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**Sense of Community and Restorative Justice as Models of Support:  
Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Males Who Have Offended Sexually**

by

**Chris McEvoy**

**Honors BA Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2008**

**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Department of Psychology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Arts in Community Psychology  
Wilfrid Laurier University**

**2008**

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## Abstract

Sexual abuse is a social phenomenon that adversely affects the lives of the victims, those who have offended and the surrounding community. It is an issue of public health, policy, and justice. Currently, few research studies explore the ability of community agencies to support all persons affected by sexual abuse, and even fewer studies examining the perspectives and experiences of individuals left searching for remediation or healing. The Revive program, part of Community Justice Initiatives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada functions as a mutual-aid support group for persons affected by sexual abuse, using principles of restorative justice to guide their mission. This research gave voice to those who participate in Revive. Two focus groups were conducted, one with women survivors ( $n = 4$ ) of sexual abuse and one with men who had offended sexually ( $n = 9$ ). Findings indicate the powerful capability of a community-based program to heal individuals and relationships, and safely reintegrate both women survivors and males who have offended sexually. Specifically, the findings speak to entrée (hearing about the program, initial perception and experience of the program), processes (how the program supports its members, how members support one another), structures (check-in and check-out processes, administration and staff, not having an agenda for group meetings), and outcomes (restorative justice, goals, needs fulfilment, and overall support that members receive). Similarities and differences between the experiences of women survivors' and men who have offended sexually, in relation to their membership in their Revive groups, are discussed and explored. A theory of sense of community is used to highlight the connectedness amongst group members and the positive outcomes as a result of their membership and participation in Revive. Restorative justice principles are identified as common goals towards which survivors and offenders both strive.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has supported me throughout the conceptualization and development of this project. My most sincere and heart-felt thanks goes out to my advisor and mentor, Dr. Colleen Loomis, who's challenging insight and perspective has guided much of this research. Through her emphasis in turning barriers into opportunities, I have been able to maintain a positive attitude and celebrate the "small wins" throughout this project. It has been a pleasure to have worked with you over the past four years, receiving so much guidance and support along the way; and for that I thank you.

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I would like to recognize and thank all those at Community Justice Initiatives who assisted in the development and implementation of this research project. Jenn and Richard, you are two very wonderful people who were willing to support me and provided invaluable insight and expertise throughout this journey; I thank you very much for the support, guidance, and laughs along the way. A special thanks to the Revive group members who engaged in this research; your commitment to restoration and healing has inspired me.

I would also like to acknowledge the support, encouragement and guidance I have received from my family and friends. Thank you to my mother, Irene, who has been there for me by my side through my development as an individual, as a student, and young professional. A thanks to my father, Terry, with whom I shared insightful conversations and debates that no doubt shaped my thinking and growth as an individual; this ones for you big guy. To those close

to me who have supported me and were willing to put up with me throughout this process, I am forever grateful for your unconditional and continued support.

## Preface

### Personal Interest for Thesis Topic

Community psychology has a number of values, conceptual tools, and settings of focus which guide both the work and practice of the discipline. My specific interest lies in human services and alternative settings, with emphasis on the values of social justice, support for community structures, compassion, and accountability to oppressed groups (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). What is to follow is a brief summary of my introduction to and personal interest in sexual abuse, restorative justice, and support for community structures.

Emphasis upon social justice and community participation were prevalent throughout my childhood; whether it involved school clubs, boy scouts, joining the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers Federation picket line, or work with local food banks. Dinner conversations were discussions pertaining to crime and justice, education, social policy, politics, health care, child rearing, poverty, or other worldly issues. With this background, I am conscious of the lives and well-being of others, with a strong sense of both myself and society at large.

It is these experiences that lead me to pursue a Masters in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in hopes of affecting positive change in people's lives. An opportunity to affect positive change through my schooling came in the form of a practicum placement at Community Justice Initiatives in Kitchener. Through this placement I became involved in the Revive program; a series of mutual-aid groups that provide opportunities for individuals affected by sexual abuse to receive social, emotional, and informational support.

Restorative justice (RJ) emphasizes the need to repair people and relationships in the aftermath of harm. In applying restorative justice to cases of sexual abuse this process involves seeking out and working with others (Yantzi, 1998). Upon entering the Revive a group as a



volunteer-facilitator, I immediately began to notice the usefulness and effectiveness of restorative principles. The group members engaged in processes whereby they were challenging one another's justifications for their actions, recognizing and identifying each others red flags (behaviours, locations, or thought processes which puts the individual at risk of re-offending), and supporting one another as they sought to make changes in their lives.

Productive work on the part of the group members cannot begin until they feel that there is mutual trust within their group (Yantzi, 1998). When individuals are attempting to deal with issues in their lives such as sexual abuse, which are highly personal and confidential in nature, the entry and gaining of trust phases of community entrée are difficult for an outsider. I believe that I overcame these obstacles in entering the group as a facilitator through compassion, active listening, and being genuinely concerned for the group members as they shared their experiences and worked towards healing their lives. This process did not occur immediately; it took considerable effort on both my part and on the part of the group members. When the group concluded in late May of 2007, I felt connected to the group and its members, and rewarded through the conversations and experiences I had shared with them. In volunteering with the Revive program, I had fulfilled one of my main goals for my masters schooling in gaining experience on the front lines of a community organization.

In concluding my first experience within the Revive program, I began to have many questions regarding the group and the experiences of members: What characteristics of the Revive groups work to motivate its members to come every week and share such intimate, personal, and sometimes downright harmful experiences with almost complete strangers? Do the groups work? How does each of the groups function differently depending on the needs and goals of the different members? Are the groups effective in the eyes of their members? How does

the healing cycle for survivors compare and contrast from the remediation cycle of persons who have offended? From these questions, experiences, and from discussions with my classmates and professors, a unique opportunity arose for me to engage in research in the hopes of answering some of these questions. Also, from the outset, a goal of mine was to engage in this research in hopes of promoting restorative justice, tolerance, and furthering the understanding of and acceptance for self-help groups for all persons affected by sexual abuse.

When using qualitative methods, there is often a negotiation process in relation to the researcher being both an insider as well as an outsider to the community or context under study. This positionality is conceived of as the way one's position in the social hierarchy relative to that of other groups which ultimately "limits or broadens" one's perception of others (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p.36). I personally have not been affected by sexual abuse, making me a relative outsider to this community. However, I am a group facilitator for the Revive program and have been working within Community Justice Initiatives for a year now; therefore I have taken on somewhat of an insider's perspective in describing the program and context. Also, I have become an advocate for restorative justice and the Revive program, as I have heard first hand the impact that the program has had upon its members and I have first-hand experience in viewing the group processes. This being said, I realize that I must take on a critical perspective as a participant observer.

Being a participant observer, or an "active-member researcher", entails a number of ethical and practical concerns that I will have to negotiate during the research process (Adler & Adler, 1994). In order to ensure ethical practices throughout my research, I must ensure that participants are aware that I am not representing the agency through this research, and that there will be no repercussions as a result of members' participation, non-participation, or their critique

of the program. To ensure that there are no repercussions to participants, no names will be used, collected, or published, whether they choose to participate or not. Members must feel free to express their true feelings about and experiences within the program. This entails that I as the researcher remain non-colonial; not projecting my own meanings onto the experiences of those observed, and not researching to improve the life for the research participants through having them conform to my conceptions of the program (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). Through this research I acknowledge to myself and others involved in the research process that I am in a powerful and privileged position; while I hope to share the lives and experiences of the participants, I also hope to remain a respectful visitor (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006).

Also, as I am a volunteer within Community Justice Initiatives, I have become engaged in the principles of restorative justice, the organization, and the Revive groups. I therefore have my own preconceptions about how the groups work in empowering individuals to support one another and how restoration occurs through group processes. I must be aware of these preconceptions and possible biases throughout the research process to ensure that they are not represented in the research findings. The present research is rooted in grounded theory and theory application; therefore the data as well as the theory or themes extracted from the data must remain intimately linked. To make certain that the research findings truly speak to the data (the narratives and experiences of the group members) I will attempt to confirm the findings by continuously returning to the raw data and ensuring that the codes and themes found can be supported by quotes and participants' experiences.

With this research I hope to be able to further explore the perspectives and experiences of mutual-aid group members in order to expand the existing literature on sexual abuse. Current literature discussing sexual abuse and programs that support those affected achieves both breadth

and depth; however there currently exists a gap in research examining the effectiveness of community agencies and programs that support all peoples affected by sexual abuse.

I believe that it should be a priority for our society to reintegrate and support persons who have offended sexually and caused serious trauma to others, while keeping the community safe. At the same time I am as supportive of persons who have been unjustly harmed by sexual violence. I feel privileged that I have the opportunity to walk along side these individuals and support them along their journeys.

Finally, an initial word of caution. While I have tried to back up the arguments and analysis in this report with references, and have attempted to present the material as objectively as possible, the issues discussed within this thesis are controversial. I have tried to strike a balance between traditional views and radical views, and between optimistic and critical interpretations, however biases inevitably come through. I hope to have presented a reasonably balanced account of Revive members' experience, though not everyone will agree. This report does after all discuss challenges to the status quo. I welcome further discussion around critiques or criticisms of this report.

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## Introduction and Background

Individuals affected by sexual abuse are often treated or helped in isolation without consideration for the role of social support, community and restorative justice play in healing or remediation; this includes both female survivors of sexual abuse and males who have offended sexually. Not incorporating these factors into treatment models reduces the potential to maximize its positive effects within the individuals as well as to restore healthy community functioning. In the past, individual level approaches such as treatment programs for individuals who have offended while they are incarcerated or community organizations that support survivors of sexual abuse, have been necessary however they are not sufficient. A more recent, yet still uncommon, model of support is restorative justice. The advantages of using a restorative justice approach over traditional methods include developing empathy, social competence, and a sense of community.

Explicit detail and effort paid to issues of language are important when discussing the phenomenon of sexual abuse. Therefore, the following section along with others to follow regarding language, gender and sexual abuse are attempts to ensure that I am not perpetuating the conspiracy of silence that “institutionalizes the invisibility of male agency in violent crimes and eradicated the experiences of women and children who are victimized by heterosexual male violence” (Mitchell, 1992; p.198).

In this research, several terms will be used to identify the phenomenon and populations of interest. “Persons affected by sexual abuse” will refer to those individuals who have offended sexually, in addition to survivors of sexual abuse. The term “offenders” will rarely be used within this research. Instead, I will use the term “persons, people, or individuals who have offended sexually” to reflect the reality that they are people who have made wrong decisions in

their lives, and should not define their identity by their behaviours as an offender. I will be using the term “survivor” or “someone who has survived sexual abuse” to refer to persons who have been sexually abused. I have elected to use this term to describe persons who have been abused as it reflects the empowered determination of victims of sexual abuse as they attempt to repair the harm to which they have been subjected.

Sexual abuse occurs in many forms, within many different relationships, and at varying points in individual’s lives. Much of the research on sexual abuse concerns childhood sexual abuse, and so I will be using the term childhood sexual abuse to reflect such literature. For the scope of the present research, I will not be focusing on one particular type of sexual abuse, as the mutual-aid groups under investigation make no reference to the type of abuse.

I will also be using the phrase “journey of healing or remediation” throughout the document. This phrase refers to the process in which both survivors and persons who have offended sexually engage as they attempt to put their lives back together. For survivors of sexual abuse this journey reflects a need to feel safe again in their community, to have interpersonal and intimate relationships, and to begin to heal themselves from the harm inflicted upon them (Three Paths to Healing, 2002). The journey of remediation for people who have offended sexually often encompasses identification of their “red flags” which work to initiate their offending cycle, effective self-management, and a safe reintegration into their community (Three Paths to Healing, 2002).

Sexual abuse and sexual assault are crimes that dramatically alter the lives of those who live such experiences, either as perpetrators or victims. While both those who have survived sexual abuse and those who commit sexual offences deserve opportunities to receive support and become empowered to make effectual changes in their lives, those who support either population



must become aware of the damage and hurt that those who have offended have inflicted.

These individuals have chosen to violate another in such a way that the survivor of the abuse is often left with guilt, shame, self-blame, and a number of negative psycho-social outcomes which are often life lasting (Cloitre, Cohen, Edelman, & Hand, 2001). Most often, the perpetrators of these acts are men, a trend that will be discussed in detail below. These men's behaviour has taken away the other person's sense of control and sense of self. At no point throughout this thesis research do I intend to minimize the grievous acts these men have wilfully committed or their culpability in doing so; they are ultimately responsible for their actions. I also believe that they are ultimately responsible for their personal changes and life they hope to achieve.

However, I firmly believe that in order for these individuals to change, to better themselves, to make the right decisions in their lives, that they must be given the opportunity to do so and be supported through their reintegration process. In working to remediate individuals who have offended we must encourage them and provide opportunities for them to take responsibility for their actions and the harm caused. At the same time, we must remember that these individuals are human and that they deserve opportunities to turn their lives around. While we must forgive in order to move forward, we must also never forget the potential for future harm.

Women are far more likely to be survivors of sexual abuse than to be perpetrators, making up 80% of the victims in Canada between 1993 and 2002 (Kong, Johnson, Beattie, & Cardillo, 2003). In the same study of Canadian sexual abuse, men make up 29% of child victims, 8% of adult, and 12% of youth victims. In 2002, 97% of the persons accused of sexual offences (including assault, rape, and unwanted touching) were male, with a mean age of 33 (Kong, Johnson, Beattie, & Cardillo, 2003). Therefore we must keep in mind that the topic of sexual abuse and sexual offending takes place within the larger context of gendered violence, in which

the majority of victims are female and the majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are males. That is not to say that females cannot be perpetrators and males cannot be victims; they can, and occasionally they are. However, one must recognize the reality of sexual abuse; males are the majority of those who have offended and the overwhelming majority survivors are females. The present research will therefore be examining women who have survived sexual abuse and males who have offended sexually.

When the research and literature regarding sexual abuse cites that it is currently believed that 1 in 3 females and 1 in 10 males will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Seymour, 1998), it is hard to argue against the notion that sexual abuse is a gendered issue. Our society categorizes and conforms men and women to ascribe to certain characteristics of gender and sexuality that are accepted as normal, natural and just. We are still living in a patriarchal society wherein practice and prescription dictate that men should be powerful, controlling, unemotive, and highly sexualized. Women on the other hand are told (implicitly and sometimes explicitly) that within society, and within the nuclear household that is shaped by and an extension of the patriarchal society, they are to be submissive, reactive, and to yield to male dominance. Sexual abuse (and the gendered nature thereof) is better understood when considering the patriarchal context of our Western society, as men have the dominant gender role. In this way, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation are viewed as ways in which men are obtaining and maintaining control and power over women in society. In order to address and ultimately prevent sexual abuse then, we must work towards understanding and ultimately changing the way in which men hold power and control over women in society.

There are several competing feminist theories that argue the root and purpose of male control within society. Marxist feminism believes that male power exists and is fuelled by the

inequalities and oppressions inherent in our capitalist societal structure (Seymour, 1998).

Radical feminists posit that the social institution of gender and not the economic system is ultimately the source of women's oppression (Seymour, 1998). From these feminist perspectives, the goal of sexual abuse (from an offenders perspective) is to reflect and reproduce the inequalities that are inherent to patriarchy. As well, these perspectives are rooted in the intentionality that males seek reproduce or reaffirm their power and control over women in society; often in its most abhorrent and violent form of sexual abuse.

A competing theory from a non-feminist perspective argues that there is no single explanation or theory of domestic violence or sexual abuse. Instead, theorists who do not subscribe to the feminist perspective believe that the heinousness seen in an offender's behaviour is symptomatic of some early trauma, a misunderstanding or misapplication of the offenders' gender role, or as a yet-unknown mental illness or character/personality disorder (Felson, 2002). Theorists who operate from this perspective still believe that these individuals are responsible for the harm they have created, however, the abhorrent behaviour is thought not to be common to the general population of men and caused by a symptom of some individual dysfunction.

Both perspectives ascribe, to varying degrees, to the notion that the male sex role is socially constructed and reinforced as a contributor to influencing offenders' behaviour. The divergence between these perspectives exists as feminist theorists posit that the male sex role is one of control and privilege to which all men (especially offenders) intentionally strive to maintain (Felson, 2002). The alternative perspective is that male and female roles inherently have both disadvantages and advantages, and that both genders are equally as trapped and limited by these roles.

The divergence in these viewpoints and intentionality are particularly relevant to inform and guide interventions that focus upon changing the cognitions and behaviours of men who offend sexually. If the offender is someone who seeks to preserve the status quo with intention, and thus to gain and reinforce their power and privilege, the treatment ought to focus on controlling him, or matching his displays of power with threats of punishment and attempts to reduce his “advanced” ego and ideations of dominance (Felson, 2002). If, on the other hand, the male who has offended is viewed as acting out of a socially programmed set of behaviours without his recognition of being abusive, or is using behaviours aimed at control and dominance which he feels are socially and culturally acceptable, a treatment program may focus upon challenging notions of male privilege and the male sex role and its destructive impacts upon victims. Using this model, a male who has offended could be taught new skills, which would reinforce the appropriate expression of his feelings, and emotional needs as well as improve communication and conflict reduction techniques. Ultimately, this perspective operates assuming that a male who has offended believes that his behaviour is as devastating and repugnant as it is to the survivor and the rest of society.

I have chosen to highlight these two perspectives on gender and sexual abuse as a central question in sexual abuse research which follows: *Why are men the overwhelming majority of offenders and women the overwhelming majority of survivors?* My standpoint is that society strongly reinforces gender roles which each have their advantages and disadvantages depending upon the context. Males have controlled much of the economic and business world in which competition, control, and power are pervasive values that are celebrated and linked with success and achievement. Females have traditionally been at the centre of the nuclear household and community, in which compassion, cooperation, and open communication were strong values that

were promoted. I am not asserting that I agree with these rigid roles and distinct role separation, I am trying to convey that these gender roles have permeated our society for hundreds of years and have affected our socialization patterns, expectations, and ultimately the phenomenon of sexual abuse. I firmly believe that whatever the model or theory used to explain the pervasiveness of male sexual abuse upon females, none of them makes the violent actions of the offender or painful suffering of the survivor anymore just or tolerable. That being said, I also firmly believe that there must be individual differences within these males who offended that cause them to act out with such heinous and hurtful actions; their cognitions and behaviours cannot be explained by gender roles alone. While I believe in these individual level differences, I also believe that there are a minority of these males who offend sexually who are beyond treatment and should be separated from society in order to protect our communities (Ingersoll & Patton, 1998). I do believe however that the majority of the men who sexually abuse are reachable and can be safely reintegrated back into our communities (Ingersoll & Patton, 1998). This reintegration process should be maintained through community programs that work as communities of support that can assist these individuals to understand themselves and their issues in order to ultimately have them re-evaluate their values, cognitions, and behaviours. The current study was conducted in part to further our understanding in treating and supporting these men who abuse, and the effectiveness of an identified re-integration program. From this understanding, I hope to further promote discussion of sexual abuse and new avenues for treatment, healing, and ultimately prevention.

While there continues to be competing theories and perspectives that attempt to explain the root cause(s) of sexual abuse, there is no debate in the literature as to the devastating and life long affects that sexual abuse survivors endure.

Research examining the affects of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) has consistently found that CSA is linked with poor psychological and behavioural outcomes in adult populations (Peleikis, & Dahl, 2005). While mental and behavioural disorders are not definite or consistent across individuals, research has found a link between childhood abuse and a number of “disorders” (as classified by the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual, 1994) including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse, dissociative disorders, anxiety disorders and personality disorders (Peleikis, & Dahl, 2005). The affect of sexual abuse on an individual causes them to question themselves, their life, their decisions, and ultimately their sense of self. Survivors of sexual abuse lose the perception of control in their lives and often turn to very negative coping mechanisms such as drugs or alcohol to cope. The abuse of power and control that an offender afflicts on their victim causes the victim to internalize the guilt and shame that they feel after being violated. This internalization of guilt and shame is what often leads to the drastic underreporting of such crimes.

Sexual abuse is unfortunately common in our contemporary North American society. Research using the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski 1987; as cited in Kolivas & Gross, 2007) with a nationally representative sample (U.S.) has found that approximately 15.4% of women have experienced a completed rape since the age of 14, and a further 12% reported an attempted rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski 1987; as cited in Kolivas & Gross, 2007). Further, there is a gap between the self-reported prevalence and perpetration rates of sexual violence. Koss and colleagues (1987; as cited in Kolivas & Gross, 2007) in the previously mentioned study found that while 15.4% of college women admitted experiencing an incident of completed rape since the age of 14, only 4.4% of college men admitted to this level of sexual aggression. This research exemplifies the gap between the prevalence rates of females

reported sexual abuse, and the lower perceived perpetration rate of male offending. Both the reluctance of females to share sensitive information and identify as a victim of sexual abuse, and the disinclination of males to identify their behaviours as sexually coercive and aggressive as well as their desire to report socially desirable behaviours, are cited reasons for this incongruence (Kolivas & Gross, 2007).

