

St. Joseph's Restorative Inquiry September Newsletter



St. Joseph's Orphanage, Circa 1950

Overview:

This is the first of a monthly newsletter from the [St. Joseph's Restorative Inquiry](#) (SJRI). SJRI seeks to understand and document the events of the orphanage through the voices, experiences, and stories of those most impacted (former residents); and then facilitates inclusive processes of accountability, amends-making, learning, and change. Restorative Inquiry staff are committed to facilitate and respond to the stated priorities and requests of the former children of St. Joseph's Orphanage.

The Restorative Inquiry is a project of the [Burlington Community Justice Center](#). The project was launched in May of 2019 with funding and support from the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services and is guided by an Advisory Team comprised of community stakeholders, restorative justice practitioners, and former St. Joseph's Orphanage residents. Project staff began with individual outreach to former residents of the Orphanage. Staff transitioned to group meetings in October of 2019. With the advent of COVID-19 in March, the project moved to weekly online group meetings. Currently, Restorative Inquiry participants meet every Friday from 11:00-1:00.

The weekly meetings allow participants to connect with each other and share perspectives and experiences. Beginning in July, the group decided to alternate between formal and informal weekly meetings. The weekly formal meetings are facilitated by Restorative Inquiry staff and frequently include project questions for the group to consider and decide upon. Group decisions are made by consensus, or when not feasible, through a vote.

Current Initiatives:

In addition to the weekly meetings, the Restorative Inquiry is facilitating a series of initiatives that reflect the expressed interests and requests of the former residents. The following is a summary of current initiatives:

- **Participant-Informed Historical Research Project:** The Restorative Inquiry established a collaboration with Bennington College in the spring of 2020 in order to conduct a participant-informed historical research project. Bennington College students India Carter-Bolick and Gabriela Yadegari initially met with the former residents to explore what Orphanage-related questions that the group wanted answered. India and Gabriela then conducted research into these questions, connecting with a variety of sources (including former residents); compiling documentation; and preparing both interim and final reports. They shared their research with the participants in June and August. A summary of their research will be published on the St. Joseph's Restorative Inquiry [website](#) by the end of this month.
- **Access to Department of Children and Families Family Files:** Several participants of the Restorative Inquiry were placed at the Orphanage by the State of Vermont. These participants requested the opportunity to view all state information (without redaction) related to their time at the St. Joseph's Orphanage. In order to respond to this request, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has collaborated with the Secretary of State's Office to search the state archives for all available files. DCF is committed to facilitating opportunities for the Restorative Inquiry participants to view their family information in group and individual sessions. The Inquiry held the first viewing session in August and future sessions are being planned.
- **Medical Records:** Restorative Inquiry staff are working with UVM Medical Center to provide any available medical records of participants from their time at the Orphanage. UVM Medical Center is currently conducting a search and will send the records upon request.
- **Writer's Group:** In May, a group of Restorative Inquiry participants requested the opportunity to work together in a facilitated writers' workshop. The Restorative Inquiry contracted the services of Carol Adinolfi to coordinate a 10-week writers' group. Six former residents participated in the group and are now preparing to share their work with the select members of the public.
- **Orphanage Memorial:** Participants of the Restorative Inquiry have requested a public memorial to recognize the countless children who passed through and were impacted by the Orphanage. The group recently selected three representatives to a subcommittee to represent their interests in this initiative. In the coming weeks, staff of the Restorative Inquiry will be organizing meetings for the committee and relevant stakeholders.

Upcoming Initiatives:

- **Meeting with Public Policy Makers:** Participants of the Restorative Inquiry have a core request: that no child or vulnerable person ever again experience the harm that they experienced. This fall, the group will meet with a group of Vermont state legislators and other public policy makers to share their experiences, knowledge, and aspirations; and then collaboratively work together to better protect all vulnerable people.
- **Oral History Collaboration with the Vermont Folklife Center:** Later this fall, interested Restorative Inquiry participants will begin recording oral histories of their experiences with the Orphanage. Each participant will decide how and whether their recording is shared with others and potentially, the general public. With participants' permission and guidance, some of the recordings may form part of a multimedia exhibition.

Other Items:

- Maura Labelle is gathering a package of letters from former residents of St. Joseph's Orphanage who want to send a letter to the Pope. If you would like to have a letter included in this packet, you can send it to: Maura Labelle, 31 Eagle Park Drive, Colchester, VT 05446.
- In the next month, we will be posting historical photographs from the Orphanage on our website. If you have photographs from the St. Joseph's Orphanage that you would like to share with Restorative Inquiry participants and/or the general public, please contact Marc Wennberg at marc@communityreentry.net.

How to get involved:

- If you are a former resident of St. Joseph's Orphanage and would like to participate in the restorative inquiry, please contact Marc Wennberg at: marc@communityreentry.net or by calling 802-522-7394.
- If you are a former resident of St. Joseph's Orphanage and in need of support, you can connect with Amy Farr, Victim Advocate at the Vermont Attorney General's Office at amy.farr@vermont.gov or at 802-279-1027.
- All other requests and questions can be directed to Marc Wennberg at: marc@communityreentry.net.