregation and killed two children in the parking lot, without a doubt. Now that split the congregation because there's half the congregation was on the side of the person who did the harm. The other half was on the side of the one who was harmed. The woman who did the harm, she was drinking, so she went to prison.

When she comes home five years later, the congregation is still split. Some people don't want her in the congregation. Some people feel that she should be let back in the congregation. So, what we did, we, they brought me in, and I facilitated, I think, about eight circles. Restorative service. First, we started out with those who didn't want, and then we went, we did circles with those who were willing to bring a man.

And then we did circles with both. And then we got to a space where they would let her back in the congregation. She could never work in that we couldn't, she couldn't become an employee of the church. But as she was before, but she could definitely be a congregant in the church. I consider that a win.

Veronica Agard: That's definitely a win because it, there were multiple steps to that process. And also in and of itself, it was a process. It wasn't just and I don't think we without trying to hold the complexity of the harm that had happened but also still acknowledging the humanity of everybody involved. Thanks for sharing that. What advice would you give to anybody who's looking to get into restorative justice? Somebody who wants to learn how to hold circles, how to bring it into their workspaces, what advice would you give them?

John Ducksworth: Learn the practices and principles. Don't make the mistake of believing that restorative justice is solely about circle keeping. Okay. Restorative practices is about healing harm, healing the hurt from when harm has been committed. So one, I would say, begin to realize if you want to get into this work, recognize that it's not about circles.

Okay, there, there are a host of other variables, you know, we in this country, and this is again digressing, we in this country, we see restorative justice as when we work with youth in schools who are troubled when we work with troubled adults, maybe we can turn them around. Again, as you mentioned that the other parts of the world, they see restorative practices as part of the national discussion. You know, we don't see restorative practices in D.C. We don't see it on the left-hand and the right-hand side of the aisle. We never get into discussions. You know, only recently are we beginning to get into discussions around restorative practices in the. Public forum, you know, but we definitely I'm not aware of any places where we see it in our political processes. And I think other countries are ahead of us in that regard. We still see it at the national level anyway. Yeah, we still see it. I think Chicago, no, not Chicago, Detroit.

Veronica Agard: Yeah we might see it in local levels, but we, we rarely see national. I, I don't know anything national level other than like NACRJ or like those kind of conferences, but they're not in the, but those are still base.

John Ducksworth: That's right. Those, those are still people like you and I, nonprofit citizens who are ab, they're advocates at best that, that their advocate, they're not part of the system. You know, they're not part of the Republican Party, the Democrats, they're not part of our system of government. You know, there's no agency on the national level says, okay, let's use restorative practices and how we do food and agriculture, how we do our economy and all of these kind of things. So we don't see that here in this country. We, you know, we see it so.

Being done, it's, it's within not meeting schools, blacked out. So I would tell them to look at circles beyond the only thing that restorative practices is practice what you preach, you know as a restorative practitioner. I don't conduct circles in my house as much as I would like to, and that's only because my wife and kids say, don't bring your work home you know, we're not one of your clients. But, I also know that.

John Ducksworth: Talking to one another, usually in, if not in a circle with a talking piece, at least in a circle setting and just my demeanor towards it and all of that as recent as just yesterday when a 13-year-old, I was able to bring what I know about circle keeping to that conversation. And that conversation was so life-giving do we use a talking piece? No, but again, just, so those are the things that I would tell people, you know, find ways in your personal life to use the principles, learn about what restorative practices are. My PhD, my doctoral degree dissertation is about restorative justice in the faith community. You know, I, I train people to about about circle keeping. And it's not my primary source of income, obviously, but it is definitely a supplement source of income that, you know, I'm comfortable where it is. If I, if I got on YouTube, not YouTube, but if I got on LinkedIn and did, if I marketed myself more, I could probably triple my income from it, but I'm not trying to do that. So I'm comfortable with what I generate from it but those are things that I would say.

Veronica Agard: That's great. What would you like people to know who may not be believers in restorative justice or restorative practices, or they might be critical? Or like it goes back to what you said earlier to the folks is just think that restorative justice is just circles or that "circles don't work."

John Ducksworth: I, I went to the biggest, let me answer it. I'm trying to answer it this way. One, the biggest criticisms of restorative practices, some of the biggest criticism. One, it takes, it takes time. Okay, and my argument, my answer to that is yes. Restorative justice, if you take, I think it was John Bale, who used to be president of IIRP, he has referred to restorative practices as the science of relationships, of healthy relationships. Okay, fine. Restorative practices take time. And I say this, and I say this when I teach, restorative practices is not a one-night stand. Restorative justice is a relationship. And if you think about any intimate relationship you've ever had, it took time. Okay, it took work. Restorative justice is that it's building a relationship.

