



ESSEX COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER

SERVING NORTHERN CHITTENDEN COUNTY

This story recounts the experience of one Restorative Panel process:

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of the involved parties.

Cindy was referred to the Essex Community Justice Center for a restorative justice process. The local police department made the referral after Cindy was charged in an ATM Fraud incident.

At her intake meeting, Cindy confirmed her involvement and shared that her actions were directly connected to a relapse in her opioid addiction. During a low moment in her relapse, she stole her mother's ATM card and withdrew hundreds of dollars from her mother's bank account without her consent. Fortunately, the bank reimbursed her mom's account right after the fraudulent transaction was noticed so Cindy was now responsible for paying back the bank. With Cindy taking accountability and feeling prepared to repair the harm caused, she was scheduled for a restorative justice panel with four community volunteers.

At the time of her first panel meeting, Cindy was in active recovery and committed to her sobriety. This led to a meaningful discussion with the volunteers around the impact of her actions, how she can prevent situations in the future and what is needed to repair the harm she caused. Cindy was clear that she felt horrible for her actions and shared that her relationship with her mom was in a bad place. She left the meeting with an agreement that included a variety of tasks, including writing a letter to her mother and a payment plan to pay back the bank. The payment plan considered that Cindy wasn't currently working, juggling care for her children and prioritizing her recovery. This led to a very extended payment plan of \$20/month which all agreed was a fit for the situation.

As of June 2023, Cindy continues to make her monthly payments and is well on her way to paying back the full restitution. During a recent email exchange confirming payment, Cindy shared a touching note expressing her gratitude for the panel process and acknowledging how it improved her relationship with her mother:

"Thank you for reaching out. I appreciate your help. We will be much better once I am able to get this paid off. I feel like it's taking me so much longer than I was expecting. I am feeling frustrated with myself about it. Other than that, we are doing well. Life can be chaotic and rough at times. However, I am incredibly grateful for all that I have.

I don't know if you remember my story of why I owe this restitution, but it was one of my many mess ups while I was in active addiction. When I had my meeting with the panel one of the things I was asked to do was write an apology letter to my mother. The panel said that I did not have to give it to my mother, nor read it to the panel. But I chose to do both. And I want to

thank you, and the other members again for asking me to write that letter. Since the letter, my life and relationship with my mother has drastically changed for the better. It was a slow and ongoing process making amends (as it should have been for all that I did while using). It all started with that simple apology that may have never happened had y'all not asked me to. This restitution is a haunting reminder of who I once was. But also a reminder of what I never want to be again, and how far I have come since then. So thank you again. Sincerely. I hope that the center you work for, as well as yourself and the community panel members continue to help change lives as you have mine." - Cindy