Even more regrettable is the fact that the abuse is often underreported and not dealt with in such a way that makes our communities safer. In fact, sexual victimization is the most underreported violent crime in the United States (Kolivas & Gross, 2007). In the United States in 1999-2000, only 46% of victims of sexual assault reported the incident to the police (U.S. Department of Justice, Obtained August 8<sup>th</sup> from <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>). Further, of those who reported the assault to police, half received medical treatment, compared to just one fifth of those who indicated that the crime went unreported. Individuals who have offended sexually and are caught will likely face some type of punishment for the hurt and damage they have inflicted. In 2003 in Canada there were a total of 1,722 convicted cases of sexual assault and 887 convicted cases of other sexual offences (Statistics Canada, 2003). Of the total number of convicted cases (2,609), the majority (1,987, 76%) were sentenced to probation and returned to their communities. These statistics inform us that those who offend sexually are often released back into the communities in which they inflicted their harm. Without support or an opportunity to safely challenge their cognitions and behaviours, we are effectively telling these offenders that while they may have issues and challenges that cause them to act out, it is acceptable to release them back into our communities without any support. My personal standpoint is formed by previous research that concludes men who have offended

can change and can be rehabilitated (Ingersoll & Patton, 1990), but I do not believe that it is possible in isolation.

The U.S. Department of Justice reported that in 1994 nearly 60% of the total 234,000 convicted sexual offenders were under conditional supervision in their communities (Bureau of Justice Statistics Criminal Offenders Statistics, 1994). Further, they reported that the likelihood that these individuals would be rearrested for any other offence was 43%, and that 40% of those released who committed another sex crime did so within a year or less of their release from prison (Bureau of Justice Statistics Criminal Offenders Statistics, 1994).

Evidence from the re-offending statistics cited above supports the notion that our practices of incarcerating these individuals and providing little support once they return to our communities are ineffective in creating safe communities. Therefore, both those who offend sexually and individuals who are survivors of sexual abuse reside simultaneously in the same communities, and are in need of assistance and support in their journeys of healing and remediation. Through community agency programming which provides opportunities for social, informational, and behavioural support, we can acknowledge and manage the risk of the individuals who have offended, while assisting survivors in continuing their journeys of healing. However, such types of community programming is scarce and is rarely researched. Consequently, there is limited knowledge about the characteristics of these programs and how they work to facilitate change.

The way in which we view, and ultimately define problems affects how we attempt to study such issues as well as our potential solutions in trying to solve them (O'Neill, 2004). Social problems continue to be viewed as individual differences, which lends itself to social research creating individual-level solutions which promote the status-quo and halt the progress of social change (O'Neill, 2004). The current research context has implemented a holistic community



program whose scope stretches beyond individual aimed solutions to heal “victims” and prevent relapse in “offenders”, by helping to support *all* of those who have been affected with respect and dignity.

Individuals affected by sexual abuse and sexual assault are marginalized and are given few avenues to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Such victims of abuse choose to group together to engage in self-help groups for mutual aid and support when they feel that their needs are not being met by existing social institutions (Katz & Bender, 1976). Because of the stigma and blame associated with sexual assault (both for survivors and for people who have offended), those affected by sexual assault are reluctant to receive treatment or support and are marginalized as a result.

Marginalized or non-dominant communities have been characterized as lacking competence and resiliency, as they cannot provide adequate social and instrumental resources for their members to cope with stress and adversity (Rappaport, 1977; as cited in Sonn & Fisher, 1996). In contrast, research on alternative communities has shown that such settings can act as intervening structures for its members, allowing members to perceive and evaluate themselves on their own terms rather than those set and forced upon by the dominant oppressive group (Sonn & Fisher, 1996). Examples of alternative settings can be found in support groups, community agencies, and online self-help groups. Such an alternative setting for survivors of sexual abuse allows survivors the opportunity to normalize their experiences with others who have gone through similar circumstances, and provides an opportunity for those who have offended to hear empowering stories regarding others’ experiences in turning their lives around. Members of these settings are also afforded chances to evaluate themselves based upon their own standards, and develop a sense of community within an open and accepting environment.

The discipline of Community Psychology is guided by the notion that in order to understand how and why individuals function and behave the way they do, one must inquire about the multiple contexts and social systems that they belong to. There is a strong conviction that people cannot be understood or removed from their context (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). This research is guided by the levels of analysis and values that underpin the discipline; ecological analysis, support for community structures, social justice, caring and compassion, participation, and self-determination (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

The remaining sections of this literature review present a rationale for supporting persons affected by sexual abuse, models of support including restorative justice, group therapy, self-help and mutual-aid, and sense of community, as well as the scope and design of the present research. The subsequent segment outlines separately these rationales of support for survivors as well as persons who have offended. We then move on to examine various models of support in order to explore the processes and outcomes of these models as they relate to both populations.

### Rational for Support

### Impact of Sexual Abuse

For survivors of sexual abuse, their experiences often adversely affect their social, behavioural, and cognitive well-being. In their work with female survivors, Cloitre, Cohen, Edelman, and Hand (2001) discuss the connection between women with a history of familial childhood sexual and/or physical abuse and a poor self-perceived physical well-being and an increased likelihood of medical problems. Social support is often theorized to have positive impacts upon self-efficacy, coping, and the overall well-being of an individual during times of stress and trauma. Lack of social support given to survivors of childhood sexual abuse has shown

to be a predictor of future levels of emotional distress (Hiebert-Murphy, 1998). This past research demonstrates the need for formal and informal social support for survivors of sexual abuse. Olson et al. (2003) found that women participating in the mutual-help residence, Oxford House in the United States, had high perceived sense of community (SOC), including high scores on the subscales which measured the women's perceived reciprocal responsibility, harmony and mission. In fact, this sample of women obtained the highest scores on the SOC measure than any other previous sample; including student groups, church groups, and scout groups (Olsen et al., 2003). One explanation for these women having a significantly high SOC could be that these women shared similar abuse and trauma experiences, which lends to having similar life goals of breaking free of the trauma through healing and helping one another. This research demonstrates that individuals who have who have a history of sexual abuse positively connect with and influence one another, fulfilling one another's needs to attain emotional connections. Formal social support is an essential resource for persons with a history of sexual abuse, and can be found in various mediums such as the previously discussed residences, or in therapy or self-help groups.

Perceived sense of community has been positively associated with resilience and coping with stressful life events (Lev-Wiesel, 2001; Pagona, Fani, & Gregoris, 2006). Comparable to sense of community, sense of coherence (SC) has been used as a measure to determine an individual's ability to use internal resources to manage stressful life events. The construct is thought to have three components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Individuals who have a high sense of coherence have been associated with positive health and it has been found that they experience increased abilities to manage life stressors when compared to individuals with low coherence. (Antonovsky, 1987; as cited in Renck & Rahm, 2005). Renck and Rahm (2005)

found that women who self-selected for a self-help group for persons with a history of sexual abuse scored significantly lower on sense of coherence measures upon entering the group than previous samples (which included cancer patients from the Czech Republic and Israeli adults with cerebral palsy). These findings are not surprising given what was discussed previously regarding the negative psychological and behavioural consequences of sexual abuse. However, the investigation was incomplete as there was no post-group test conducted to determine if the groups had an impact upon the women's sense of coherence.

What remains to be investigated is whether or not the components of SC can be positively influenced and increased through mutual self-help groups for those with a history of sexual abuse. Perceived sense of community has been shown to exist in mutual-help residences for women by means of two important components within the sense of community model: reciprocal responsibility and mission (Olsen et al., 2003). Group members who score highly on the mission and responsibility components can be thought to be working towards common goals through helping one another; influencing and assisting one another in achieving common goals of healing. In relating SOC to sense of coherence, we can theorize that in working towards similar outcomes with individuals who are in similar situations, those in self-help groups will come to comprehend and create meaning out of their experiences. In sharing resources, skills, and experiences with each other, it is hoped that group members will be given the resources and support needed to manage their life experiences.

#### Rationale for Supporting Men Who Have Offended

Sexual offending and sexual abuse are social problems as well as issues of public health (Laws, 1995). Individuals who engage in sexual offences are members of communities who often reside or return to those communities upon completing their required penalty. As stated

earlier, 76% of individuals convicted of a sexually based crime are given probation upon being convicted (Statistics Canada, 2003). As well, surveys from victims indicate higher prevalence and incidence rates than are officially reported, as well as the high levels of sexual victimization that remains hidden (Hood, Shute, Feilzer, & Wilcox, 2002). The financial and human costs of sexual offending to victims, the health and social sectors, and in prosecuting and incarcerating offenders takes its toll on communities and has become a major challenge for social policy and society at large (Brooks-Gordon, Bilby, & Wells, 2006). The result is that there exists the need to recognize the struggles of these individuals who have offended and support them within their community through their processes of remediation and reintegration. The goal in supporting these individuals is to positively reintegrate them back into our communities. A more immediate objective is to protect the community and its members by openly addressing the issue of sexual offending and working towards creating a safer and more connected community.

Those who engage in sexual offending behaviours quite often go through a series of steps and actions, which taken together form a pattern of behaviours often called a *chain* or *cycle*. This series of behaviours is triggered by both internal and external stimuli towards a sexual goal, which once achieved terminates the chain (Maletzky, 1998). The majority of this cycle is spent pursuing non-sexual priorities, a so called “pretend normal” stage. However, once the person who has offended is triggered into entering a sequence of deviant behaviours, the goal then becomes a sexual release or the deviant behaviour itself; the likelihood of sexual offending behaviour is lowest just after this release (Maletzky, 1998).

Supporting these individuals through identifying their “red-flags” (which often trigger the sequence of deviant behaviours) and by deconstructing their justifications while they are in their “pretend normal” stage holds the most promise for safe reintegration. It is during this stage in

which they spend the majority of their time that they can identify their flags, triggers, and justifications for their behaviours. Once they come to recognize their triggers they can then begin to work towards avoiding the triggers altogether to decrease their chances of re-offending. Mutual-aid groups provide a constructive context for these individuals to work with trained facilitators as well as one another on their issues surrounding their offences.

The Sex Offender Need Assessment Rating (SONAR) developed by Hanson & Harris (2000) is a measure which works to assess the change in risk among sexual offenders. The SONAR scale items are divided into five stable factors (negative social influences, intimacy deficits, tolerant attitudes of sexual offending, sexual self-regulation, and self-regulation) and four acute factors (substance abuse, negative mood, anger, victim access). This scale can assess the risk factors of persons who have offended sexually, with its ability to discern recidivists from non-recidivists coupled with its correlation with other static measures of risk factors (Hanson & Harris, 2001). In a meta-analysis of recidivism studies, Hanson & Morton-Bourgon (2005) identified that some of the variables commonly dealt with in treatment programs (e.g., psychological distress, stated motivation for treatment, and victim empathy) had little or no relationship with recidivism. The authors found that other variables, such as intimacy deficits, anti-social orientation, problems with self-regulation, and a history of rule violation were associated with recidivism rates (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). These dynamic factors identified as predictors of recidivism are ideal ones to be dealt with in mutual-aid groups. The social support and affirmative peer influence found in mutual-aid therapy groups has the potential to be used to effectively help these individuals make positive choices in their lives and to empower them in turning their lives around.

## Restorative Justice Principles and Model

Our North American contemporary societal views of criminal behaviour depict crime as a violation against the state, where those who have offended must contend with the criminal justice system. This system seeks retribution from the perpetrator in various forms of punishment; often times removed from society. In the way that the justice system encourages the accused to plead not guilty and to try to strike plea-agreements, it encourages people who have offended to not take responsibility for their actions. The contemporary justice process excludes both the victim and community affected by the offence. By removing the justice process from the affected community, the region is left without the tools to repair the damage caused by the crime.

Restorative justice is an alternative model of viewing crime which seeks to empower communities to react to crime and crisis in ways which involve the community, the victim, and the person who has offended to resolve the conflict and repair the harm.

This philosophy of viewing crime and harm as a violation of people and their relationships is a holistic process that addresses the harm done, as well as the repercussions on the individuals and community. Restorative Justice also integrates the obligations of the offender, the victim(s) and the greater community in the process towards healing. This alternative model recognizes the wrong doings and after effects of crime and harm, and appreciates that there are both subsequent dangers and opportunities for growth stemming from these types of crimes. The dangers as a result of harm are felt by the victim and the greater community, in the forms of distrust of the community and its members, feeling disrespected or disempowered, feeling unsafe in one's community, and the feeling of a less cooperative society (Classen, 1996). Another danger that presents itself to the community can be found in the reintegration of individuals who have offended without adequate support and the recognition that they are in need of help. Without

recognizing that these individuals are in need of support in order to safely reintegrate themselves, the community to which they return is left with little resources to adequately cope with the potential risk that these individuals present.

The opportunity that restorative justice provides lies in involving those affected in community and relationship repair, restoring equity, and to make the situation as right as possible. This model recognizes that needs are created in the aftermath of harm: the need to repair the damage and harm done (both to the individuals and their relationships), and the need to identify and resolve the underlying need which led to the offence (e.g. lack of social support or resources, addiction, and an ethical or moral base) (Classen, 1996). Restorative justice is most successful when those who are most affected by the harm are thoroughly involved in, and direct, the healing processes (Hudson, 2002).

Much of the impetus in using restorative justice in situations of violence and harm, namely sexual abuse, generally stems from the failings and inadequacies of the formal court justice system (Hudson, 2002). The court system falls short of providing justice in gendered violence and sexual abuse cases in our criminal justice system through low prosecution and conviction rates, coupled with the survivors' experience of being re-victimized through the proceeding. Additionally, survivors are often apprehensive about the possible consequences of prosecution; if the offender is acquitted or not given a custodial sentence there is fear of more violence and harm; if the person who has offended is found guilty and incarcerated the cost is felt in terms of a family break-up or further dysfunction in addition to the financial and emotional consequences that follow court proceedings and prosecution (Hudson, 2002).

Advocates of restorative justice advocate for an alternative reactionary system to sexually based crime primarily on the basis of the perceived failings of the court system and the need for



an alternative arrangement to compliment the legal system in reacting to the courts failures.

There are a number of cited advantages when working to repair harm and creating safer communities using restorative justice principles. The opportunity for victim empowerment is a central component and by-product of restorative justice's principles and proceedings. The survivor is not only afforded an opportunity to openly share their story and experience, they have control of the process, allowing them the opportunity to take charge of their life, goals, and their path from a victim to a survivor. Sharing the experience, a survivor is vindicated and validated; more likely to reject the notion of blame. This avoids the problem of the victim feeling as if they were on trial. At the heart of restorative justice is the notion that those involved should be at the centre of the decision making and goal setting processes. Survivors of sexual abuse who engage in RJ are encouraged to make decisions for themselves towards healing while they are supported throughout their journey.

The primary goals of restorative justice are to enhance individuals' ability to repair the harm and damage done from sexual abuse and to empower communities to recognize the potential risk of those who have offended. Community Justice Initiatives accomplishes these goals through community awareness campaigns that stress the impact, as well as the potential for community healing, in the aftermath of sexual abuse. As well, restorative justice seeks to work in partnership with these individuals in order to create safer more resilient communities.

Community Justice Initiatives strives to mobilize community discussion around the topic of sexual abuse, in the hopes that more survivors will break their silence and begin to work to heal, and in the hopes that men who have offended will take responsibility for their issues and actions and begin to seek assistance. Therefore a central part of restorative practices involves working with those who have offended to identify and help manage areas of their lives in which they need

help. One of the first steps in working with those who have offended is encouraging them to take responsibility for their actions and the damage they have caused individuals and the community at large (Daly, 2006). They must take responsibility for their actions and be motivated to take strides in repairing the harm done to people and relationships. When compared to the court systems emphasis on pleading not guilty and thus not admitting responsibility, restorative justice encourages accountability on the part of a person who has offended, which encourages those who have committed wrongs to take personal recognition and responsibility for the harm caused. Daly (2006) theorizes that early recognition of responsibility allows those who have offended to be open to the potentials of the Restorative Justice program. Daly goes on to suggest that with option of alternative forms of justice, remediation is more apt to occur. More offenders may be willing to acknowledge the harm caused and seek treatment; more victims will be motivated to report offences. The overall goals of RJ programs for those who have offended are to have individuals take responsibility for the harm caused, take active steps to recognize and then minimize their risk factors and overall risk to the community, and to make strides to repair the harm they have caused.

While there is much discussion and literature on the goals and aims of restorative programs for persons who have offended, there is little research on understanding the factors in restorative justice programs that facilitate remediation and healing. Petrunik's (2002) examination of risk management in relation to individuals who have offended through social policy and community programming is a rare example of such RJ research.

Petrunik (2002) discusses the Community Reintegration Project and its functions as circles of support and accountability in southern Ontario for persons who have offended sexually. The project began in 1994 in response to an individual who was a repeat offender who

was released into the Greater Toronto Area into a new community where there were no existing social networks or connections within the community. The goal of the support circles was to aid in the reintegration of persons who had offended through informational, instrumental and general support as well as promoting personal accountability. From the program's inception until the year 2000, 42 circles were successfully created and managed in the GTA and surrounding region, lasting anywhere from 18 months to over 6 years (Petrunik, 2002). While there was no formal program evaluation conducted on the circle groups, the statistical probability held that seven of the people who had offended were likely to re-offend again either during or following their circle; only three members were charged with a sexual offence (Petrunik, 2002). This encouraging, although not precise finding suggests that this type of mutual support and reintegration programming was marginally successful in managing individual risk factors and helped to reduce the probability of harm to the community.

#### Applying Restorative Justice to Sexual Abuse

There exists a debate in the current literature as to the appropriateness of restorative justice in dealing with cases of sexual, family, and physical violence (Braithwaite & Daly, 2004; Daly, 2006). There are four potential areas for restorative justice to be applied to legal matters: diversion from court, pre-sentence advice to judicial officers, a condition or component of sentencing, or at post-sentence in the form of a community sentence or pre-prison release back into the community (Daly, 2006).

Restorative justice's ability to effectively handle cases of sexual abuse has been criticized in some literature. Cited pitfalls of using restorative justice in physical or sexually violent cases include victim safety, offenders manipulating the processes, pressure on the victim to advocate on their own behalf, mixed loyalties, and a lack of impact upon the offender (Daly, 2004). The

potential for the power imbalances between the person who has offended and the survivor to go unchecked and potentially exploited exists, which could lead to further victimization and a serious lack of impact upon the person who has offended. As well, a restorative approach relies at least somewhat upon the ability of the survivor to effectively advocate on their own behalf, putting pressure on them to articulate their experiences and negotiate for a mutually acceptable outcome. There are several ways that these potential issues can be avoided, and are largely addressed through the cited advantages of using a restorative approach.

The benefits of using restorative justice to address either physical or sexually violent crimes are reflections of the apparent inadequacies of our justice system: victim voice, participation, and validation, offender responsibility, flexible environment, and relationship repair (Daly, 2006). In our court systems, victims are often put on trial themselves through the court process, having the legal defence team attempt to challenge their story and deform their character in order to influence the judge or jury into believing the accused. Victims are seldom given an opportunity to express the impact and pain of the crime within this system, and have little say in the outcome of the case. Using a restorative approach affords the victim an opportunity to have their story heard and validated; as well their desired outcome is taken into consideration and is advocated for. In cases where a survivor does not express a desire or need for a particular outcome, they can consult with support professionals or other survivors to begin to pull ideas together regarding what steps to take and what goals to work towards. Power imbalances between the offender and the survivor are a focal point of the restorative process, which is often supervised or mediated by trained facilitators who guide the procedures. Unlike the court system, a restorative approach encourages the offender to take responsibility for their

actions and to take part in the negotiation process that will ultimately influence their willingness and role in making amends.

There is a body of literature that discusses the role of shame and guilt in relation to the treatment of individuals who have offended and their successful safe reintegration into the community. Braithwaite (1989; as cited in McAlinden, 2005) made a critical distinction between “reintegrative shaming” and “disintegrative shaming”. Disintegrative shaming has been used for centuries as a reaction to heinous crimes, and these methods are still carried out today. Examples of disintegrative shaming include offender registration with notification to the community they are living in, mandatory self-identification as someone who has committed a sexual offence (e.g., a red “S” worn on the outside of clothing), or requiring individuals who have offended to hand out flyers in the community in which they live with detailed information about their physical appearance, address, and past crimes (McAlinden, 2005). While these forms of shaming may have powerful deterrent effects, they may also contribute to disintegration, stigmatization and denial of the need of assistance on the part of the offender. When stigmatized as a sexual offender in these ways, these individuals are likely to view themselves as outcasts and may incite further rebellious or criminal activity.

Reintegrative shaming conversely has two core facets: 1) the open disapproval of the aberrant act (shame) by community members who are socially significant, and 2) the consistent inclusion of the offender within an interdependent relationship (reintegration) (McAlinden, 2005). These forms of shaming are reintegrative as they seek to reinforce an individual’s membership in civil society, as well as focus on the malevolence of the offence rather than the evil of the individual. Restorative justice advocates for reintegrative shaming through focusing on repairing the bonds of love or respect between the person who is being shamed and the person

who is doing the shaming, while working towards goals of acceptance and forgiveness. These processes of reintegrative shaming should be at the heart of treatment programs or services that attempt to safely reintegrate these individuals who have offended back into our communities.