Not a one-night stand. Okay. I would like to come up with a better analogy, but I can never see when that really fits, you know I mean, it gets to the core. I believe so. But anyway, that being said, the other thing that comes to mind. But in terms of critics, I think many critics criticize restorative practices without understanding the depth of restorative practices. So for instance, like even in South Africa, the illustration, restorative practices, teachers maintain establishes your accountability. You got to be accountable. You got to be accountable and it has to be voluntary. It doesn't fit. In every circumstance, unless a person is willing is there voluntarily. This is not the tool to use. Go pick something else. You know, it's it's not, you know, one glove fits all. It's not that with Johnny. Put the glove and it fits. It's yours. This is not that you know, you have to want to want to participate in this process. You know, so and I also say that what makes something restorative is not the outcome, but the process. You have gotten the, it's the process that's restorative, not the outcome. And we'll often think about what's the outcome. We think about it in our judicial system.

John Ducksworth: What was the rule? What law was broken? Who broke it? And what's the punishment? All of that is outcome-focused, not the process. You know, so those are the kind of things that, that, that I, I would uplift. You know, it's, it's, it's not, it doesn't apply in every situation, you know, and, and, and we try to make it one of the things that, you know, I, I tell people I work with in Connecticut, no, every youth that comes in those institutions doesn't want to go through a restorative process.

So, if you bring it in as a program and say that everyone has to be in the program, you're starting at a disadvantage, you know, and, and, and I use simple things, let's take a circle with a talking piece. In institutions, when youth, even adults, it applies, when they come to these programs, and you're sitting in a circle, and the circle keeper or the facilitator asks a question, they expect a response from everyone there, because that's what they're, that's what they're evaluating, that's what they're processing.

Are you reformed because you were able to answer this question? Are you, are you, are you getting the idea? Are you becoming a better person because you're participating in my group? Well, in a restorative process, passing is legitimate. Passing is part of the process. And so, you know, I've done circles inside the facility and say one or two staff persons were sitting there because they felt they needed to sit there for security reasons. You know, and then a kid didn't want to say something. Staff, I'm the circle keeper or someone else's. And here comes a staff from the other side of the room. The circle. Oh, you got to say something. What do you think? You got to have some thoughts. No, it's his right or her right to pass. So I would, that comes to mind. You know, it's not for everybody. It doesn't fit every situation. So don't, don't try to sell it. Don't market it that way.

Veronica Agard: I'm trying to think, what's the last thing I wanted to ask? What sustains you or keeps you going as you do this work? Cause you're right, it, as you talk about restorative processes, especially in how like people have to be in it to win it. They have to consent to it. They have to want to be there. That's a lot of work. So what do you do to take care of yourself?

John Ducksworth: I have a faith conviction. And I'm active in my faith. So, I don't use restorative practices to keep me going. I use my faith to keep me going. You know, I use my faith to take me through the dark times. You know, now look, I'm not a Jesus freak. I'm not walking the water. You know, I'm not, that's not what I'm implying. But when I look at, my journey, my life, my ups and downs, I lean on my faith. I trust in my faith. My, you know, corny as it may sound, my, so far to this point, my faith sustains me. I know who my creator is. And, you know, I, I would say this from the, from the pulpit. And I'll say it here. You know, I don't expect you to write this, but if Christ couldn't meet me where I was at, then I don't need him.

Veronica Agard: I appreciate you and I appreciate your time.

John Ducksworth: Well, One question I have for you, and I do, I even do this in circles. I even do this in my classes. Whenever I teach the class. What will you take from this conversation?

Veronica Agard: I will take the macro or bigger picture within restorative practices out of here because I know, given the nature of RJ, we're always thinking about, you know, local to New York City practitioners and people that we know, but I really appreciate, you know, bringing South Africa and Colombia and, you know, reminding me of some of my travels. So I'm taking that away from our conversation today.

Veronica Agard: That concludes The Practitioner Spotlight, brought to you by Restorative Justice Initiative. If you enjoyed this conversation and want to see more of it, reach out to us at veronica@restorativejustice.nyc. Again, that's veronica@restorativejustice.nyc. Signing off until next time, take care.