



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.

Finn was referred to the Essex Community Justice Center for a restorative justice process. The local police department made the referral after Finn was identified as leaving the scene of an accident.

As soon as Finn's case was received, CJC staff reached out to Finn's mother, since Finn was under age 18, to schedule an intake meeting. Unfortunately, Finn's mother was very hard to reach, and it took multiple attempts to finally have a face-to-face meeting. CJC staff are committed to providing multiple engagement attempts, especially with youth, as it is understood that parents are typically the gatekeepers of communication, schedules, and transportation. In Finn's case, his intake meeting occurred almost three months after the incident occurred. This type of delayed start is an outlier and a reminder that successful interventions can occur even after a slow start.

While one CJC staff member reached out to Finn and his mother, another CJC staff member reached out to Tom, the person who owned the property where the car accident had occurred. During the phone call, Tom shared that a structure on his property had been significantly damaged, and he would need to wait until spring to make the repairs when the ground thawed. Tom also confirmed that he was the one who reported the crash after seeing the damage and that he was relieved that there were no pedestrians near the crash site at the time. He appreciated the CJC reaching out and wanted to be a part of the process for Finn so he could understand what happened and collect restitution for the property damage. Tom was updated on the delayed intake scheduling with Finn and was understanding.

At his intake meeting, Finn confirmed his involvement in leaving the scene and shared that he regretted his decisions from that day. Finn acknowledged that he was driving too fast for the conditions and when the crash happened, he got scared and left without connecting with anyone. Then when he was contacted by the police, he lied about what happened because he was scared to have the police involved. He shared that he wanted to do what was needed to fix things. With Finn taking accountability and feeling prepared to repair the harm caused, he was scheduled for a restorative justice panel with four community volunteers.

At his panel meeting, Finn attended with his mother and Tom attended with his wife. Soon after the volunteers started the process, Tom and Finn were talking directly with each other. This led to a meaningful discussion with the whole group around the impact of Finn's actions, what was

needed to repair the harm he caused and how he can prevent situations in the future. At one point in the conversation, Tom shared how he had navigated a similar situation in his youth and urged Finn to take a different path. He recommended Finn to take steps to surround himself with positive friends and avoid lying, even when things get hard. Tom encouraged Finn to stay focused with school and work and let this incident be a situation that he can overcome and grow from. It was clear that this interaction was meaningful for Finn, and he took the opportunity to apologize directly to Tom in the meeting.

Finn left his first panel meeting with an agreement to pay restitution, write an apology letter to the officer, outline the appropriate steps to take when you are in a car accident and take time to reflect on the type of person he wants to be going forward. After the meeting Tom shared that he was glad that he attended and was happy with the outcome. He said that he appreciated getting to meet Finn, and hopefully help him move forward. Tom's property was repaired, and Finn successfully completed all pieces of his agreement.