Using restorative justice principles to guide the community sentencing or pre-prison release of those who have offended holds the most promise and opportunity for success for the model. Community sentences and the safe reintegration of those who have offended back into our communities represent the two areas where those who have offended are in need of the most support and assistance in identifying and addressing their issues surrounding their offending behaviours. In being returned to their community, or in serving their sentence within their community, those who have offended are at risk of re-offending if their red-flags are not identified, if they do not feel they have a supportive network they can turn to in times of need, or if they still deny the severity and impact of their behaviours. In the words of an offender who used a restorative approach:

“I thought I had stopped any chance of re-offence because I knew the situations where I could potentially re-offend and I avoided them. I agreed to one-on-one counselling and group therapy. Through this process I found that other people could have excellent input into dealing with my problem, and now that I have dealt with my issues, I have a much clearer picture of what I have to do in order to not re-offend again.” (Three Paths to Healing, 2002).

Using restorative principles to support these individuals' reintegration or sentence processes affords the offender an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, hear the impact that their behaviours have had on their victim, and make meaningful steps towards identifying their issues surrounding their offending as well as the opportunity to begin to make

amends in repairing the harm done to individuals as well as relationships. Several quotes from individuals who have offended, and used a restorative approach in their remediation and recovery, speak to the impact of their processes.

“We are making an even more basic assumption that healing is a goal for offenders as much as for victims. Some people may disagree with this. However, it seems self-evident that without offenders there would be no victims in the first place. Offenders are wounded people, and in the course of offending they wound themselves further...We accept without question the need for restoration for victims: restoration of their sense of safety; of love; self-love; self-esteem; the ability to forgive. We also accept that the offender can play a part in helping victims to achieve this.” (Three Paths to Healing, 2002)

“I will no longer focus only on my needs. I will have identified my root areas of the offence and be able to answer the question, ‘Why did I do it?’ I will know situations that could lead to reoffending and stay out of them. I will have developed a set of goals and be working on them daily. I will have identified my sexual cycle. I will have put together a relapse prevention plan.” (Three Paths to Healing, 2002).

In using restorative justice principles to guide their groups for persons affected by sexual abuse, Community Justice Initiatives applies a number of key restorative values. First, a central focus of restorative justice is attempting to understand the wrongful acts as seen by all of those affected; including the victim, the offender and the greater community (Yantzi, 1998). The subsequent goal after understanding how the acts have affected various individuals, “is to deal with the wrongful act(s) in a way that provides all affected person with paths toward healing,

while not losing sight of the consequences that follow such behaviour.” (Yantzi, 1998, p.68)

The processes that follow restorative principles and guide the program require a change in thought patterns by the offender, the victim, and their respective circles of support. However, “if these communities in any way minimize or condone the wrongful acts, they lose the central ingredient for handling such matters.” (Yantzi, 1998, p.72)

One of the central goals of restorative justice is attempting to repair relationships. To achieve this goal, Community Justice Initiatives is committed to seeking out and working with others, including other agencies such as Family and Children’s Services, the police, and the court system. The candidness with which they work with other agencies is reflective of their respect for other avenues of support and safety, and helps the agency from falling into the trap of feeling superior because of their unique and high values (Yantzi, 1998).

External controls upon individuals who offend sexually such as the police, family and children’s services, and prison are necessary systems which function to protect our communities. The Revive groups function as a support system for males who have offended in hopes of the external controls becoming the individual’s self-control over time (Yantzi, 1998).

## Research Context

The Revive program operates through Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, a non-profit community organization whose goal is to create safer more connected communities through raising awareness for and implementing the values of restorative justice. CJI is internationally recognized for being the first organization to apply restorative justice principles to their programs ([www.cjiwr.com](http://www.cjiwr.com); Pioneers of Peace). Restorative justice is a way of addressing community crime and conflict which engages the person who caused the harm, those who are affected by the harm, and the entire community, to engage in dialogue and



action regarding ways of repairing the harm and preventing further conflict. Community Justice Initiative's mission statement communicates that CJI "strives to build a safer, more connected community through supporting creative, peaceful solutions in situations of conflict or harm. Restorative Justice principles are at the heart of everything we do." (Community Justice Initiatives, 2007).

The Revive groups at CJI began in 1982 when a few individuals in the community who were survivors of sexual abuse came forward to the organization and inquired about a space for them to meet and talk with others who share similar experiences. CJI was happy to fulfill the request, and thus the Revive groups were born. In the past 25 years of operation, the Revive groups have grown to encompass many different peoples affected by sexual abuse; groups for men who have offended, male and female survivors, developmentally delayed adults, and groups for the spouses of survivors. The focus of the present research will be upon males who have offended and female survivors, as they are the dominant sex in the two populations (offenders and survivors respectively).

The Revive groups operate on a voluntary basis, having new members join who feel they are ready to begin their journey of healing or remediation. While some participants may have a conditional probation that requires them to seek some form of treatment program, they are not mandated to a particular organization or treatment format (such as the Revive mutual aid groups), and therefore their choice to involve themselves in Revive is their own.

Largely due to CJI's emphasis on restorative justice, the Revive program is a unique opportunity for support for those affected by sexual abuse. The groups consist of 5-8 group members and two trained community volunteer-facilitators who are there to ensure that the group is operating without conflict and to act as role models or further supports for group members.

The training for the volunteer-facilitators emphasizes that the facilitators are not to be the focus of the groups, they are not to lead the groups, and are often reminded to “use the group as a tool” to accomplish what the members want to get from their groups. The program is staffed and coordinated by two CJI employees, the program coordinator and the service coordinator, and a number of trained community volunteers.

In the Revive program, there is no set curriculum or agenda for the program or the groups themselves. Operating principally as a self-help or mutual-aid support, the groups function largely by the participation and involvement of the group members themselves. The operational framework of the Revive groups allows for the individual members to set the agenda of the meetings, discuss what they feel is important and relevant, and set their own goals and timelines. This process allows group members opportunities for empowerment and action as they walk along their journey of remediation or healing, while supporting others who share similar experiences. Knight (2006) expressed the advantages in using group work as an intervention for survivors of trauma, in the existence of multiple relationships between members whereby members assist one another while receiving help from others in the group. These relationships create opportunities for mutual support that work to decrease a sense of isolation, increase trust in others, and develop a sense of connection with others, which can work towards enhancing their self-esteem and self-worth (Knight, 2006).

Upon one deciding he/she would like to participate in the Revive groups, one meets for an initial intake interview with either the program coordinator or the service coordinator of Revive. There are minimal requirements for individuals who are interested in participating in the Revive program. For survivors, the main requirement is that the person recollects at least parts of the sexual abuse (if they were directly affected), and is willing to discuss their story and the

impact that sexual abuse has had upon them. Those who are not willing to share their story with others in a group format are advised that the Revive program may not be right for them, and are put into contact with organizations that provide individual therapy. Sharing one's story and discussing the impacts of sexual abuse with others is essential to the self-help / mutual-aid model, and is therefore required in order to become a participant in the program. For the men who have offended, their entry requirement is that they take full responsibility for their actions and the harm they have caused. Responsibility taking and being able to discuss their distortions and behaviours are essential for the men who have offended, as they will be working with and challenging other offenders to make significant changes to themselves and their lives. As well, it should be noted that a majority of the men engaged in the men who have offended sexually Revive group are mandated by the court system to attend some form of therapy or counselling; Revive functions as an option for counselling and support.

The Revive groups are made up of individuals of the same sex, who have similar experiences with sexual abuse. Therefore there are four distinct groups: men who have offended, male survivors, female survivors, and spouses whose partner was affected by sexual abuse. Each group has a particular night of the week on which it meets for two hours, for ten months of the year; there is a two month summer break in July and August. The focus of the present research will be upon males who have offended and female survivors, as they are the dominant sex in the two populations (offenders and survivors respectively).

#### Models of Support and Research Framework

The following section discusses several models of support, including group therapy, self-help and mutual-aid, and sense of community. These models of support are being used to

characterize and describe the context of the present research, in which both survivors and persons who have offended sexually participate in homogeneous groups.

### Rationale for Group Therapy

Group therapy models are often employed to assist both survivors and offenders of sexual abuse in the process of recovery and remediation. Therapy for survivors of sexual abuse often focuses on the effects of childhood sexual abuse on emotional reactions (anxiety, depression), negative self-perceptions, somatic complaints, sexual dysfunctions, and interpersonal problems (Peleikis, & Dahl, 2005). The goals of treatment programs are rarely made concrete and explicit, as individuals are often at different stages in their processes of healing when entering group therapy and have varying goals and needs. The length of time that individuals spend in group therapy also varies, and individuals have different outcome expectations for themselves. Variations withstanding, programs often focus upon common issues such as facing the experiences of CSA, enhancing interpersonal trust, placing responsibility for CSA on the perpetrator, and learning adaptive coping mechanisms to replace maladaptive survival strategies (Peleikis, & Dahl, 2005).

Those who engage in sexual offences are thought to have deficits in empathy (McGrath, Cann, & Konopasky, 1998). This lack in empathy acts as a state dependant variable where the affective component of empathy is significantly decreased while experiencing emotional states similar to those which preceded their previous offences (Pithers, 1999). Treatment programs for people who have offended sexually often take place in correctional institutions. These programs take the form of individual or group therapy, and focus on correcting skill deficits (e.g., managing emotive-cognitive components and stress), mitigating cognitive-behavioural excesses (e.g., justification beliefs, sexual arousal to children), empathy enhancement and other similar

components which are believed to be associated with an increased likelihood of abuse and re-offending (Pithers, 1999).

Recently there have been a number of published studies that have reported the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural therapy for men who have sexually offended (Friendship, Mann, & Beech, 2003; Hanson et al., 2002). In one particular study reviewing custodial treatment programs in the U.K, the authors found that the twelve in-prison therapy groups they reviewed had a mean percentage treatment change close to 66% (Beech & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). The authors were also able to reveal that within these groups for males who have offended sexually there was a significant relationship between group treatment outcomes in relation to cohesiveness and expressiveness. Beech and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2005) found a significant correlation ( $r = .65, p < 0.05$ ) between the group environment (e.g. cohesion, expressiveness, independence, leader support, etc.) and treatment outcomes such as victim empathy, cognitive distortions, and emotional identification with children. Therefore, we can conclude that a cohesive and openly expressive therapy group environment for men who have offended leads to a reduction in cognitive distortion and pro-offending attitudes; further research is needed to understand the impacts upon recidivism and future offending. These results suggest that group members' commitment, friendship and concern for one another, in addition to the levels of "freedom of action and expressions of feelings" that are promoted by leaders and group members, are strongly related to treatment outcomes. The ultimate goals of such treatment programs are to provide a safe and open environment to empower these individuals to make positive life decisions that will prevent future offending and contribute to their safe and successful reintegration into the community.

Authors Frost and Connolly (2004) have proposed a model of therapeutic engagement, reflexivity and change processes for men who have offended sexually which strives to explain how men who have offended make sense of their experience in a therapy group and how *in* as well as *out* of group processes contribute to personal change. Frost and Connolly propose that each stage of the model is sequential, and that if a group member fails to complete a particular stage, they are considered to have exited the therapeutic engagement process, at least in the interim. The model proposes that there are a number of phases that either promote engagement or create a potential for disengagement. In order for therapy group participants to truly reach therapeutic engagement they must successfully recall the material discussed in their group, ruminate on the identified issues, and then consult and reflect with ones self and other group members outside of their group sessions (Frost & Connolly, 2004). Therapy group participants can disengage from the therapeutic environment and support through recalling nothing significant from the group session, not ruminating upon the topics or issues brought up in group, or by not consulting with other members or reflecting upon the issues themselves (Frost & Connolly, 2004). This model of therapeutic engagement can be applied to clinical, custodial, or community programs that offer cognitive or behavioural therapy for men who have offended sexually. Whether receiving the program while they are incarcerated or once reintroduced into the community, we can establish that significant personal reflection and consultation work with other group members is needed in order to be truly engaged in a therapeutic setting.

Community programs and organizations that support those affected by sexual abuse are important resources for individuals that reside in our communities who wish to begin and be supported through their journey of remediation or healing. There is an extensive body of literature discussing the impact of sexual abuse (Fox & Gilbert, 1994; Gilgun & Reiser, 1990;

Kamsner & McCabe, 2000; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993), the effectiveness and outcomes of group programs that support survivors (Alexander, Neimeyer, Follette, Moore, & Harter, 1989; Fisher, Winne, & Key, 1993; Peleikis & Dahl, 2005), and the effectiveness of individual-level psychological interventions and treatment programs for sexual offenders (Brooks-Gordon, Bilby, & Wells, 2006; Hanson & Harris, 2001; Pithers, 1999). Group therapy or counselling offers the potential for a supportive and empowering opportunity that enhances empathy and social skills while preventing alienation and isolation for both survivors of sexual abuse as well as persons who have offended.

Group therapy in particular offers individuals affected by sexual abuse opportunities to begin or continue along their journey of healing, while receiving social support from others who share similar experiences. This support from others who share similar experiences often creates an environment of normalization or shared experiences wherein much of the guilt and shame that is tied to sexual abuse can eventually be overcome and forgiven, focusing then upon replacing maladaptive coping strategies and making positive decisions in their lives. Group therapy can often take the form of self-help or mutual-aid groups, where the goals are for group members to support, help, and influence one another towards the potentiality of greater personal control over their lives while navigating through high-risk situations (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005).

#### Rationale for Self-Help / Mutual Aid

Mutual engagement and mutual aid are essential tools to effectively protect and cope with adverse life events. Mutual-aid provides for an opportunity to feel a sense of emotional as well as physical well-being, in addition to a personal identity that is part of a larger collective identity (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005). The goals of a mutual aid system are to universalize and normalize individual problems, reduce isolation, support reintegration and to alleviate stigma.

Mutual-aid groups provide persons affected by sexual abuse with a confidential and safe environment in which to receive social and behavioural support. For survivors, the adverse symptomatology they often experience as part of the abuse is not pathological, rather, they are adaptive (or maladaptive) reactions for the horror of the abuse they incurred (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005). Skills that were once necessary for survival have continued on to become routines and now act as barriers to healing and recovery. Survivors often internalize the oppression they have suffered in the sense that they have no voice, no control, and a false sense of responsibility for the abuse (Peleikis & Dahl, 2005). In a mutual aid group, survivors can be heard by others who will validate and empathize with their experiences and pain as well as hear others remind one that he or she is not to blame. One of the primary sources of healing for survivors is to be heard, believed, and to have their narrative supported by others (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005). Reclaiming their story and their lives, survivors in mutual-aid groups are encouraged by other members to become empowered and take control of their own lives.

For individuals who have offended sexually, group environments provide a space that is ideally free of judgement and prejudice where group members can discuss their issues surrounding their behaviours, thoughts and motivations for their offences, while focusing on positive decisions and changes in their lives. Whereas there are various theoretical explanations of deviant sexual behaviour, a range of researchers and practitioners from a variety of backgrounds agree on the importance of group treatment and experiences for persons who have sexually offended (Ingersoll & Patton, 1990; Maletzky, 1990; O'Donahue & Letourneau, 1993 as cited in Gitterman & Shulman, 2005). Substance abuse, denial, and a lack of empathy are common characteristics in people who have offended. Modifying cognitive distortions, alleviating behavioural deficits, as well as developing empathy and acquiring pro-social skills are



frequent goals of group therapy (Pfafflin, Bohmer, Cornehl, & Mergenthaler, 2005). These goals are achieved when group members challenge one another's justifications and behaviours; assisting in identifying red flags, and promoting positive coping and self-management choices. Using the information they have gained regarding their own maladaptive behaviours and effective self-management techniques, they have the prospect of being positively empowered with the knowledge they will need to make constructive decisions in their lives.

These groups act as a supportive community for its members through modifying cognitive distortions and behavioural deficits in persons who have offended, or, in giving a voice and validation to a survivor's narrative. Such communities give their members a sense of belonging and self-worth while working to fulfill the individual members' needs.

#### Sense of Community as a Model of Support & Belonging

As previously mentioned, having a positive psychological sense of community can act as a resilient asset assisting individuals in coping with stressful life events. The present research utilizes the sense of community model in order to examine the characteristics of a restorative justice mutual-aid group for persons affected by sexual abuse.

Seymour Sarason conceived the concept of a psychological sense of community in his classic work *Psychological Sense of Community* (1974). Sarason argued the communities in which we live are geo-political entities in which we live, work and to which we pay taxes, but to which we feel little part of a member. To Sarason, having a psychological sense of community entailed a "readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness that impel one to actions or to adopting a style of living masking anxiety and setting the stage for late and

more destructive anguish” (Sarason, 1974, p.1). In his first discussion of perceived sense of community, Sarason framed SOC in terms of the negative consequences that could potentially arise when an individual lacks a sense of belongingness to and support from one’s community. He goes on to argue that community psychologists are agents of community and social change, and that existing traditions and agencies in community settings will be found wanting and in need of radical change. In this way, Sarason argues that it is the goal of community psychology, and of community psychologists, to change social institutions and the way people behave in communities. This change in perception and social institutions is in pursuit of the ultimate goal of increasing people’s psychological sense of community in order to stave off the negative isolating effects experienced when lacking SOC.

Within SOC frameworks, communities are typically thought of pertaining to one of three categories; relational, geographical, and political. Relational communities are not defined in terms of time or space, but rather upon the interaction of fairly regular members who engage in joint activity together (Obst & White, 2007). Geographic communities are generally thought of as neighbourhoods (anywhere from streets, to blocks, to rural areas), and are often defined by physical barriers or boundaries. Political communities are thought of as a group of people who share similar values, goals, and political viewpoints, who engage in activities which further their common goals.

Sarason postulated that psychological sense of community should be celebrated and embraced as the overarching goal and focus for community psychology (Chavis, Hogge, & McMillan, 1986). Following the formation of the concept of SOC, there was a push by community psychologists to define and fully conceptualize this notion in a psychological capacity; most of this initial work on definition and conception took place in the seventies and

eighties. Doolittle and McDonald (1978; as cited in Chavis, Hogge, & McMillan, 1986)

theorized that SOC had 5 factors (informal interaction, safety, pro-urbanism, neighbouring preferences, and localism), and sought out to validate their factor model with a 40-item sense of community scale to probe community perceptions and behaviours at the neighbourhood level of social interaction. The results indicated that there is a direct relationship between safety and preference for neighbourhood, and that pro-urbanism (privacy, autonomy) decreases as the perception of safety increases.

Another psychologist, Glynn (1981) set out to measure and define SOC by first administering his 120 item scale to randomly selected members of the Division of Community Psychology of the American Psychological Association, and subsequently to two Maryland and one Israeli kibbutz community. Results of the questionnaires indicated that levels of SOC were higher in the kibbutz community than in the Maryland communities. Findings also reflected that there were reliable predictors of individuals' perceived SOC: expected length of residency, satisfaction with the community, and the number of neighbours an individual could identify by their first name (Glynn, 1981). Glynn (1981) as well as Doolittle and McDonald (1978) characterize early efforts to operationalize and assess sense of community, which ultimately did not stand the tests of time.

It is these efforts to characterize and create the dimensions and factors that ultimately define how sense of community is thought of, investigated and measured. McMillan and Chavis (1986) achieved an operational definition of SOC with their four factor model, which is now used as the primary model for investigations of sense of community. This model was developed from a Sense of Community Index (McMillan, 1976; as cited in McMillan & Chavis, 1986), comprised of a formal and operational definition of sense of community, and is considered a perception with an affective component. The authors define SOC as "a feeling that members have of

belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met by their commitment together" (McMillan, p. 11, 1976; as cited in McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The four dimensions of SOC as defined by McMillan and Chavis are *membership and a feeling of belongingness, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection*. McMillan and Chavis' four dimensions encompass their model of sense of community and are not put in any particular order for priority or relevance. *Membership* is defined as having the feeling that one has invested part of oneself in becoming a member, and therefore has a right to belong. Boundaries are encompassed within membership, and define the characteristics of membership which create the dimensions of those who belong and those who do not. These confines provide members the emotional safety necessary for needs and feelings to be exposed in order for an intimacy with the community to develop.

The second dimension, *influence*, is conceived of as a bidirectional concept, whereby one direction leads an individual to be attracted to a community because one feels like they have some influence or impact on what the group does (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Conversely, the cohesiveness of a community is reliant upon a group's ability to influence and guide its members. The dimension of influence is related to the theory of consensual validation; there is an inherent drive that drives people to confirm that the things that they feel, see, and experience are familiar and similar to the experiences of others.

*Integration and fulfillment of needs* is the third dimension which describes the human tendency to be motivated by reinforcements (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In order to maintain a positive sense of togetherness and cohesiveness, the individual-community relationships must be rewarding and beneficial to its members. Group-cohesiveness can be found in shared values.

When people who share similar values come together, they are likely to communicate similar goals, needs, and priorities, which they can together work towards to better satisfy their needs and obtain the reinforcement they seek. The needs of individuals are translated to the needs of the community, which members then work towards in joint activity.

