



Respect Works Here

Community Champion

Margaret Clark is a truth teller.

"It may be my truth," she says laughing.
"And I am going to tell you the truth."

Being identified as a Community Champion is initially uncomfortable, as she tends to want to highlight the work of others.

"I've been on stages," she quips. "I sometimes prefer to be the stage-hand."

She recognizes the opportunity to share about the work being done through the Restorative Justice Society – North Okanagan and the complexity of issues facing the communities she works in, and so she agrees to share her truth.

Restorative justice is an alternative to the court systems. "We deal with public matters in a private way," explains Margaret. "We involve the people in the process that need to be involved. People get answers to questions they may or may not get through the court process. Like knowing what is and has gone on for all the people involved."

"It's hard to explain to people how it works," she says. "In the circle, there is an openness and vulnerability that cannot be avoided and there a magic moment that is validating that you are doing the right thing, at the right time, with the right people. It is just right."

"Being in a circle, you get a sense of the person who caused harm...you see regret and remorse; and they hear the pain and anguish they have caused others as everyone shares the impact the incident has had on them and their family. And, when that magic moment happens, everyone has a deeper understanding of the full story."

"If you are a person harmed (victim) you want to hear what the person who caused harm (offender) was thinking, doing and wondering at the time of the incident," Margaret continues. "With the full story, the person harmed may experience a sense of safety returned to them."

Restorative justice is about repairing relationships: with yourself, others, family, and the community.

Putting context to situations is a passion that stemmed from Margaret's own childhood.

Margaret grew up not knowing anything of her mother or her heritage, as she was never talked about in the home, even though she lived with her siblings and was raised by her father and grandmother.

When she was about eight, Margaret learned that her mother was Okanagan First Nations and that she had died while Margaret was an infant. "I didn't know what it all meant to me," she says. "When information isn't shared, you learn quickly not to ask about it either."

“People need to talk and talking is healing.”

- Margaret Clark

At fifteen, Margaret really started to question what had happened on the fateful day her mother died. "I have spent most of 45 years trying to piece together what happened on the day my mother died – just that one day."

"My saving grace was meeting Elders when I was 28. Just talking, I had these clarifying moments, helping me to understand who I am and that it wasn't bad to ask questions and that people may get upset by the questions you ask...although people need to talk and talking is healing."