When individuals come together to pursue common goals they engage in activities together, which then becomes a shared history with which members can identify. This is described as a *shared emotional connection*. The interactions of members during shared events work to strengthen the ties between members as they invest in relationships within the community. The authors argue that time spent during shared activity acts as an investment by individuals in their community; the more that individuals feel like they have invested, either financially or emotionally, the more they will feel the impact of community life and become emotionally involved.

McMillan (1996) addressed the conceptualization of sense of community ten years after his work with Chavis in order to re-explore the dimensions and meaning making reflected in community making. Spirit, similar to the original dimension of membership, still speaks to the created “us” and “them” boundaries that create some form of emotional safety that encourages intimacy and self-disclosure between members. However, greater emphasis is given to the “spark of friendship” that becomes the Spirit within the community (McMillan, p.315, 1996).

Trust, originally conceived of as influence, refers to the community’s use of power in establishing and maintaining trust: Who has the power? When and why do they have it? If power is not present in some members, why do they not have it? (McMillan, 1996) The author states that in order for a community to survive beyond the initial spark of friendship, the community must adequately deal with issues of the use and allocation of power.

The satisfaction that an individual receives from a particular community is in part due to the satisfaction they are able to derive from that community (Lott & Lott, 1965; as cited in McMillan, 1996). McMillan

The framework of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) perceived sense of community can be applied to various contexts: creating public policy based on values of harmonious living and human development, integrating marginalized and oppressed groups back into our communities, and increasing the amount of community engagement and interaction amongst its members.

For the purpose of the present study, the sense of community framework will be applied to examine the positive effects and experiences of people who belong to mutual-aid or self support groups. Ussher, Kirsten, Butow, and Sandoval (2006) investigated the unique relationships and interactions amongst cancer patients who engage in peer support groups. The authors found that group members developed friendships within their groups, felt cared for by other group members, and shared emotions and mutual experiences; all of which served to strengthen the bonds between group members and unite them. The group members described how their needs to belong and share their emotional experiences with others were fulfilled by their membership in a mutual aid program when they often felt they had no one else to talk to and confide.

“Support groups were positioned as providing a unique sense of community, unconditional acceptance, and information, in contrast to isolation, rejection, and lack of knowledge experienced outside the group. At the same time, the support group was positioned as facilitating positive relationships with family and friends because of relieving their burden of care, facilitating increased empowerment and agency, and improving the overall well being of group attendees.” (Ussher et al., 2006).

Support groups for individuals with cancer can be used as a comparison group to predict similar processes and outcomes in groups with individuals affected by sexual abuse as both populations are experiencing periods in their lives where they are in need of social, informational, and concrete support.

As found in other research examining the positive outcomes of cancer support groups (Cella & Yellen, 1993; as cited in Ussher et al., 2006), the members' unique ability to relate to one another's experiences facilitated relationships providing mutual support, a sense of belonging, as well as the motivation to empower ones self in pursuit of personal change and increased socialization. Support groups where membership boundaries are defined and members share similar experiences and goals provide unique opportunities for individuals to engage in reciprocal healing with others.

As discussed earlier, Olson and colleagues (2003) investigated the perceived sense of community amongst females who were residents of the Oxford House, a mutual-aid home for individuals who were recovering from substance abuse. The authors demonstrated that the women participating in the houses had high perceived sense of community, including sub-themes of reciprocal responsibility, harmony and mission (Olsen et al., 2003). These women were also found to have the highest perceived sense of community of any other pervious sample, as measured by the Sense of Community Index (Bishop, Jason, Ferrari, & Huang, 1998).

The above research findings suggest that sense of community may play an important role in understanding relationships and interactions amongst members in mutual-aid groups. Members of mutual-aid groups strive towards common goals have shared similar experiences which define their membership, and join the communities in order to fulfill needs that are not met by their other communities and social networks. These communities provide an ideal place

for their members to begin, or continue along, their journey of healing, empowerment, and personal change.

### Research Questions

The adverse affects to both survivors of sexual abuse and persons who have offended sexually have been outlined, along with the literature stating the impetus and rational for mutual-aid and group therapy for individuals affected by sexual abuse. Driven by my own motivation, personal interest, and role as a facilitator in an RJ program, combined with previous research, the current study will be examining several research questions. The primary goal of the present investigation was to explore how the Revive program can support both individuals who have survived sexual abuse as well as persons who have offended sexually using one mission statement, one model, and the same principles of restoration. The secondary aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of Revive group participants in order to examine how participation in the program relates to sense of community and empowerment. Specifically, three primary research questions were posed:

- 1) How are the groups experienced by its members?
  - a. How does the Revive model facilitate healing in survivors?
  - b. How does the Revive model facilitate remediation in persons who have offended?
- 2) What comparisons can be made between the group experiences of those who have offended versus those who have survived sexual abuse?
  - a. How are the group processes experienced differently by their members?
  - b. Are there any commonalities in the way the two groups are experienced?
  - c. How are the needs and goals of the groups communicated by each population?



3) How does the Revive model promote empowerment and sense of community?

- a. Does empowerment occur in both populations, and what does it look like?
- b. Do the groups facilitate a safe community reintegration for persons who have offended?

The first research question addresses the extent to which the group members perceive that the groups are effective in providing support, and attempts to identify the effective features of the program. In answering this research question, findings will be presented separately with respect to the healing processes in survivors and remediation processes in persons who have offended.

The second research question will examine the experiences of group members in relation to their position as either a survivor or person who has offended. Relationships between the needs, goals and experiences amongst both survivors and offenders will be compared in order to assess similarities and points of divergence. This question will also illuminate the ways in which the same Revive program and model can facilitate both healing and remediation.

The third and final research question aims to examine the group members' explanation of the role of the groups in providing opportunities for empowerment and a psychological sense of community. Characteristics of the groups that provide empowering opportunities and a sense of community will be explored and analyzed through this question. This research question will also explore the members' experience of the potentially unique benefits that the groups provide in comparison to other support they receive.

## Method

### Research Approach

There is still little if any research examining the stories and experiences of persons who have offended, or upon community resources and organizations that provide supports and programs for all individuals affected by sexual abuse. Therefore, in determining which methods are best suited in my approach to this research and its goals, I elected to focus on case study practices using qualitative data in order to understand the lived remediation and healing experiences of those affected by sexual abuse.

When engaged in case study methods, it is the task of the researcher to bring available data together to make sense of an individual's life within a particular context of interest (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). The purpose of a case study is to use one or more in-depth cases to describe a phenomenon and address the research questions posed, and can include cross-case analysis to address similarities and divergences. Traditionally, case studies use multiple data sources to achieve a holistic and in-depth description of the context or environment of interest. The current study however was conducted using only one data source, Revive participants, due to time constraints.

A qualitative methodology was chosen as it "embraces the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p.12). This research also operated using a postmodernist methodology which assumes that there is no universal truth or unified reality: there are instead multiple voices, realities and systems (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). This methodology was used to illuminate the narratives and voices of those who are typically silenced

in modernist research (e.g., the perspective and voices of survivors as well as those who have offended sexually).

For survivors of sexual abuse, an opportunity to share their story can be a way of reclaiming themselves, their history and their experiences which otherwise might be shrouded in secrecy (Lemelin, 2006). For those who have offended sexually, rehabilitation should concentrate on providing individuals opportunities to develop capabilities and values to live pro-social and personally meaningful lives (Ward & Marshall, 2007). People who have offended who have begun their journey of remediation and healing may find that sharing their story through narrative research enables them to reflect upon their journey and successes (e.g., identification of red flags, adaptive coping strategies, effective behaviour and thought regulation, etc.), which may act as an account of success for others who are struggling with similar issues. Because one goal of this research is to shed light on the experiences of Revive group participants using their self-defined determinants of success and impediment, focus groups and interviews were chosen as the data collection methods. This group process is familiar to participants and gives survivors and males who have offended a voice. The idea was that the group members would generate key ideas and stimulate one another in the focus groups, eliciting broad discussions on the impact of the groups.

The present research is routed in understanding the experiences of group members participating in an RJ model, as well as their constructions of social support, self-help groups, and their recovery / remediation processes. Kahn & Mathie (2000) highlight the importance of using a qualitative approach when conducting sexual assault research as it places emphasis upon the individual's constructed social reality and their constructed place within that reality. Therefore the present research operated largely from a social constructivist perspective; a

research approach that employs methods that seek to understand the lived experiences and social relationships of those affected by the phenomenon of interest (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006).

### Research Design and Sampling

The current research utilized a two group one stage design, consisting of two focus groups. The two focus groups had nine and four participants, each made of homogeneous members of the following Revive groups: men who have offended (n=9) and female survivors (n=4). Originally the research was proposed to utilize a two group two stage design, with stage two functioning as four separate interviews: two males who have offended and two female survivors. The interviews were scheduled to take place at a date to be determined once the focus groups had been completed. However, upon finishing both focus groups the second stage interviews were discarded due to a number of rationales. First, after reading the transcripts from the focus groups, I believed that I had the necessary and sufficient data to answer the original research questions in full. Second, I thought that the interviews would be a burden on the participants, as all available and willing Revive group members took part in the opportunity to participate in the focus groups. Therefore, the interviews would be conducted with the same individuals, and it was felt that no further data was needed to answer the research questions. I also believed that the interviews would be an additional burden as group members are used to sharing their abuse story and experiences with fellow survivors and offenders in a group environment; therefore a one on one interview would be a foreign environment for them and as such would not yield profoundly different data from that of the focus group.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants who are currently enrolled or had since graduated and left the groups of interest.

## Participants

The total sample size for the research is 13 Revive group members. Nine individuals participated in the men who had offended sexually focus group; two of the participants were the facilitators who regularly facilitate this group on a weekly basis. All of the men who had offended sexually who took part in the focus group were currently enrolled and attending the program. Four female survivors participated in the second focus group. Of the female survivors, two of the women had participated in group earlier in their lives, but had not done so in at least five years. One of the females was currently enrolled and attending the group, and the other female survivor had recently (within the last two months) graduated from the program and stopped attending. Each group (men who have offended, female survivors) participated in one separate focus group. The estimated age range of the participants is 19-55 years old.

## Interview Protocol

Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method as a large quantity of data can be collected in a reasonably short amount of time, and the level of analysis is often higher than that of one-to-one interview data as members excite one another in discussing key ideas and experiences (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). Focus group questions were asked in an open-ended manner in order to prompt group members to reflect thoroughly about their narratives and experiences (Posavec & Carey, 2007). A focus group guideline (Appendix D) was used to facilitate discussion in response to the research questions and other areas of inquiry.

## Procedure

### Invitation to Participate

Revive group members were invited to participate in the project via a volunteer form (Appendix B), and an informed consent form (Appendix C) which communicated the opportunity to participate in research examining the group processes and experiences of the group members. The letter was accompanied by an informational flyer which outlined the details and goals of the project. The informational letter (Appendix A) outlined my own experience with CJI and the Revive program in order to make the potential participants feel comfortable in openly discussing their Revive experiences. It was also communicated that the research is not affiliated with CJI, and would have no repercussions on their group, or their membership within that group, should they have consented or refused to participate. Once all of the potential participants had been invited to participate in the research and had completed the interest to participate form, dates and times for the focus groups to take place were arranged with the program coordinator and the group members themselves. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the invitation to participate letter was given to all group members. These letters were then collected back from the potential participants, wherein they had indicated whether or not they wish to participate by checking the appropriate box. The letter had allowed the participants to communicate willingness to participate or non-participation. All of the participants who were given an invitation to participate form indicated that they were willing to participate, except for one male who had offended sexually who did not feel comfortable in participating in the research. The interest to participate form asked only for the member's first name and their respective Revive group, to ensure strict confidentiality and partial anonymity.

### Steering Committee Involvement

For the span of the current research project, the principle investigator and thesis supervisor were in consultation with a steering committee whose composition consisted of two other Wilfrid Laurier Faculty members: Dr. Peter Dunn from the faculty of Social Work, and Dr. Terry Mitchell from the faculty of Psychology. The function of the steering committee was to act as a body of knowledgeable and experienced individuals who could guide the research from design to final report. The present project was a collaborative exploration of the Revive program, utilizing the experiences of those in the groups, those facilitating the groups, and academics who are knowledgeable in the fields of psychology, counselling and community support and integration.

### Conducting the Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus groups were employed as the primary methods of data collection and were conducted by the principle investigator. Participants were first introduced to the research project and its focus, and were then be asked if they would like to participate in the focus groups, the interviews, or both. Participants were asked to participate in a two-hour discussion with their fellow Revive group members on their perceptions and experiences of the program, their group as a supportive community and their perceived efficacy of the program in supporting them through their journeys of remediation and healing. Each of the Revive groups participated in one, two-hour focus group with the other members of their particular Revive group. The focus groups asked questions according to the topic guide created by the researcher.

In order to respect the group member's desire for confidentiality and anonymity, each of the Revive groups participated in a separate focus group with their respective group members

whom they meet with every week. The focus groups were scheduled during their regular scheduled meetings, in order to minimize inconvenience to the participants.

Those participants who gave written permission to participate in the focus groups engaged in an audio-recorded discussion were held in a private room within the CJI offices. The audio-recordings were then transcribed to an electronic document which was analyzed and used as the primary data source for analysis. Potential participants were informed that the information and data taken from the transcripts will be presented in a group format, supported by non-identifying direct individual quotes. In order to thank those who participate in the current study for sharing their thoughts and experiences, participants received complimentary snacks during the group sessions and will be provided with a summative report based on their focus group.

A finished copy of the thesis will be given to the Revive program, and an executive summary report will be made available for group participants. The final thesis report will be bound and a copy will be submitted to the Wilfrid Laurier Psychology Department for approval. Manuscript for publication in academic journals and for conference presentations may also be drawn from the final report of this study.

## Proposed Analyses

### Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data from the focus groups and interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis and emergent coding design, using the qualitative data software NVIVO. Both the thematic as well as the emergent codes were then analyzed using comparative analysis to identify themes which are common with the original four dimensions of sense of community; needs



fulfillment, shared emotional connection, reciprocal influence, and membership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The qualitative data were analyzed and coded by the principle investigator. Theory application (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006) guided the principle investigator in finding observable themes and general characteristics of the data. These themes, ideas, and experiences then became the main variables in the study, connecting patterns and commonalities amongst the data which were organized as the findings of the research (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). The analysis began by examining the data in relation to the research questions, with specific focus upon the questions asked during the focus groups. The data was then re-read for themes and insights not encompassed within the original research questions (i.e., emerging themes). A summary was created for each focus group, as well as for each general theme identified, with sub-themes and crosscurrent ideas contained within. Within each of the summary of themes documents, quotes were used to support the analysis as well as to document an audit trail of the quote origins. Intersubjectivity, an authentic dialogue between various persons involved in the research used as a confirmatory process, were utilized by presenting the themes and sub-themes found in the data along with the transcripts of the raw data to the Revive program coordinator to ensure validity.

#### Verification and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

To verify and assess the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) recommend using a *constant comparative method* in order to test theories and themes that arise from the systematic process of data gathering and analysis throughout the research process. It is because the present research is rooted in grounded theory and theory application that the data and the theory or themes extracted from the data must remain closely connected. Grounded

theory relies on codes within the data being linked together by similarities or remaining apart due to their distinctiveness (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006). This means that for every theme or theory pulled from analyzing the data, the raw transcripts of the focus groups were then re-examined to ascertain if the themes speak to the data itself.

There exists a clear tension in using both analysis practices of grounded theory and theory application; grounded theory is by nature inductive, and theory application by nature is deductive. The motivation to use both analysis methods in the current study lies in my desire to test existing theories and their possible application to the Revive groups, as well as to provide an opportunity for the data to stand-alone and speak for itself. Therefore, I chose to analyze the data using both deductive methods to apply existing theory, as well as inductive methods that sought to give voice to the narratives of research participants and lay ground for the development of new theory. My choice in using multiple analysis methods reflects the value I hold for both inductive as well as deductive theory and research in attempting to describe the experiences of Revive participants.

Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) recommend using three principal confirmatory tactics to ensure the analysis is complete and of high quality; saturation, cohesive theory, and salience. Saturation refers to the point at which new data is added to themes and theories but there is no change to the description or depth of the theme. At this point the researcher can be certain that the accuracy and strength of the created descriptors. The second principle of cohesive theory refers to the strength of the analysis and rich descriptions to explain the data. Developing theories were analyzed with respect to negative cases, in order to ensure that weak or satellite data is not at the centre of theory building, and that saturation has been achieved. The third principle, salience, refers to the ability of those closest to the data to say that it makes sense to

them, and coherently explains what they have said in their raw data. Salience was achieved through prolonged engagement with the data throughout the research process, in addition to data checking throughout.

### Ethics and Dissemination Plan

There were a number of negotiations and consultations that I undertook in order to ensure that the research was ethical. First, I met and collaborated with the coordinators of the Revive program to ensure that my research, specifically its questions, goals, and values, were complimentary to those of Community Justice Initiative and the Revive program. Having established that the CJI was on board with my research, I created an ethics proposal that reflected a description of my research and participants, risks and benefits to participants as a result of participating, as well as the questions and procedures that I would propose to the participants. This document was first sent to my advisor, which we discussed and subsequently revised, and then sent to the Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier. Prior to any component of the current research process being enacted or conducted, the Request for Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier. In addition, the principle investigator completed the Tri Counsel Ethics training course prior to conducting any stage of this research. Deception was not used at any time during this project.

Two formal reports were produced with respect to the findings of this project: a thesis and a final summary report, to be presented to the steering committee. In addition to these reports, several other means of dissemination will be used in order to communicate the findings of the research to various populations interested in healing the effects of sexual abuse. The following methods will be used in communicating the findings once the analysis is complete.

First, a two-to-three page summary of findings sheet was created which captures and concisely communicates the essence of the Revive program and the experiences of its members. This summary sheet will be made available to Community Justice Initiatives as well as the participants of the Revive program. It is expected that the findings of this project will help reinforce the impetus for the Revive program and celebrate its success in supporting individuals in need.

Second, the completed thesis will be sent to academic journals in hopes of publication. It is anticipated that the dissemination of the research findings through the publication in academic journals, or presentations at conferences, will contribute to the current literature regarding sexual abuse, mutual-aid groups, restorative justice, and sense of community. The findings gathered and communicated through this research could be used to inform similar agencies and programs in the hopes of supporting more individuals who have been affected by sexual abuse.

### Findings

The findings being presented here are first separated by the focus group from which the quotes originated. Transcripts were first read for a priori codes that were based on the questions asked in the focus group. These codes included descriptions of their entrée into the groups, the group processes, and outcomes they experience as a result of their participation. They were then re-read to identify newly emerging codes that originated from both transcripts. These emergent codes communicated the ways in which Revive group members perceived the structures of the group and how these structures provided support and empowerment that ultimately lead to the programs outcomes. Each transcript was then read a third time in order to fully code each of the newly emerged codes. Table 1 displays in brief the findings as they relate to each code. The table summarizes the similarities and commonalities of the Revive experiences of both the men who have offended sexually and the women survivors of sexual abuse.

Table 1

## Codes &amp; Themes

<b>Entrée</b>	
Hearing About Revive	*referred to CJI/Revive from counsellor, probation officer.
Description of Revive	*safe place, no judgment, no stigmatization, acceptance, unique/distinct support, normalization / shared experiences.
<b>Processes</b>	
Program Support	*unconditional and ongoing support, provided with time and space to discuss sexual abuse, validate experiences, shared past, administration and staff willing to support them outside of their group night *share similar experiences / challenges, give advice, learning from listening, accountable to one another, reduce isolation, challenging group members, multiple perspectives, sounding board to bounce ideas off, different viewpoints / ways of thinking, positive atmosphere (accepting, non-judgmental, honest, open).
Members' Support	
<b>Outcomes</b>	
Goals	*Central goal of the program was to provide a safe environment to discuss sexual abuse. Personal goals were personally oriented and defined, empowerment a common goal, empowering other women / men, abuse not defining their identity.
Needs Fulfillment	* to speak and be truly heard, to be believed, to learn from like-others, safe space, support through court processes, *goal of RJ was identified as the repair of people and relationships, positively alternative to traditional legal system, empowerment, not labelled as a victim, provide an opportunity for a survivor to confront their abuser, healing, public education, de-stigmatization, increase community awareness of sexual abuse,
Restorative Justice	
Support	*support outcomes included emotional (unconditionally accepted, learning to express their feelings / thoughts, learning to handle and express their anger / frustration constructively, being heard), informational (learned they do not have all the answers, empathy, perspective taking, confidence, legal processes, conflict resolution), tangible (networking with other members or organizations that could provide additional support, personal change), support beyond group (through the discussions and contact sharing group members felt supported outside of their weekly two-hour group night), and distinct support (through meeting with other women survivors or men who had offended participants gained insight and support that they perceived to be distinct from their other networks of support).
<b>Structures</b>	
Check-in/Check-out	*check-in / check-out allows members to prioritize the issues discussed from week to week, ensures that members do not leave the group feeling that they are still in crisis, allows members to control the flow and structure of the group *staff and administration were identified as instrumental in providing support (both within and outside of the group), provided consistent and continuous support. Facilitators keep the group "on-track" each night, also challenge group members, their impartiality as non-survivors / offenders is appreciated by group members.
Admin & Staff	
No Agenda	*group members are able to control the topics of the group from week to week, prioritize the issues and challenges they discuss, facilitators are also able to define topics and create discussion if no group member identifies a specific topic / issue for the night.

## Women's Survivor Focus Group

### A priori Codes

#### Hearing about and Choosing Revive / First Experiences

Participants were first asked how they came to learn of the Revive program. Of the women survivors, the majority of the participants were informed about the groups from their counsellor or from another program that they were attending. All four of the participants had enrolled in both individual counselling and group therapy at some point in their journey of healing. One of the survivors had been informed about the organization after her abuser, her stepfather, was referred to CJI for the men who have offended sexually group. Another of the survivors was referred to Revive as she was attempting to contact her abuser, and her counsellor thought it would be best if she tried to arrange mediation through CJI.

"I was in personal counselling and um, I suddenly without information from the counsellor told her that I was contacting my abuser and um, wanted to have a discussion in the counselling room and then she phoned back and said that as that organization they recommended that I go to CJI, have it done here. So then I did confront with my abuser at CJI and from there I lost my counsellor and picked up the group, when I found out about it." (DIANNE)

One of the women said that she always disliked one on one therapy, and chose the group format as she felt she gained more from the group experience. Through the group she was able to feel safe and comfortable enough to speak about her abuse, and she valued the support and discussions that she had through Revive.

“Um, I’ve always disliked one on one therapy, and I’ve been going for fifteen years, so, group therapy was the number one thing for me, and I just I joined and yeah, I’ve been coming here a long time.” (SUSAN)

Another survivor spoke about her transition from another group program to the Revive program. She describes that the transition into the program was easy, as the Revive groups were more open and they were not “psychiatrically monitored” as her previous group was.

“So um, so yeah so for me it was a transition from Homewood into here – it was actually quite easy because the Homewood was more intense, it was more monitored, um, coming to this one here it was not monitored it was more, ah, it was more open. Whereas in the Homewood survivors program at that time, and I don’t know what it’s like today, but at that time it was psychiatrically monitored, yeah, so it’s really changed, yeah.” (EMILY)

The participants went on to describe their initial encounters and reactions to participating in the group. Two of the four survivors said that they felt nervous during their first few group sessions, but were soon at ease with sharing their story and beginning to talk due to the safe and honest atmosphere.

“I know for myself I was terrified, I did not want to be here... I was back and the next week was a lot easier but it took me about four weeks before I started talking... I remember when I first came here, that I was completely lost I didn’t know how to talk, but I knew that this was the first safe place I ever felt. It’s just being here. So even though I was terrified of talking to people, the group, that whole idea to own – I didn’t want to own it. I took twenty-five years to figure out that I was even abused. Um, I was in complete denial and then – I think there’s lots of times that I wanted to go away from it, but I knew that this place was safe and people would listen...” (DIANNE)



“Um, yeah I think I would agree like at the time that I came here I was just afraid to open to people and then what was nice was almost that it was just other strangers and the only thing that we had in common was that one element of our life, so its easy to talk about it because its really what you’re here to deal with and what you’re here to do, so.”

(ANGELA)

Another participant described that she was comfortable right from the beginning. She was anxious at first telling her story only because she perceived her story to be so much more traumatic and worse than the other women; she did not want to minimize their experiences.

“I just remember coming in and being comfortable right from the beginning. Um, I was – not with everything – like with telling my story I wasn’t too comfortable with sharing that because um, I was very uneducated I was very young, CJI wasn’t even going to accept me because I wasn’t even eighteen. And um, I used to put other peoples abuse to shame, and I used to think that mine was so much worse and I didn’t want to share it, until I started to come to group and as time went on...I started to realize that it didn’t matter what the abuse was or if it happened once or a hundred times that it affected that person as much as it affected me...So it took me a while to start talking but, I wasn’t nervous or anything.” (SUSAN)

After speaking with other group members during the first few weeks that she participated in group, this woman soon began to realize that all of the women shared an abusive past, they were all affected by their abuse, and that they were all there to get help. Participating in the group allowed this participant to normalize her experience and realize that there were other women out there who were hurt and in need of support as much as she was.

### Characteristics of Revive

Participants were asked how they would describe the program to someone who had no knowledge of the program or its purpose. All of the women agreed that first and foremost the Revive group functioned as a safe and open place where they could speak openly about their abuse. There were several facets of the program or of the building itself, that put these survivors at ease such that they could share their story. One of the women commented on the fact that the group space was located on the third floor of a church:

“Because the stairs was to me – that was the security – we’re going four stairs up... Well, it was the whole – it’s in a church, at the top of the church, nobody’s get around so, I was afraid to talk, I didn’t want to talk, I think they must of – I must of known that already, so, yeah. Now I’m getting used to it –the whole thing.” (DIANNE)

The women often spoke about how sexual abuse is a topic that cannot be discussed in society, and so the group provided a safe place where they could openly and safely speak about their abuse. Participants communicated that membership in the Revive group gave them permission to truly tell their story without the fear of being judged, blamed, or stigmatized.

“I found the outside world can’t handle the topic. I was growing up in a topic that couldn’t be handled – to me, at the beginning, talking about sexual abuse, how do you talk about it? So at least here once you get through these walls you’re allowed to talk

about it, it's not a bad thing...But I guess once you take that whole stigma off it, you take the power away from it, it's just something that you deal with. I think you get to a level that's liveable." (DIANNE)

Participants went on to communicate that by having a safe place to share their experiences with other survivors, it reduced the isolation they felt; they connected with other survivors and were able to own their story without feeling shame or guilt.

"I was always very isolated up until- I forced myself to have to talk, I could talk from my head I didn't know how to talk from my heart and this is a good place to practice. Yeah, and it was really nice to leave and then go into the world and do something different...you could deal with it here, you always stayed focused on one subject and never get off topic, it would always be this subject here..." (DIANNE)

Participants were adamant that the ability to share and talk openly with other survivors was essential to their processing and healing. They frequently compared the work they were able to do in individual counselling versus their time spent in the Revive program. All of the women survivors said that there was something unique about the support they received in the groups; this support either complimented or replaced the work they were doing in individual counselling.

"... another thing about group therapy for me, I like being able to talk and then you're going to say something to me and you're going to make a comment and like when you're in one on one therapy you don't get any kind of interaction...not with my psychologist anyway, you know he's being all big paid bucks big whatever to sit there and go, uh hrm, uh hrm....Like it doesn't feel personal to be sitting with somebody making a hundred and fifty grand a year, compared to sitting with fellow survivors are going to comment on what you're saying, and maybe get mad at you or praise you for what you've done, and

you get to say wow, you know like I don't know like, it just – I would never ever suggest one on one therapy..." (SUSAN)

" Yeah, I would agree with that, like the human element to the whole thing is well worth the time you put into it, and even the struggles that you come here trying to work through or the conflict of personalities that you might have, just for the sake that somebody might say this one sentence and it makes a whole chunk of stuff make sense to you, you can process an entire event, just because you heard them say that this made them scared or, some people just don't have some vocabularies and they just cant figure it out for themselves and having just so many different voices come at you all at once it helps out, it helps to keep other things in mind than just how you normally think things through."

(ANGELA)

How does the program support its members?

Participants were asked how the program functions to support its members. Group members responded that the Revive program was instrumental to their healing and recovery processes. One participant, who is no longer participating in the program, commented that the program was so vital to her and her recovery, that it saved her life.

"Like I think CJI saved my life, like, they, to this day they still save my life I have really big mental health issues and I still spend time in the hospital as you know as time goes by and they're still there for me today." (SUSAN)

This group member expressed that even though she has not participated formally as a group member in the Revive program in thirteen years, she still receives continued support from the program and staff.

Another participant communicated that the program provided her with a time and space in which she was allowed to speak about her abuse without guilt or shame. Through having an environment where she could openly tell her story to other survivors, it gave her permission to speak.

“I kept, it was a secret for me for twenty five years so I had massive denial or whatever, to give the permission to speak for me this was the place that I had to- I needed a place where I could speak, because I still can’t speak with my family and my abuser is my brother, um, and now I’ve lost all my communicate with my parents. If I didn’t have this for the last for the last while I would have had no where to go, until I began, so for me CJI has a connection.” (DIANNE)

This participant communicates that she felt that there were little other options for support. She made the connection with CJI and Revive as it validated her experiences, and provided a place for her to safely and honestly share her story, and begin the road to recovery.

Participants were asked what it was like sharing their very personal story and experiences with people who are virtual strangers. A few members said that their first experiences were anxiety provoking and they were nervous. Through discussing their abuse with others who share a similar past, participants reflected that this normalized their experience and enabled them to open up to the group.

“Um, yeah I think I would agree like at the time that I came here I was just afraid to open to people and then what was nice was almost that it was just other strangers and the only thing that we had in common was that one element of our life, so its easy to talk about it because its really what you’re here to deal with and what you’re here to do, so.”

(ANGELA)

“I felt when I was here that everybody that was here understood, we all have different pains that everybody has pain, its all the same crap it just comes in on different angles and different ways, so its just nice to see ‘oh, well you got that’ and then you can take that and well I could maybe apply that to myself. So it was nice to compare notes.”

(DIANNE)

This shared past, the common element of a history of abuse, enabled participants to get past their initial anxiety and truly open up to the group so that they could share and work on their road to recovery.

How do Revive group members support one another?

Focus group participants were asked how members work to support one another, and to describe how those support function to further their road to recovery. Participants communicated that the Revive program functions as a supportive community wherein group members unconditionally support one another. Group members often said that they received individual counselling in addition to their Revive group, however, the Revive groups provided a different and unique environment in which they could productively work on their issues.

“You can’t get that, like, in – what you get in individual is just basically you working on yourself, but this is a community – and I think, I feel like it’s neat that you get the help and then there’s going to be a point in time where you get to also give, and to support and help others, so you get both of it, that’s part of the healthy growing community.”

(DIANNE)

The above quote demonstrates that participants in the groups appreciated the ability to both give and receive support from their groups’ members. This reciprocal support provided them not

only with an avenue to learn from and be supported by other group members; it provided them with opportunities to give advice and impact someone else's life in a positive way. One group member commented that she felt that she took something away from each group she participated in; it did not matter if she was the centre of attention on a given night, she could learn from listening to her peers.

“...sometimes I didn't even talk in group because other people needed it, and I was perfectly fine with that because listening to somebody speak and tell their story I always got something from it for my own healing and I didn't need to necessarily talk, and I felt comfortable with the silence...” (SUSAN)

Participants communicated that there was a level of accountability that comes with membership in the group. Participants are accountable to each other, and are expected to show up every week and put an effort forth in both giving and receiving support. One participant communicated that the support members' receive from other group members assists in reducing their isolation, as they are in need of an environment when they can communicate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

“I mean its easy when you're in the throws of misery or like in the darkest dumps of your brain to just isolate and cave in and you cant even process what your going through much less communicate it to other people, and you can come in and just sort of be in a dump and people can illicit it from you...another part of it too is accountability, there's other people expecting you next week to have a progress update or to see that you've tried or made an effort in some way, um, or that you know if you are having a bad week that's where the support comes in.” (ANGELA)

Another participant goes on to describe her feelings on suffering and being alone, and how working with other women with similar pasts has reduced her seclusion.

“I didn’t realize the depth of human suffering that you go through until you realize it and once you work with other people and with you’re with other people that are going through the same, you don’t feel so alone. I feel alone with people that haven’t worked through it, but I don’t feel alone with people who have worked through it, yeah.”

(EMILY)

The women group members commented that part of their role within the group was to give and lend support to other group members. Part of the process of giving support included challenging other members on issues they were not being 100% honest about, or, challenging other to try a new strategy or new way of thinking.

“...because for me some of the problems were looking for dependency, and to know that I could come here and somebody was going to tell it me pretty straight was a nice thing, they weren’t going to let me get away with my delusions.” (ANGELA)

One of the group members communicated that during her first Revive session, another group member challenged her to return the following week, even though she was not fully comfortable with the group yet:

“...and her threat to me was the best thing that ever happened, the end of the group she says ‘so you going to come back again next week?’, and I needed that challenge, because I was scared, but there was nobody that was going to bully me around so I was back and the next week was a lot easier but it took me about four weeks before I started talking.”

(DIANNE)



The above quote illustrates that this participant needed to be challenged to come back and work on her issues with the group. While her initial anxiety about speaking in front of others prevailed, she was able to overcome her anxiety through the challenging support of another group member.

Participants went on to describe how the support they received from their group members was unique; support that they did not receive anywhere else. They commented that they found the multiple perspectives and multiple people to bounce ideas and issues off of were useful for their recovery.

“DIANNE - But we needed help. There were different people- you needed help from all group members to find care-are you feeling this way?

ANGELA – Yeah a lot of different heads to bounce it off of instead of getting one persons perception.”

Group members went on to comment that the different ways of thinking that each member possessed provided useful feedback to them and allowed them to change their ways of thinking and processing their challenges and their healing. Participants communicated that group members did not always getting along; but despite these conflicts, there existed a motivation to continue showing up and actively working on their healing.

“Yeah, I would agree with that, like the human element to the whole thing is well worth the time you put into it, and even the struggles that you come here trying to work through or the conflict of personalities that you might have, just for the sake that somebody might sway this one sentence and it makes a whole chunk of stuff make sense to you, you can process an entire event, just because you heard them say that this made them scared

or...having just so many different voices come at you all at once it helps out, it helps to keep other things in mind than just how you normally think things through.” (ANGELA)

Participants went on to comment that group members support one another through unconditional positive regard, and one hundred percent support. Members communicated that sometimes they needed different things from their groups’ members; sometimes they needed to be challenged and tested, other times they just needed to be heard. Participants said that they had other supports in their lives who would listen to them; but they needed to know that their experiences have been truly *heard* and understood, and not just listened to.

“SUSAN – Cold hands, crying shoulders...Kick me, punch me, let me slap you...(Laughs)

SUSAN – Yeah no, just support one hundred percent, just one hundred percent.

EMILY – Being there.

DIANNE – To listen.

SUSAN – Girl power.

ANGELA – Unconditional positive regard, isn’t that what they call it?”

“I always had a screaming voice to hear, to, I wanted to tell my story and I couldn’t- and felt like I couldn’t get anybody to listen so, at least when I came here my few minutes or whatever I got my own time. And I felt like I had a person that was listening.”

(DIANNE)

The participants characterized the group atmosphere as accepting, non-judgmental, honest, and open. This atmosphere is in part due to the normalizing experience of being able to

discuss their abuse history and progress in healing with other survivors who can identify with one another's story and provide unconditional support.

"And you just accept every emotion it doesn't matter what emotion it is...It was accepted, like, you could be happy, you could be angry sad confused, any emotion or feeling, it was always accepted, you're never judged for anything." (SUSAN)

The normalization of participants' experiences was in part due to the presence of the older "veterans" who had been participating in group for some time. These older, more experienced members provided a model-framework of progressive healing from which the younger less experienced members could attend to and work towards.

"I like being in a group of people who are all there for the same reason. Like it made me so much more comfortable, made me learn a lot about things and, when your- when I was in a group with other survivors, we were all at different stages in our healing so this persons' stage might help me get to that stage and it was always like a stepping stone to get to- to move on for me, so that was really helpful with just having a group setting."  
(SUSAN)

## Goals

Participants were asked what goals they have that they would like to achieve as a result of participating in the Revive groups. Members communicated that their goals were largely personally oriented and defined; they wanted to empower themselves so that they could return to being fully engaged members of society.

"I wanted, I personally wanted to achieve personal strength and...I wanted, my goal, I reached my goal... like I did a lot of therapy here, for a couple years and, I reached my goal, like I became that strong person, and I got all the strength I needed to stand up and

tell my story, and when I tell my story I say- you know I say it right from the heart in hopes to touch at least one person, like, out of everybody that's listening at that moment."

(SUSAN)

One member communicated that her goals have changed throughout her time as a member of the Revive program. She comments that the process of goal settings is not static; she re-evaluates and re-defines her goals and progress on a continuous basis.

"I think when I started my goal was zen, like I didn't even have an idea of what I wanted, I was just like I just need to fix this, this being me. Um, and I think my goal now is to get myself to the point where hopefully I can mentally process what I go through- like hopefully where I can handle my stress level on a daily basis, cause that was really what the problem was. Um, so goal setting, I use that term fairly loosely because you don't really start with one and you don't really work towards one you're sort of revising it every week that you come, until you can do it own your own and just be self-sufficient, so I guess a goal of mine is independence, or interdependence, outside of group."

(ANGELA)

Another prominent goal that the women communicated was to be empowered to help other women who had been abused. Participants wanted to take their healing, their knowledge, and mobilize it to assist other women who were suffering. These women communicated that they wanted to spread the healing, to make use of what they had gained, and to pass it off to others in the hopes that they can walk along side other women in need.

"And I think in the end I hope to be able someday to be able to stand beside somebody else, and that this is something that you can work through and you can get to a place where it's okay...I didn't have goals about you know that I wanted to become a social

worker or nothing like that, I just wanted to be with other women work with other women that had gone through the same processes I had just to say I know where you've been, that's all, that's all I wanted to do was just to be able to share my own experience, just like we're doing, just to be able to know what I was sharing, yeah." (EMILY)

Group members expressed a strong conviction to get themselves to a place where their abuse did not define their identity. Several participants communicated that they want to work on their path of healing such that they get to a place where their history and what has happened to them does not define who they are.

"And another goal for me is I don't want this to be the only thing in my life" (DIANNE)

"For me, for me with that, it was my life for so many years, that was it, every time I was hospitalized it was because I was sexually abused, every time I needed therapy it was because I was sexually abused...everything was because I was sexually abused, now, I don't ever even think about my sexual abuse, like nothing in my life that goes wrong...I never use that anymore, like I never say oh its because this happened, oh its because this happened to me, cause its not...its not who I am, that abuse is not me." (SUSAN)

The above quote is from a participant who has graduated from group and no longer participates, and is illustrative of the progress that group members can make. Through the work she has done in the Revive groups, she has fulfilled her goal of not letting the abuse define her and her life.

When participants were asked what the goal of the program was, they were tentative about stating an over arching goal for the program. Participants discussed the goal of the program further, and decided that it was unconditional and continued support.

"SUSAN – That's what I would say is support.

EMILY – Yeah support...

SUSAN – If there is a goal.

ANGELA – Support and keeping communication open..."

Members went on to describe that one of the central goals of the program is to provide a time and space for individuals to deal with their experiences of sexual abuse. Members communicated that there were little other options for discussing sexual abuse and for receiving support. Therefore, just by the program existing it was fulfilling one of its goals of providing a safe and open space for individuals in need.

"I found the outside world can't handle the topic. I was growing up in a topic that couldn't be handled – to me, at the beginning, talking about sexual abuse, how do you talk about it? So at least here once you get through these walls you're allowed to talk about it, it's not a bad thing...But I guess once you take that whole stigma off it, you take the power away from it, it's, it's just um something that you deal with. I think you get to a level that's liveable." (DIANNE)

### Needs Fulfillment

Participants were asked what needs they had that were fulfilled through their membership in Revive. Participants responded with a number of needs that they felt they had met through participating in Revive: permission to speak and be heard, to be absolved of guilt and blame, to share their story and be believed, to learn from others who have similar experiences, and to have a safe space where they can begin their journey of healing.

"The need to feel heard was definitely a big one for me. And believed, like, that was my biggest fear was not – I was not going to be believed, like no one was going to believe my story so, um. Just being heard and believed were to big ones for me." (SUSAN)

“Feeling safe was huge. Um, this was the first safest place I ever I was able to speak. And being told that it wasn’t my fault, cause I think that’s why I kept it quiet for twenty five years is cause the way I was responsible, even though I didn’t understand it.” (DIANNE)

One participant commented that she felt the Revive program address and can fulfill all of the needs that a survivor may have.

“I would tell somebody that...um...it’s a program that supports you and offers, um, just offers everything someone needs at that time in their life going through something as sexual abuse.”(SUSAN)

Another participant communicated that the Revive groups could be particularly useful for survivors who are going through court and legal processes.

“...but I really do agree that that outside contact, for the sake of discussing what you discuss here, was really, was really pretty necessary. I would argue if anything that Revive really comes in handy for the people who are going through the processing, or going through, either the legal, the mental aspect of processing what they had gone through...” (ANGELA)

One participant went on to explain how the Revive groups provide empathetic ears and an opportunity to feel human again.

“Oh like...well a lot of human needs like I didn’t – before coming to group I didn’t feel like I had a lot of human contact that was empathetic, that was it, the need to feel human because I was emotionally entirely out of touch, um, to be heard, to be seen, to be – to have other people okay with what happened with you and not be willing to sweep it under the rug, but just a place where your verbal about your abuse and there’s (no)

judgment...because when you come forward everybody else's is negative emotions get dumped on you because they can't handle what you went through, and that was a big kicker I think." (ANGELA)

## Restorative Justice

Focus group participants were asked how they define restorative justice, and how they see restorative justice principles applied in the Revive program. Their responses centered on the idea that restorative justice attempts to repair both people and relationships, as well as their frustrations with the traditional justice system and their thoughts on how restorative justice alleviates those frustrations.

"I think well, personally, I – I'm a pretty firm believer in restorative justice and I think the reason why is because it wants to maintain the fact that, well it wants to maintain humanity right, we're all human beings and we have emotions and the prison system functions to a certain extent, it gets – its an attempt in a way to create safety, or the illusion of safety, and it does its job in that it isolates the people who cant control their behaviours or don't control their behaviours, but it doesn't – the penal system doesn't keep in my mind that I am emotionally hurt by what happened and that I do not want to feel like a victim for the rest of my life I don't want that to carry forward, and that one of the keys to that is an open and forgiving confrontation with the person who hurt me. It tries to incorporate human relationships into the system of punishment that we've built."

(ANGELA)

The above quote illustrates this participants need to be empowered and to not be labelled as a victim for the rest of her life. This quote also communicates this participants desire to confront her abuser in order to ask questions and get answers. She goes on to express her frustration with



her experience within the legal system, as the goals held in the justice process fell through and she was let down. She goes on to express what she feels she needs to heal.

“I think I said before like my experience was so unsatisfying, like it was a confrontation like basically the admission was pulled out of me I didn’t – I was fine with not talking about it but it was pulled out of me and then when I talked about it was shut down, like basically other people said okay well I guess now we have to do something about it because it’s still on going and so I was like well okay let’s go let’s do this put the bugger in jail, and I was really ecstatic because I thought that coming forward with it was going to fix my relationships with my parents it was going to fix my relationships here it was going to do this for me it was going to do that for me, and it just all kind of – like I kind of watched it crumble, and then to top it all off after I think he ended up getting he ended up getting a year and a half which meant that he served eight months...I got a form letter that somebody wrote down for him (her abuser) and he copied out, it was so unsatisfying, and then basically it was all the rest was all carry over after that so I think that if I would have had at some point somebody intervening and saying what do you need out of this or what are you not getting right now, then I would have known to ask for it I had that in me to say no like look I need to talk to him and I need to hear it from him to hear his sincerity or lack thereof or to feel any closure cause that was just my beef was like I never got to say my piece it was other people moving forward with it, and so for me restorative justice would have somehow actually been, because it was within the family actually dealing with it as a unit and not letting it sever us the way it ended up doing, so I think that that’s what it could have been.” (ANGELA)

During the focus group, one of participants shared her story regarding her confrontation with her abuser through CJI's victim-offender reconciliation program. This programs purpose is to allow survivors of sexual abuse to confront their abusers in a safe and honest environment, with the support of a trained mediator. The goal of the program is for survivors to confront their abusers in order to ask questions, get answers, and communicate the impact that the harm has had on them. For the offender, the goal is for them to hear and understand the harm they have caused, and to be given an opportunity to take responsibility for the harm they have causes as well as express their remorse and explain their actions. The woman participant in the focus group who had undergone this mediation told her story of how initially she was pleased with the process until her abuser pulled out of the program and stopped communicating with her.

“What I really learned from that was, I was taught how to respect an offender...it worked real well at first with my brother cause things – I know that they were working with my brother but then my brother quit and he changed ship, he quit on me. Then I also got help with my parents. And then my parents have rejected CJI and I've been kind of left alone but, it was really awesome to have had that type of support because that's, for myself it's been wonderful not to have to go through the court system, and because it's so late yeah I don't think for myself that the court system is really worth while because I didn't feel that brother was abusing anybody no more, it seemed fairly safe, and, you don't have that damage or whatever, I don't think as much of that damage, so that was really good. I don't think I would have been so respected of my brother if I hadn't been guided and supported...But it does work, because I feel like I can respect him, now. Its just that's...you separate the person and I'm grateful that I went this road.” (DIANNE)

While she expresses her frustration with the mediation process when her brother pulled out of the program, she discusses how she has regained respect for her brother, and how she can separate her brother from his very harmful actions; his past behaviours do not define how she views him.

Another participant had listened to the above woman's story, and how she had never charged her abusive brother. This participant went on to discuss her experiences within the court system and how she looks back upon the two years she spent charging her abusers as the worst years of her life. She then goes on to discuss that one of her abusers, her father, had joined the Revive program to work on his issues after serving time in prison, and she discusses the change he has made throughout.

"I've heard you say a couple of times tonight, mentioning that you didn't charge your brother like you didn't go through the process of going to court...and let me tell you those two years of my life, I would trade them for anything cause it was the worst two years of my life. It took two years – two years I had to go to court, every six weeks, then three weeks, then four months, then one week, and it was just remanded remanded remanded. Worst thing ever. I could have cared less that my dad went to jail, I could care less that his best friend went to jail, but I put them both there – like what they did put them there, and the only reason why they even got charged...like once I disclosed my abuse to the guidance counsellor they had to report it to everybody down the legal system, I probably never would have charged them on my own, um. I don't think my dad got any rehabilitation from being in prison, he served two and a half years, got sentenced to five years, went and did the big Kingston pen – um – it's a screwed up system in my eyes like my mom was there every weekend she'd sleep in a townhouse with them, and

they had my little brother and they'd rent movies and have family weekends like it was just ridiculous, he's in a federal prison for sexual abuse and my mom's spending the weekend there. Um, but, I believe CJI made a big difference for my dad, like changed him, like he still goes to therapy to this day, um, he just needs to do that work on his own, and I just, yeah, I hate our legal system, I much different now that I've been with CJI and I've learned more about restorative justice and about rehabilitation and stuff, back then I was like, put him in a fucking jail for twenty five years, like he needs to go to jail, cut off his penis, like I was just this angry, for everything, but I would never suggest that like I would never think like that now, like I think that everybody who goes through court should come through CJI and let them work their magic, like do something, help them... And I accept that, I accept him for who he is, like I accept that that's who he is and...yeah, I trust that he wouldn't do anything, I feel completely comfortable with him in presence, like him and I by ourselves go on a road trip like that's totally fine with me, like I don't feel any fear or that he would ever harm me again. But, yeah, he was – it just sounds funny saying that out loud cause he ways by far the most serious abuser out of all my abusers, and he's the only one I would ever forgive I have no interest to forgive anybody else.” (SUSAN)

This woman communicated that the Revive program has been instrumental in her healing and in her fathers' ability to remediate himself and work on his issues. She went on to talk about a recent experience that she had with her father, when she received an apology that she was neither expecting nor looking for.

“I love him like I live with him, I don’t, they don’t go to bed without calling me to say goodnight, him and my mom like I have such a powerful relationship with them today more so than I’ve had with my parents in my entire life, so I don’t know.” (SUSAN)

“Did you know that last Friday was the first time my father has ever apologized, ever. I was crying he was crying, I was phoning all my friends you’ll never believe what just happened, you know like that was a huge thing, but it took a long time, like he’s had plenty of opportunity in the past fifteen years to apologize, but never, and all of a sudden he just started crying and we were having a heart to heart about my life and just things and he was sobbing on my shoulder and I thought what the hell, and then he whispered in my ear I’m so sorry for everything I’ve ever done, and he just kept saying I’m sorry I’m sorry” (SUSAN)

“I never ever wanted an apology like I never waited, when people would ask me that question in seminars and stuff I’d just say no and that would be it, I would never go oh but I really want to hear someone say they’re sorry, because I didn’t really care if they apologized I didn’t need to hear it. But when I actually heard the apology unexpectedly, it was like my heart just you know, it just sank. I was like oh my god, I never thought I cared about an apology but I guess my heart did.” (SUSAN)

The above quotes demonstrate the powerful healing opportunities that restorative justice has provided this individual. She credits her strength and ability to heal with the work she has been able to accomplish through her membership in Revive. As well, she recounts how her

relationship with her parents and her father specifically, has begun to heal as a result of the progress they have both been able to achieve.

Near the end of the focus group, participants began to discuss the topic of sexual abuse in relation to awareness and public education. Participants expressed a frustration in the public's narrow view of sexual abuse, and the lack of dissemination of information regarding self-protection and general awareness regarding sexual abuse. As a result of this frustration, participants expressed the desire to become empowered to disseminate information and educate the public about sexual abuse in hopes that this awareness will lower the stigma associated with being a survivor as well as to advocate for victims to come forward and receive support. One participant discussed how she feels that society's perception that only a certain percentage of offenders can be safely supported in the community can be improved as a result of the work that the Revive program is engaged in.

"I had a – I don't know if anybody else heard this line but I – there used to be, I used to called it an old wives tale, that only three percent of offenders can be cured and I believe that they're killing that whole theory here. Um, that people are definitely, there's healing if your willing to do the work, and that percentage is not true. We saw a film that was sponsored by CJI that – I just, learned incest, family tragedy or whatever, and I think if you want to kill sexual abuse you've gotta go and get people speakin' and talkin', that's the answer, and here at least that's exactly what they do, they just talk...But if somebody holds them (offender) accountable, I think that's the answer, that's the healing, is if they don't get away with it no more, so if everybody starts talking about it it ain't going to happen. I don't know, and I think that's the secret, to fight sexual abuse, is we got to start talking about it. (DIANNE)

The woman survivor group members were passionate about talking about the topic of sexual abuse, and creating public awareness of the issue. They communicated that in order to take the stigma off of sexual abuse and to effectively deal with the aftermath of the harm the general public must be willing to discuss the topic openly, and that through dealing with sexual abuse as a taboo topic only talked about behind closed doors we are exacerbating the problem. Two participants described how they are empowered to become an advocate for openly discussing sexual abuse. They both believed that it was necessary to educate young people on how they can protect themselves, in order to reduce the number of future victims.

“...so one person can affect a hundred other people in their lives, well if somewhere along the lines, if number one, number seven, or number fifty would have said something and been believed, then it would have saved number fifty one through hundred and one.”

(ANGELA)

“I just, I have like this, power in me to just go and talk to grade ones and grades threes and grade fives, and tell everybody, and just do like abuse prevention, and I’m not allowed, like Richard, like I ask all the time, get me into the schools let me have it – let me have a gym full of grade six kids, like, because when I was in grade six I would have loved to hear somebody come up to me and say you know what my dad did this to me, because you know what maybe I would have said to them it’s happening right now, but its not talked about its so dammed shut and put in the closet that kids are never going to come out and tell you at a young age, and by the time they come tell you there’s – its, its never too late to tell, but by the time they do tell you or by the time someone does disclose abuse when they’re in their thirties or their forties, and its like why didn’t you

tell us why didn't you tell us, because no one talks about it. You're not allowed to talk about it, that's what it feels like, and I would – like I have this dream, I will get in those schools boards, my dream will happen, I don't know how I'm going to do it but I'm going to convince the principles or something..."(SUSAN)

### Emergent Codes

The following codes were created from emerging themes that became apparent after reading through the transcripts for a priori codes. Definitions were created for codes as they emerged, and the transcripts were re-read to conduct explicit analysis for these newly emerged codes. Four emergent codes were identified from the transcripts: check-in / check-out, administration and staff, no agenda, and support.

### Check-in / Check-out

Throughout the women's survivor focus group, participants discussed their process of checking in and out at the beginning and end of each group. They described the function of the check-ins as a way to start off the group each night and gauge how members are feeling and how their past week has been. The check-ins provides members with an opportunity to state that they need assistance that evening on a particular topic, or, that they are in crisis and in need of support.

"But, so then you know right at the beginning oh, Jim, Mary, and Jenna they all need tonight so the other group members are pre-warned and they know that they might get to talk, like I think that's a good set up to have a check-in." (SUSAN)



The function of the check-out and the end of each group is to provide feedback to members on how the night went, and to gauge how members feel leaving the group; to ensure that everyone is of sound mind.

“Just state how your doing for the week and if you need time, and what that time might involve – conversation topic....This person always asked uh – we had self-care-what are you doing for self-care this week, in your check-out...So then they would tell you how your doing or how were you feeling or what was – if something happened your response to the group for the night or whatever just to – its kind of a check to see how your doing when you check out. So check-in is how your feeling coming into group and check-out is how you’re feeling coming out of group. And fine is not okay.” (DIANNE)

#### Administration & Staff

During the focus group, the participants often commented on the role of the administration and staff of CJI and the Revive program. Group members commented that both the service and program coordinators for Revive were instrumental in providing them with support, both inside and outside of the Revive groups. One woman commented that while she had not been involved with CJI in a few years, she still felt like she had ongoing support from the staff; that she could drop-in or call for crisis support whenever she needed it.

“I still volunteer here but to actually be a group member or anything and I could call Jenn or Richard at the drop of a dime if I was in crisis and they would be there. To me that’s what keeps me coming back” (SUSAN)

During the focus group participants were asked what role the facilitators play in the groups, and to describe their experiences with the facilitators. Group members commented that the facilitators provided structure to the group, and offered their perspective as support.

“There was a, like, like just those nights when you’re just really angry and you just really want to talk about it, and it was safe to be angry here too, there was a leash put on it by the facilitators which was nice cause they didn’t let it get out of hand where you’re just like uselessly angry...” (ANGELA)

“We’ve had some – some facilitators have been able to take a feeling and you work through it, and this whole possessing stuff, and it just all of a sudden comes alive and even if your not the person, even if its somebody else, when they walk through the steps on the board all of a sudden it works...” (DIANNE)

Another role of the facilitators that the participants mentioned was that of challenging the group members in their negative thoughts and feelings; as the following group member describes, not letting her get away with her delusions. This participant also communicates that she appreciates their impartiality and distance they have as non-survivors.

“I didn’t ever feel like the facilitators...they’re a listening ear and I sort of liked the impartiality that they have, I like that distance, because for me some of the problems were looking for dependency, and to know that I could come here and somebody was going to tell it me pretty straight was a nice thing, they weren’t going to let me get away with my delusions.” (ANGELA)

“Yeah because if they weren’t, if they were just there to kind of, sit in a pile of crap or you know yeah maybe get pity, some people like to sit in pity, then they really dragged the group down, and it wasn’t so much that the group members challenged them so much as the facilitators, that challenging really seemed to be left up the facilitators, um, because the group members-I don’t really remember were that comfortable at doing that.”

(EMILY)

### No Agenda

Participants discussed the fact that the groups did not have an agenda from week to week and it was up to the facilitators and group members to decide on a relevant topic to discuss. Participants commented that it was beneficial that there was no set topic for each meeting, and that they could receive crisis support if they identified an issue they were having that particular week. As well, one participant went on to describe that members may not be in need of structured support on a given week, but that through listening to another group member share their troubles or tribulations would provide them with insight into their own issues and healing.

“I really liked it, the set up like that, you know not going home and thinking about my god I need three answers for this question for next week, or just walking in and she could talk or she could talk first and she could take thirty five minutes of the hour, or the first hour, I liked that, its funny cause in individual therapy I’m the complete opposite, I need the structure...but for group therapy I was just, I loved that it was no structure and just walk in and – sometimes I didn’t even talk in group because other people needed it, and I was perfectly fine with that because listening to somebody speak and tell their story I always got something from it for my own healing and I didn’t need to necessarily talk,

and I felt comfortable with the silence, but in one to one therapy it was the complete opposite I – I – group therapy for me all the way.” (SUSAN)

Another participant described how there were given weeks where no group member was in crisis or needed support on a particular topic; as a result it was up to the facilitator to start the discussion.

“Uh yeah I was thinking about it too like I like that anybody can sort of take off and take their own time to it – I do think that there’s nights when people are just non-communicative or there’s just nothing to say there’s nothing really that’s come up because you do meet every week, and it would be nice on those nights to have- for the facilitators to have a topic in mind...” (ANGELA)

## Support

During the focus group, the women participants often talked about the support they received from different parts of the Revive program: the group, facilitators, and the administration and staff. Five codes were created to summarize the different forms of support that members communicated having received: Emotional, informational, tangible, support beyond group, and unique support.

Emotional support was defined and characterized by members providing a listening ear, providing feedback, suggesting plans of action, and having a safe place to tell their story. The following quote is from a woman participant who communicated that she needed to be supported through being taught how to live with and love herself.

“...it was get me to a point where I can exist in society, truly exist in society, where I don’t feel as though I’m just going to- as though I have horns on my head, as though I’m constantly shrinking within myself to avoid looking at myself, you know it was no longer

about the world being afraid or the world looking at me, but it was being so absolutely utterly disgusted, not in what the world had done to me but in what I had done to myself. It was about coming to CJI and saying teach me how to live with myself in this world, I don't learn to learn how to live with you guys I want somebody to teach me how do I love myself...that's all I wanted to do was just to be able to share my own experience, just like we're doing, just to be able to know what I was sharing, yeah. And to say it with heart and with passion, yeah, cause I didn't want to have anybody talk to me from the head, the last thing I wanted was somebody to talk to me from the head cause a survivor knows who's coming at them from head and who's coming at them from the heart"

(EMILY)

The above quote communicates that this group member felt that she received unique emotional support through Revive, by having other survivors listen to her story and talk to her from the heart.

Emotional support was also characterized by unconditional acceptance of other group members. Group members commented that they provide each other with unconditional and ongoing support; there is never any fear of being judged, blamed, or scrutinized.

"Yeah no, just support one hundred percent, just one hundred percent." (SUSAN)

"Unconditional positive regard, isn't that what they call it?" (ANGELA)

"I always had a screaming voice to hear, to, I wanted to tell my story and I couldn't- and felt like I couldn't get anybody to listen so, at least when I came here my few minutes or whatever I got my own time. And I felt like I had a person that was listening" (DIANNE)

“And you just accept every emotion it doesn’t matter what emotion it is....” (SUSAN)

Emotional support was defined by the personal growth that members could identify in themselves as a result of participating in Revive. Members communicated that they wanted to achieve personal growth and satisfaction from their own perspective that their abuse history does not define their identity; they are more than a survivor of sexual abuse.

“I’m not happy that I was abused I’m not happy that I’m a survivor of sexual abuse, but you know what it is who it made me, I am what I am because of that, and I’m a great person today, I do a great job at my job, I volunteer, like I am who I am, that’s made me strong, made me who I am, like I’m so accepting of what happened to me and I wouldn’t want to change it. Like it was a struggle and I and fought and fought and fought and fought and said so many times that it was well I don’t know.” (SUSAN)

Informational support was defined by outcomes of the program, or of the support that members provide one another, that lead to participants learning something new to assist in their healing, or being provided with a new perspective or outlook on their situation. Participants communicated that members provided insight into their healing through telling their story and perspective on their own healing.

“I felt when I was here that everybody that was here understood, we all have different pains that everybody has pain, its all the same crap it just comes in on different angles and different ways, so its just nice to see ‘oh, well you got that’ and then you can take that and well I could maybe apply that to myself. So it was nice to compare notes.”

(DIANNE)

One participant described the insight she has gained on the topic of sexual abuse and how it has helped her heal and view her abuser in way that will allow her to safely interact with him. She describes that she knows her father will always be an offender; though he now chooses not to offend.

“My motto always is once an alcoholic always an alcoholic, you just choose not to drink anymore, once an offender always an offender you just choose not to offend anymore, I will always believe that, I don’t know why I started saying that, or where it came from but I truly do believe that. I – one of my main abusers was my stepfather, for thirteen years he sexually abused me everyday of my life, I moved out at sixteen I’m thirty now, I moved back home this summer. Like, just, where I am with my healing process and my forgiveness for what he is, I don’t look at him and think he would never ever do it again – he could do it again cause’ he’s always going to be an offender in my eyes, he’s just choosing not to offend right now, I have a best – my best friend’s an alcoholic, but she’s been you know sober for a year and a half, but she always calls herself an alcoholic, I am an alcoholic, and that’s the way I look at it – like once an offender always an offender it’s just whether or not they choose to act on it.” (SUSAN)

The above quote demonstrates a healing mechanism that this participant had evoked in order to safely and effectively interact with her abuser. She believes that he is consciously choosing not to abuse and she is aware that there is a potential he could abuse someone again, and that knowledge will keep her guard in check.

Participants also commented that they had learned how to speak confidently about themselves and their story, resolve conflict, and evaluate themselves and the change they would like to see in themselves.

“...why I finished is I feel like I’ve got to a place where I can see my self protecting stuff that’s wrong and change that stuff and try to sort out what did I - what is worthy of change and what’s not worthy of change, and what are the traits that I want to keep and what are the traits that I don’t. And I think in the end I hope to be able someday to be able to stand beside somebody else, and that this is something that you can work through and you can get to a place where it’s okay.” (DIANNE)

“(I) Learned how to face- to resolute- resolve conflict... I’m glad that I learned how to face conflict, and you find out that you do survive from it (laughs). I don’t know I never wanted to call anybody on anything, I was afraid of challenging, but I have a lot more confidence now, as long as you do it in a loving way.” (DIANNE)

Tangible support was characterized as concrete support provided by the Revive program that was essential to members healing or recovery. Participants often mentioned that the program provides everything that survivor of sexual abuse needs if they are ready to begin their journey of healing.

“I would tell somebody that...um...it’s a program that supports you and offers, um, just offers everything someone needs at that time in their life going through something as sexual abuse.” (SUSAN)

Tangible support was also characterized by personal learning and growth that came as a result of the reciprocal support and assistance provided for and by the groups’ members. Participants often commented on the change they have seen in themselves or the progress they have made over the years, characterizing the tangible support they have received.



“I learned how to love myself and trust myself, and to trust others, I learned a lot about relationships and how to keep them, how to get rid of the bad ones.” (SUSAN)

Group members communicated that they felt the support they received from the Revive program goes beyond the two hours per week that they are engaged with their group members. Participants commented that there is a personal emotional connection that is established between group members that allows them to feel supported even when not directly engaged with the group. As well, group members frequently commented that the program and service coordinator of the program are consistently available for support whenever it is needed.

“Oh, I like the unique part because when groups’ over its not over, like you can go home you can call a group member, you go home like its very – that personal level again you know, your emotionally connected to all these people. If the group members aren’t available or if group if your done group period, you can call Jenn or Richard, there’s just always somebody to call – it never ends, the support never ends. They would never tell you not to call, they would never tell you just stay away ...I don’t know, its just, its just a much different experience than I’ve experienced anywhere else.” (SUSAN)

The women commented that group members made an effort to exchange phone numbers and keep in contact over the summer break, as they needed the ongoing and distinct support that group members provided.

“Well we were in a different situation because um, when we finished for the summer session, actually the majority of the group did remain in contact outside of group – and I did find it very beneficial if only because I was so um, my individual counselling was so inconsistent and not productive for me that I needed that connection, but I really do agree

that that outside contact, for the sake of discussing what you discuss here, was really, was really pretty necessary.” (ANGELA)

“And I like I said like, came back to having support outside the group as well, somebody to call when you were feeling pretty dumpy.” (ANGELA)

Throughout the focus group, participants communicated that they felt that they received distinct support through the Revive program that they were not provided with apart from group. Women group members commented that the connections they have made with other survivors in the program has provided them with opportunities to normalize their own experiences and learn from their group members

“Well, it’s definitely um, a lot of being able to relate to each others’ stories, cause I know we connected quite a bit, which was nice for me, that was a little bit of a security measure that there was at least somebody who had a very empathetic ear for what I had personally gone through. The fact that its conversational helps a little bit too, its not, um, its not just one person sort of actively listening to you, it’s a person asking questions and asking you to further divulge and to really think through what you’re, even what you’re experience was instead of asking you to sort through the baggage all at once, just to tell you’re whole story and put it out there.” (ANGELA)

“If I didn’t have this for the last for the last while I would have had no where to go, until I began, so for me CJI has a connection...when I was really desperate for, when I’m really vulnerable and desperate they are there, and they’re a facility that I think I could trust in that way, so...” (DIANNE)

Several of the participants compared the group atmosphere to their experiences in individual counselling. Participants commented that the group atmosphere was one in which they could share their story honestly and feel that they were heard and understood. One participant described the group as a healthy community in which they both give and receive support.

“I would never ever suggest one on one therapy, I know there’s a lot of people out there who like one on one therapy over group therapy, and people have fears of group therapy, but I wish I could be an advocate of group therapy...” (SUSAN)

“You cant get that, like, in – what you get in individual is just basically you working on yourself, but this is a community – and I think, I feel like it’s neat that you get the help and then there’s going to be a point in time where you get to also give, and to support and help others, so you get both of it, that’s part of the healthy growing community.”

(DIANNE)

One participant continued by commenting that even though she is no longer a member in the program and does not participate in the group, the staff of the program are still communicating with her and providing support.

“And its nice to know that even though I’m not a group member and I’m not even volunteering...its nice to know that I’m doing such a little thing for CJI but they’re doing such a big thing for me still...I haven’t been here at all and that’s not like me either but its good to know that I could be gone for so long and not volunteer, not give them any of my services, and then come back and its just left the same. They offer so much and I give so little...it’s nice.” (SUSAN)

Members communicated several times, as evidenced by the above quotes, that the support they receive from the Revive groups is distinct from all other forms of support they receive. Through talking, listening, and working through their issues while standing along side other survivors, group members feel unconditionally supported, understood, and encouraged to continue to work on their healing. With the support of the Revive program, these survivors have been empowered to overcome the harm they have endured and hold their head high, as they walk alongside and continue to support other survivors of sexual abuse.

### Men Who Have Offended Sexually

#### A Priori Codes

#### Hearing about and Choosing Revive / First Experiences

The first question that participants were asked during the focus group was how they came to learn about the Revive program. When group members were asked how they heard of the program, probation officers and/or individual counsellors were cited as referral sources. A majority of the members attended an education group which provided content on the offender cycle, re-offending, and proactive therapy. They received this informational group either through CJI or another unidentified source. Through this educational group, the men were given an unspecified number of classes in which they were educated on the offenders' cycle, triggers, red-flags, and other relevant topics that they would likely be discussing in their Revive support group. Group members were then asked by the principle investigator if the education they received helped facilitate their entry into the Revive group: (I = interviewer)

"I – Do you think it helped facilitate your entry into this group in any way?"

MICHAEL – Oh yes...understanding that there are patterns that there are behaviours and processes that you don't even realize are happening to you. And once you realize, that you can recognize your behaviour and, you can correct it before it actually winds up as an offence."

This educational group provided them with an initial foundation from which to begin their work on their thought processes and offending behaviours. Participants were provided with information about offending behaviours, grooming, and the offenders cycle; information and knowledge they would then take into their weekly Revive groups as points of discussion. The information provided also gave group members a base from which to reflect upon their own past behaviours, negative thought processes, and their potential future progress.

"I think the education prior was, I mean had I not done that it would have been a lot worse, coming to group the first time, we were all brand new in that group and so you were I guess sort of just testing the waters a little bit and weren't just thrown in to, I wouldn't say sharks but you know that kind of thing." (RICHARD)

Participants mentioned that their counsellors often suggested that they participate in a mutual-aid group to meet and relate to others who have similar histories.

"Again my counsellor thought there would be more, a there's things you could relate to better maybe than just from someone who hasn't offended sexually but also I mean the challenges you get maybe from people here would be different...it's different backgrounds sort of coming at you making you things of maybe you didn't prior to some." (RICHARD)

Participants also communicated feeling like there were limited things they could learn from a one on one counsellor, and that the Revive group provided a place where they were listened to, understood, and given what they felt was useful feedback:

“You can only so much from a one-on-one counsellor that hasn’t offended and you get to come here and get that extra you know perspective, and know, you start to identify certain similarities...I remember once...I brought up how long maybe do you let a spouse hold it over you or feel guilty, and everyone was nodding...oh I can identify with that...we were all here for something different but there was, something good to talk about...” (RICHARD)

From this common ground, members of the group better understood their groups’ members, where they were coming from, the shame and guilt attached to their behaviours; as well they were able to ask the right questions and challenge each other initially to tell their full story and hold nothing back.

“Common ground (cough), I like that common ground and uh. My first night here when I talked about offence I made it very vague and kind of kept it short and sweet, and questions were asked. I mean they immediately knew what questions to go, knowing the offender cycle and it starts and it ends at a certain place and they, in no time they asked the right questions and got that out of me. But I was holding back initially.” (ERIC)

“You can get past the shame, you learn that. Yes you’ve done something.”  
(JOHN)

When participants were asked why they participated in the groups, they responded that their shared experiences, challenges and needs, as well as the motivation to talk and listen and learn from others with similar pasts were strong motivating factors.

“I think it was being able to relate to people that had similar offences, rather than just being individual and talking with somebody that was educated, you’re actually talking with other people who have had the same experiences as you have.” (MICHAEL)

“Basically we’ve all done wrong. We can admit that here, we talk. That I think what bring us all together.” (TIMOTHY)

Participants entry into group, and their initial anxiety about sharing their story of offending, was eased and calmed by the relaxed and straightforward attitudes of their groups’ members.

Participants communicated that while they may have very different pasts, offending history, and personal issues, they were all here because of a shared history of sexual offending. This realization that others shared their experiences allowed members to open up and tell one another their challenges and distortions surround their sexuality.

“Just the atmosphere of being here, it’s like nobody’s here to judge you.”  
(JOHN)

“Yeah very anxious. Upon the night coming here. Gosh you know, and uh, you know, but you kind of, after a couple weeks of trying anything then you get a feeling for it. And uh, at the moment it’s where I belong.” (ERIC)

As well, one member commented that there were subtle things about the group atmosphere and group room that eased his entry:

“...to be honest it sounds so lame but, the light was even dimmer when I came in for my first night it was almost like a very dark room, and this, it’s just one of the those subtle things that uh, you know you’re not under the spotlight that kind of thing, it was pure voice and you could be as honest as you could possibly be and not feel like eyes are boring holes through yours.” (ERIC)

Participants were asked if they ever felt like they were forced or coerced to attend the Revive groups. They said that they at no point felt coerced into attending the groups, and they communicated a personal motivation to attend group in order to work on themselves.

“MICHAEL – No I choose to be here.

RICHARD – Same, as well for me I, well I didn’t know it existed and then once I did I mean I thought that it could only help in that sense and if it was a little bit then that’s fine if it’s a lot even better... You only get out what you put in that kind of thing, if you didn’t, keep it all to yourself, then once, you’re not going to get any help out of it so.”

#### Characteristics of Revive

Participants were asked to describe the Revive program to someone who had not heard of it before. Participants initially described the program as central to their healing and remediation. They communicated that they felt that there were little other options for support; elsewhere they were judged and scrutinized, but in Revive they were accepted, listened to, and allowed to speak honestly about their challenges, distortions and their offences. They also communicated that the fact that there were facilitators that had no offending past who would sit with them and work out their issues with them, meant a great deal.

“Just having come out of jail and actually starting into society and being rejected ah, feeling shame and guilt, the facilitators first of all were accepting. So you had, I don’t



want to use the word normal members of society...members of society who hadn't offended, who, were accepting, which allowed me to just take a deep breath and say at least there's somebody somewhere that will take the time to listen and then to get involved with other offenders and to share their stories, so the whole group of non-offenders and offenders was, it was really helping me to reintegrate into society because, zero esteem, shame guilt everything like you're pretty crushed and it allowed me to start to rebuild myself and start looking at being a contributing member of society to start taking pride in myself, to find work, to find a place to stay that's self supporting and look towards rebuilding my life rather than just walking around for no other better word with my head down." (MICHAEL)

The fact that the program was even offered meant a lot to them. These men are given a time and space to discuss their very personal issues; where ordinarily they would be judged and shamed for talking about their offences.

"So it started from right from first of all the program being there" (MICHAEL)

"It gives me a place to talk, where I normally wouldn't have. Um, my charges I can't really go talk to just anybody. I feel I have to, and this is the place, for me." (TIMOTHY)

Participants described that they were at ease, comfortable, and safe in the group environment.

The atmosphere of the groups were inviting and open, such that they could reveal their past offences and try to move forward with the help of their group members.

"I'm so comfortable with myself when I come here, just bring it all out, bring it out, bring it up bring it in again it doesn't matter, I can handle it, I can handle it in this group... You need to vent and this is the only place you're safe enough, at least, you feel safe enough to vent." (TIMOTHY)

The men emphasized the level of honesty and openness in group. They thought that this was vital to their remediation and support, as in the past they often had to conceal their thoughts and behaviours, and the only way to move forward and work on themselves was to no longer keep them a secret and to discuss them with others.

“I think one of the things that I noticed that’s unique when I’m in this room as versus outside of this room, is the level of honesty here I don’t find anywhere else. I find people have masks...they won’t be honest they won’t tell you what they think, they don’t want to be seen...all the people that I’ve gotten to know here, nobody’s held back. They say what’s almost hurtful to them, to get the feedback. So the level of honesty that I find here is, and that I bring myself personally, I am honest here and I believe that everybody else is, and that’s unique, that’s not out in the normal world.” (MICHAEL)

They went on to express that offenders know offenders’ thoughts, behaviours and actions. They communicated that the level of honesty was necessary to do the work they needed to do, but also, that they know how other offenders think and therefore they were in a good position to call out and challenge others in situations where they were not being completely honest.

“I – Is that (honesty) necessary for the program?

MICHAEL – For me it is, I won’t speak for anybody else, for me it is.

ERIC – I think if you want to heal, if you want to move on, you do not want to fall into that pattern again.

RICHARD – So if you come in with a mask on as it were, I don’t think, I think everyone would realize within about five minutes and you would be in the hot seat and it would be the best point, they’d challenge you to take off right, so.”

Participants were asked what it was like sharing their very personal and work on their own issues with a group of relative strangers. They find sharing their story with a group of relative strangers liberating. They believe what they hear, partially because they believe in the level of honesty, and the thinking that those with “masks on” will be identified and challenged very quickly.

“Liberating...I believe what I hear here. Because of that honesty. You don’t second guess it, everything else I hear in other places you wonder okay well is it, is there an ulterior motive is there a hidden agenda or whatever. But here you actually look at what the other group member is giving you and you roll around like, for the whole week, you think about it, because you actually believe what they said. Okay, am I like that, do I behave like that, should I behave like that. And you really take it to heart that there is, there is some realness in it.” (MICHAEL)

“Something that I really like to hear from one of the guys that’s not here tonight, at the end of it usually checking out its like, ‘I like the honesty here tonight’, he makes that comment, and that’s cool.” (ERIC)

How does the program support its members?

Participants were asked how and in what ways does the program function to support its members. Group members commented that just the existence of a program with a mission to support men who have offended sexually meant a great deal to them. Having an organization that was willing to walk along side them as they begin to put their lives back in order was central to their therapy and progress.

One of the facilitators asked the members what would happen if the program were not available:

“We certainly wouldn’t be getting any better. I think that our thought processes would just spiral us right back down...”(MICHAEL)

“I would be at home battling myself... And it’s not a very good feeling to just – I still do that. I look forward to coming here – just to uh, get my head straight. I couldn’t do it without this group.” (TIMOTHY)

“Yeah, and, I feel good when I leave here, and I look forward to coming here, you know.

It’s – definitely part of the road of recovery, the road to a better life.” (ERIC)

When asked how the group and the program supports them and their healing, participants commented that the program is unique as it provides them with the opportunity to talk to, relate to, learn from, and help other men who have offended sexually who are attempting to reintegrate back into society; a type of connection and support they do not receive anywhere else.

The group members commented that they generally feel like they are isolated from society, they’ve lost friends and relationships, and being in Revive helps reduce that isolation.

“MICHAEL – So many new perspectives from other people,

ERIC – It’s amazing.

MICHAEL- Yeah, and you’re not isolated, you’re not...

ERIC – You’re not alone.

MICHAEL – You’re not alone.”

“ERIC – Society, this, we’re rejected from society in general. I’ve lost, probably 90%, part of my friends....

MICHAEL – I think that's, isn't that the pariah thing you were talking about where you're just pushed away and squished down and you're nothing... You're worthless, you're...and if you're alone if nobody tells you that you're worth something and nobody else says you know you helped me so obviously you have value, that makes you feel better."

Group members commented that while they had other sources to turn to for support, they took ownership of their issues and actively sought out a place where they could discuss their troubles. Several participants mentioned that while they had friends or family whom they could turn to in crisis, they did not want to constantly burden their loved ones with their issues:

"I know, god love her, she listens to me but this is not problem, this is my problem.

Everybody here has the same problem and I can come here and vent and I have, and uh, they all listen, and they all have, not all but some have some insight, some come back you known which is good, is good, very helpful." (TIMOTHY)

"Been able to confide in only one or two people outside that, it was encouraging that I knew that I could, I have their support and I thought okay maybe the future isn't going to be as crappy as I think, that there are people that are, it's odd I have the odd friend from high school that I don't talk to anymore, but somebody I've known six months and I've talked to, completely fine with, you know, believing that my charge isn't me necessarily." (RICHARD)

How do Revive group members support one another?

Participants said that there were many in ways in which the groups' members supported them: reciprocal support, honesty, challenging one another, learning from the veterans, and

continuing the support outside of group. Reciprocal support, when members both give and receive support to one another, was emphasized by the group members as a key part of the Revive process.

“It doesn’t matter what your problem is, everybody’s here to listen to it, and, to give you words of encouragement or to try to (cough) uh, steer you in a straighter line than where you’re going. Uh, if you find you’re falling back we’re all here to help out, pick you back up.” (JOHN)

“Give you a different point of view sometimes to that you never even thought of... You wind up with this circle thinking but, you don’t think there’s an answer and then somebody provides something that just changes your whole way of thinking... It really feels good when you come up with something that somebody goes yeah I’ll try that. That makes me feel really good, it makes me eager to have somebody give it back to me as well.” (MICHAEL)

“Definitely, especially if somebody’s been having a problem. And if it wasn’t totally resolved that night, then the following week you, you think about it all week, then you come up with something maybe that nobody did during that night and you can let them know the following week... It doesn’t matter how small the issues, issue seems to you, everybody else is there to look at it and pick it apart, see what can be done about it. Which is great.” (JOHN)

In addition to members providing each other with advice and different points of view, members are expected to challenge one another and keep the level of honesty high. They felt that

other men who had offended were in an ideal place to challenge them to change their ways of thinking such as minimizing their offence or putting blame on the victim.

“And uh, the group idea is uh, pretty amazing and very powerful. I mean, um, you know sometimes we question each other and we probe until we get the answers that we’re looking for cause you can’t really fool us because we’re on the same page, you know.”

(ERIC)

In addition to challenging members, one participant commented that it was also about answering the challenge, being willing to be open and honest or to try something new. Group members said that veteran members were expected to role model for the newer members, provide them with advice, and challenge them.

“It is being challenged and answering that challenge. It is having the veterans, saying this is what I did, these are the thoughts I’ve had. Share with us how you feel, how you feeling, what’re you thinking? So it’s by example.” (ERIC)

Group members also commented that there was a level of accountability that comes with membership in the group. Members are expected to show up every week on time, and inform the group if they are not going to make a particular evening.

“And accountability is very high here. Jim phoned in and said that he would be (late)... You know um, some of us have been late in the last six or seven weeks, and we all phone in and say that we will be late. And the show up here has been amazing since I’ve been here, it’s been a short period of time. Because I think in general we look forward to Wednesday night here, just that there’s anything building up we can let it go.”

(ERIC)

The men commented that the group was an environment where they felt they could speak freely about their issues, and they had people who were there to listen and provide feedback. They often communicated that their issues were such that they needed to vocalize them; they needed to vent. They commented group was one of the only safe places to do so, as they felt that members of society who had not offended wouldn't understand them, wouldn't be willing to listen, and they would be judged and shamed for doing so.

"Its just, you find, you learn to be more calmer than if you didn't have it with everybody here to talk to. You're getting things out now too so now you're not building up instead and going to explode one day, cause you can actually get it out, it doesn't matter what it is you can talk about it. Everybody's going to listen and participate." (JOHN)

"You need to vent and this is the only place you're safe enough, at least, you feel safe enough to vent. So it's either here or at home, you know, and it's like everybody here has the same problem, okay, at home, they don't." (TIMOTHY)

## Goals

Participants were asked what the goals of the Revive program were from their perspective. As well, group members were asked what their goals were in participating in Revive; what did they want to achieve as a result of their participation in Revive? One of the participants described his goal in terms of putting his life back together, getting his life organized and working on himself so that he can be a functioning member of society again:

"Um yeah, I mean this... You know like uh, putting out your ducks in order so that you can move on, you can, kind of walk with your head high... And, our goal is to rebuild ourselves I mean, we, talking about the educational group and the offenders cycle, you



know, it's a cycle, you can go – you can get back into it, and this (the group) is so that we don't, and that we know what to put in place so we don't go there... we're all going to have private thoughts but, realize they're private thoughts and, you know...

JOHN – Know how to control them.

RICHARD – Right.”

Another member described that one of his goals was getting past the guilt and shame that he feels in order to more effectively work on himself and his issues. He recognizes he has made grievous errors, but would like to get past the shame to begin to truly work on himself.

“You can get past the shame, you learn that. Yes you've done something wrong, but there's a way to get past it, with the support of everybody here. Makes it a lot easier.”

(JOHN)

The men also commented that through the group they were actively taking control of their lives. The group provided them with the space to work on their issues, so that they could actively be engaged in bettering themselves. They all communicated that they wanted to change, and that through Revive they were beginning the process of bettering themselves.

“Michael - Just to be the best me I can be. Be active about it, take control of doing something...which is, make sure I'm here. I have control of that. Participating when I'm here, I have control of that....

John – Making positive choices.”

### Needs Fulfillment

Participants were asked what needs are fulfilled as a result of participating in Revive. There were many needs identified by the participants that they feel are fulfilled as a result of their Revive membership. Participants commented several times that the group was a formal setting

for them to work on their issues, as there were little other options for supporting them (e.g., didn't want to burden their wife's / significant others, not safe enough to confide in friends / family). Therefore the need to interact, discuss, and ultimately be accepted with their issues was central to their progress.

“ Oh yeah, you've got to have interaction, I mean you can't – you can't be a single solitary man by yourself, um part of man kind, you have to interact.” (TIMOTHY)

“MICHAEL – But being an offender and being accepted.

TIMOTHY – Yeah we did wrong, I mean, we're not – we're not ah – we made a mistake, okay, somewhere down the way we just let our defenses drop we made a mistake. Um.

We shouldn't be condemned for that, for life.”

Similar to the above point, participants commented that they needed to speak about their issues, and have someone truly listen to what they were saying and relate to what they were going through.

“JOHN – And listening.

MICHAEL – I read a book once, and just the title of it never mind anything that was in it, it stayed with me, and it's 'feelings buried alive never die'. And to be able to come here, and just spout off whatever your feeling, good or bad, it takes it out of you and it doesn't have a life inside of you that can bring you down, and having vented it then you're able to get past it or deal with it, it doesn't cripple you. So, just being, having a form to be able to vent those feelings.”

## Restorative Justice

Participants were asked what restorative justice means to them, and how restorative justice can be seen through the Revive program? Initially, a few participants expressed that they did not know exactly what restorative justice was, or its aim.

“I’m not sure what restorative justice means.” (TIMOTHY)

One member then began to speak about restorative justice, and how its goal is to repair the damage done. He states that in his opinion jail time is a wasted time, and that individuals are forced to go to jail for something they have done. He agrees that neither he nor society would agree that jail time be negated, but he emphasizes that these group members are participating because they intrinsically want to, and that the work is being accomplished within the Revive groups because they are all voluntarily willing participants.

“I think from society’s perspective, if they understood exactly what was happening here, not to you know completely negate any sort of actually jail time or probation or those types of things, those are what society says here’s the you know deterrent to society and this is what you could suffer but, what you get from that is wasted time really... if you realize you should be here and you’re here on your ... its helpful justice its not just punitive. I don’t think society would ever say yeah as long as they’re in group that’s fine, its not to say negate that...It (restorative justice) has...a better purpose for the individual who’s made the mistakes, so I don’t know if that means like, properly repairing what’s wrong with you type of justice...” (RICHARD)

One participant went on to comment that his conception of restorative justice was complimentary to or aside from a prison sentence and included de-stigmatizing the offender.

“I was just trying to think, I think that restorative justice in my mind is aside from paying the price of the sentence, I think that there’s a stigma against all offenders and restorative justice is to restructure just what that stigma is of who that person is, to create a value in them to themselves and value in them to society that they’re past that and acceptable.” (MICHAEL)

One group member commented on how restorative justice provides opportunities for the offender(s) to work on themselves and to prevent further harm. The quote below demonstrates that these men are voluntarily involved in Revive in order to change their patterns and to stop their cycle of offending.

“DAVID – Yeah restorative justice is forward thinking, you’re accountable but you’re being accounted by hopefully by changing the patterns that caused you to do it so, you can move forward and by changing your own patterns, your making society...

ERIC – So that if you come back to that place where at one time you went down that slippery road, you would hope that you would make the- two paths through the forest what one do you choose. We chose the shitty one one-time you know. Let’s choose the right one next time.”

Participants also commented on the fact that CJI and the Revive program are not solely trying to repair the offenders, they also run programs for survivors, and other programs for mediation and reintegration. One participant commented that the holistic thinking that is being communicated to the community by CJI through their programs is contributing to the identification and ultimately the alleviation of social ills.

“You know if you take a look outside of sexually offences and just offences in general and, CJI’s involved in several different aspects of restorative justice, it is to bring

attention to the individuals that they're in a cycle, you know, just try and break that cycle... Some people...they're in the middle of the trees and they don't see the forest, you know, they just don't have somebody there guiding them through it and with a little bit of guidance....It's the same idea as to, just kind of, guide the individuals in, okay this is what happened, these are, this is the cycle that may present itself for you, and let's work with it. And with the group people coming from all from the same background or same offence they make you see the forest, you see the bigger picture, or what is your issues, I guess." (ERIC)

Another participant commented about Revive's commitment to restoring the survivors of sexual abuse. Participants recognized that the Revive program's vision was one of holism; there were two distinct groups in need of support in the aftermath of the harm of an offence and in order for the program to succeed both groups needed to be supported.

"It's also restoring the victim at the same time, because there's two halves that are in the same program and it's looking at both the offender and the victim, and giving support to each of them....They need to feel better about themselves equally as we need to feel better about ourselves as offenders. There's a whole lot hurt that's happened when an offence occurs, and it's against one person by another person, and the damage is done.... Move on with their life to be able to heal the hurt that was caused, that's still justice. I mean justice doesn't just have to punish justice has to help, and I think that the victims get help as well as the offenders. There's a balance then I guess is what I'm saying."

(MICHAEL)

Participants were then asked what, if anything, does the Revive program help restore in its members? Participants responded that the program has helped them regain self-confidence

and dignity. They also communicated that through restoration and revive; there will be no future victims.

“TIMOTHY – It builds up my self-esteem,

JOHN – Yeah self-confidence

TIMOTHY – Gives me back a little dignity.”

“TIMOTHY – There’ll be no future victims, not just, past victims but future ones.”

The above quote demonstrates that the male group members fully understood and believed the principles of restorative justice that were being communicated through the program. The men recognized that they needed to be actively engaged on working on their issues in order to minimize their future risk of offending. In addition to their own work, the men communicated that survivors of sexual abuse are in need of support, and that the Revive program was visionary for addressing both sides of the harm.

### Emergent Codes

The following codes were created from emerging themes that became apparent after reading through the transcripts for a priori codes. Definitions were created for codes as they emerged, and the transcripts were re-read to conduct explicit analysis for these newly emerged codes. Four emergent codes were identified from the transcripts: check-in / check-out, administration and staff, no agenda, and support.

### Check-in / Out

Participants discussed their process of checking in every group night, and its importance to the group. Members are given the opportunity to check-in at the beginning of every meeting;

the purpose of checking in is to gauge how everyone is doing that night, how their past week has been, and if they are in need of support they will communicate it during their check-in.

“MICHAEL- Check-in is the way of breaking the ice every week, that we all just say whether or not we had a good day or good week, bad week, um, what was good about it, some event that was uplifting or positive and then we’ll say whether or not we have any major issue that we want to present to the group. So the check-in is a short thermometer of just how each individual is feeling and then we all recognize that one of us or two of us have this specific issue that we can focus a little more time on.

RICHARD – Like a prioritizing kind of, what’s, what is most pressing.”

Participants commented that this was a vital part of the program as they were given time right off the start of the group meeting to identify whether or not they were in need of support on a given night. This allowed them to prioritize the issues and topics covered in the group, in order to support members who may be in crisis.

#### Administration and Staff

Throughout the focus group, participants frequently commented on the atmosphere of the agency itself (CJI), and how the administration and staff of the Revive program facilitated the program and provided continued support throughout their processing. Participants commented on the amount of support that the administration, particularly the service coordinator, provided them and the degree to which that has impacted their ability to work on themselves and their issues. Participants also commented that they received assistance from the administration outside of their group; the administration provided informational and emotional support throughout their involvement in court and their processes of restoring their lives.

“I think there’s a very strong administration here as well that, I’ve been able to phone in to, that’s interactive with my probation, that’s interactive with other family services, that they’re supporting, they’re also providing outside of the individual group for myself they’re providing family groups...its just not specific it’s whatever needs for growth for the individual for the family...But it brings everything together, its not just this group there’s a whole lot that the Revive program touches on, at least as far as my life is concerned, that um, they’re not just like a one trick pony just for this room and these people, that any questions that I’ve had that I’ve phoned in for they find the answer.

Beyond the just the facilitators that are here the administration that’s there.” (MICHAEL)

At one point in the focus group, one of the facilitators who was sitting in on the group, commented that he thought the group members were inhibited from expressing themselves and their experiences because their facilitators were in the focus group. The facilitator offered to leave the group, in hopes of eliciting more responses, but the members responded that he was in fact a member of the group.

“DAVID – And that too, I really like the comments, they make me feel good like that you guys are getting this out of the group so, but I’m just wondering because Rosie and I are here you’re a little bit...

ERIC – You’re part of the group.

DAVID – Inhibited or...

JOHN – You’re part of the group.”

One participant commented that their guard stays down, and they can be honest with one another, because of the support and understanding of the facilitators.

“ERIC – And the facilitators are so supportive. That that guard stays down.”



Participants were also asked how they would describe the role of the facilitators, and how the facilitator's role makes their work or progress in group achievable. Group members responded that facilitators are unconditionally supportive, they do not judge, they challenge, and they listen. Also, one member described their role as mentor-like.

"TIMOTHY – I think one role is to keep us going forward, not let us get off track, keep us going forward.

RICHARD – Make sure check-in doesn't last two hours.

MICHAEL – Even while I was in prison they took my phone calls to let me know what was happening, what I could look forward to when I was released so that I knew there was at least a program on the outside that I could go to and then to get involved with the program and to be, um, mentored by the facilitators, is that uh, good word to use?

ERIC – Mentored, challenged."

At one point, a group member reflected on how the facilitators challenge the members when they are not respectful or minimizing, such as when the men depersonalize their spouses.

"ERIC – That would be an accurate term. You know like, Jane, when uh, some of the boys will say the wife (laughs) she really likes that (laughs).

I – What do you mean by she really likes that?

ERIC – She (says), 'name please'.

MICHAEL – 'Make this person real to us'."

At the end of the first half of the focus group, one of the facilitators made a comment about how gratifying it was to hear the participants express their admiration for the program and what it is doing:

“DAVID – To tell you the truth I find this really, both enlightening and really gratifying to know that you guys are getting this out of it. Cause sometimes you wonder you know did we, did we accomplish what we wanted to, did we do a good job? I really like the comments, they make me feel good like that you guys are getting this out of the group.”

### No Agenda

Several times throughout the focus group, participants mentioned the fact that the group from week to week does not have a set agenda or structure. Participants commented that they enjoyed this format as their lives and troubles were changing from week to week, and that set topics may not always be temporally relevant to their lives that week. With a no set agenda format, they are open to discuss what has been troubling them recently, they are able to seek support if they were in crisis, and issues can take priority depending on participants wants and needs that particular week.

“Your priorities, your problems change week to week, and that’s what the group is for is to bring what’s paining you or your problems to the group, make you feel better keep you up, and it changes week to week day to day.” (TIMOTHY)

Participants were asked if the fact that there was no set agenda from week to week impacted the amount of structured conversation that took place from week to week. The men communicated that there was little concern that there would be nothing to talk about in a given week.

“I – Do you ever find that there’s a week when there’s nothing to talk about? When you have a two hour long check-in?

TIMOTHY – No. Not at all.

I – Not at all?

TIMOTHY – There's always something. Oh yeah."

"TIMOTHY – But uh, when I am here on time, two hours just doesn't seem to be enough sometimes, we just, we could go on and on and on. Its good."

## Support

Participants often reflected on the support they receive from the Revive program and their group members. Five codes were created to highlight the support they received: Emotional, informational, tangible, support beyond group, and unique support.

Emotional support was characterized by members having a forum to express themselves and share their insecurities and troubles, through members listening to one another, and through reducing the isolation and shame they felt by interacting with other offenders. One member even characterized the group as a "supportive community".

"And so it's, and also, on days that you're down or low esteem, it's, they also perk you up. So its uh, definitely a community idea. We're there to support each other. But in supporting there's tough love and soft love, you know, so we will still challenge you but we are there to support you." (ERIC)

"so the whole group of non-offenders and offenders was, it was really helping me to reintegrate into society because, zero esteem, shame guilt everything like you're pretty crushed and it allowed me to start to rebuild myself and start looking at being a contributing member of society to start taking pride in myself, to find work, to find a place to stay that's self supporting and look towards rebuilding my life rather than just walking around for no other better word with my head down" (JOHN)

Throughout the focus group, participants often reflected upon the personal growth they had achieved since becoming a member of Revive, largely as a result of the knowledge they have gained through group, and through applying it to their lives. These comments relating to knowledge and insight gained as a result of their Revive membership characterized the code of informational support:

“I haven’t been around that long, but uh, everybody has their own set of problems, their own charges. Basically we’ve all done wrong. We can admit that here, we talk. That I think what bring us all together.” (TIMOTHY)

“I learned I don’t have all the answers.” (MICHAEL)

Group members communicated that through their membership in Revive they had learned how to deal with their anger, which they identified as a common problem. This progress in reducing their anger allowed them to be able to discuss their issues and admit their problems, in order for them to begin to work on them.

“Its just, you find, you learn to be more calmer than if you didn’t have it with everybody here to talk to. You’re getting things out now too so now you’re not building up instead and going to explode one day, cause you can actually get it out, it doesn’t matter what it is you can talk about it. Everybody’s going to listen and participate.” (JOHN)

“That being here helps, get some new ones. Uh, I’ve learned to, “I”, instead of you. I’m not as angry as I was before.” (JOHN)

A number of participants commented that the knowledge they have gained through Revive has empowered them to take control of their lives and their actions. Members repeated that they did not want to make the same mistakes they had made in the past, they wanted to take active control of their life and to never offend again.

“And um, I’m not proud of what I’ve done... I don’t want to ever do it again, so uh, here I am. This is where I need to be.” (TIMOTHY)

“Understanding that there are patterns that there are behaviours and processes that you don’t even realize are happening to you. And once you realize, that you can recognize your behaviour and, you can correct it before it actually winds up as an offence.”

(MICHAEL)

Participants commented several times on the concept of empathy. Several members said that through Revive, they have learned to empathize with their victim and as a result they want to work on their issues so that they never repeat their offence again. Members also said that they had learned how to empathize with themselves; understanding themselves so that they can then improve on their issues and challenges.

“I’ve also learned to take my eyes off myself and to be able to empathize and try and just appreciate what the victim has gone through as well, and what, I have a rough road in my life what is the road like for a victim? To be able to see it from that way.” (MICHAEL)

“Well for me its not, I have empathy. I’m very sad and mad at myself for doing what I did but also since then I can be pretty hard on myself, I beat myself up. And uh, this is,

has helped me with uh just picking myself up and being a little bit empathetic towards myself you know and like...the offence doesn't define me." (ERIC)

Tangible support was characterized largely through support that the Revive administrators provided. Members commented that the Revive staff advocated on their behalf, and that they were making phone calls and arrangements with other organizations to improve the men's progress and their ability to effectively work on their issues surrounding their offending. Tangible support was also characterized through the reciprocal support and advice that members provided to one another.

"It really feels good when you come up with something that somebody goes yeah I'll try that. That makes me feel really good, I makes me eager to have somebody give it back to me as well." (MICHAEL)

"I think there's a very strong administration here as well that, I've been able to phone in to, that's interactive with my probation, that's interactive with other family services, that they're supporting, they're also providing outside of the individual group for myself they're providing family groups so that there isn't, its just not specific it's whatever needs for growth for the individual for the family." (MICHAEL)

Tangible support was also characterized by structure. Participants commented that the program provided structure for their lives: on Wednesday night they were committed to coming to group and discussing their issues. They found that the structure was healthy, and began to bring structure to other parts of their lives.

"I think just being simplistic, they give some structure to my life that I know my Wednesday nights are committed. That I do have something to look forward to. And just

as simple as that, that there is a purpose, and that helped me develop that I started planning other nights with specific things, that I purpose that I had structure. And uh, it really helped build momentum.” (MICHAEL)

“No, it gives you the structure for that one night, you recognize that structure is good, so that you go and make other nights of the week with structure, and for me that’s good...it’s given me that initiative to go out to the community and do whatever I want to do and it’s helped picked me back up. You fall pretty low going through this, so, its helped picked me back up.” (ERIC)

Several participants communicated that the program provided them with support outside of the two hours that they were meeting with each other each week. Members often commented that they felt that their time in group, or their time working on themselves, was not limited to the two hours per week they were sitting in CJI talking with their group members. Participants commented that through perspective taking, they could enter a situation and immediately process a feedback loop of “what would group member x do in this situation”.

“I don’t think it’s just the two hours where you know you’re here and you can talk, it’s also like, on the Thursday you know connecting (inaudible), maybe if its stress relief, kind of vent or whatever it is, you know that that’s always there for you.” (RICHARD)

“I think that that’s one part of it, but, just, every week for the length of time that I’ve been coming I can almost tell you what Jerry is going to say, I can almost tell you what Mike’s going to say, so if I have a thought going through my head I could almost have a dialogue

of what their perspective would be...because of the support they have given in person, you know where they're coming from." (MICHAEL)

The men also commented that they have applied the knowledge and learning they have gained from the Revive groups in situations with friends, family, and co-workers who are not a part of Revive.

"It's helped me out greatly... I've helped a few people at work already from things I've learned in here and that so, it's great I love it... another guy he's got a, a real big drinking problem so I've helped him out a bit. He doesn't drink as much anymore, which is good, I like it. I think he likes it too. He's starting to work out more and stuff like that, so, it's great." (JOHN)

"Just being able to relate with spouses, with children, um, how to speak without being angry, like you get into patterns. Especially with spouses where you've been around them for years and you just constantly do things again and again, so just be able to say well let's try this, and try that." (MICHAEL)

The men's group members often commented that the support they receive through the Revive program is highly beneficial and distinct to the other support they received. Members' brought up that there were other areas of their lives where they could turn to for support (e.g. counsellor or family member), however they felt that they were burdening their family members by constantly talking about their issues, and there was only so much they felt they could learn from an individual counsellor.



“Been able to confide in only one or two people outside that, it was encouraging that I knew that I could, I have their support and I thought okay maybe the future isn’t going to be as crappy... So, its sort of the base support kind of.” (RICHARD)

“You need to vent and this is the only place you’re safe enough, at least, you feel safe enough to vent. So it’s either here or at home, you know, and it’s like everybody here has the same problem, okay, at home, they don’t. I know, god love her, she listens to me but this is not problem, this is my problem. Everybody here has the same problem and I can come here and vent and I have, and uh, they all listen” (TIMOTHY)

“You know, we all have families and they’re under, I mean this stressful for them as well, so you don’t want to be hammering them all the time with stuff, and this is where you just can unload and feel much better for it.” (ERIC)

Participants were asked by one of the facilitators where they would be without the support of the Revive program. They responded that they would be fighting with themselves, stuck in the same ruts and facing the same issues they were when they were offending.

“DAVID – What would happen without that kind of support – like what do you think would happen? Like, I’m just turning it around.

MICHAEL – We certainly wouldn’t be getting any better. I think that our thought processes would just spiral us right back down...

(Agreement from members)

MICHAEL – Without a life to look forward to then you’re going to be – it doesn’t matter might as well offend again.

TIMOTHY – Battling myself. And it's not a very good feeling to just – I still do that.

I look forward to coming here – just to uh, get my head straight. I couldn't do it without this group.

ERIC- Yeah, and, I feel good when I leave here, and I look forward to coming here, you know. It's – definitely part of the road of recovery, the road to a better life.”

## Discussion

In this section of the thesis report, I discuss the findings of the research, their implications for practice, potential for future research, and my reflections on the Revive program as well as the research process. The findings are discussed in two separate sections: 1) the findings are first presented in relation to the research questions outlined previously; 2) the findings are then discussed in relation to the theory of sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) as a model of support. Based on the discussion of the current study's findings, I then present the limitations of the current research as well as implications and directions for future research in the field. Following a discussion of possible directions for future research, I present the values of community psychology and their relatedness to the Revive program and the present research. Finally, I share my own reflections on the Revive program and its relevance to the principles of community psychology.

### Q.1 How are the groups experienced by its members?

The first research question this research sought to answer was how are the Revive groups experienced by their members? Specifically, two questions were posed: 1) How does the Revive model facilitate healing in survivors?, and 2) How does the Revive model facilitate remediation in persons who have offended? These questions can be answered through discussing the findings as they relate to the codes of support, goals, needs, and restorative justice.

#### *Q1. A ) How does the Revive model facilitate healing in survivors?*

For the women survivors, participants communicated throughout the focus group that they feel that the group supports them unconditionally, at whatever stage of healing they are engaged in. The women mentioned that at first, they were nervous about sharing their very personal abuse story in a group of relative strangers. However, they commented that within a few

weeks they had overcome their initial fear and anxiety, as their experience with sexual abuse was normalized through reciprocal discussions with other survivors. Previous research has cited normalization of survivor's experiences and establishing an emotional connection as two motivating factors for individuals to join a mutual-aid group (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005), a finding that can be confirmed by the present research findings. The women communicated several times that their primary motivations to join a group therapy environment were to make connections, to have their story heard and validated, to reduce isolation, and to receive as well as give support. These women have gone through traumatic experiences wherein they have had their power, control and identity taken away from them, often by someone whom they care for and love. As a result, these women often internalize the blame, the pain, and the lack of control as something that they are responsible for. The opportunity to sit in a room with others who have shared similar experiences allows these women to look across at one another and say "You are not to blame", "You are more than a survivor of sexual abuse", "I was a victim, now I am a survivor". This opportunity, as shared by the women in the focus group, is an important component of healing as restoration.

Reciprocal support between the members was highlighted by the participants as one of the most effective characteristics of the group. As evidenced in past research examining support groups (Cella & Yellen, 1993; as cited in Ussher et al., 2006), the members' distinct ability to relate to one another's challenges facilitated mutually supportive relationships, a sense of belonging, as well as the motivation to empower ones own as well as others' healing. The present findings illustrate that the Revive groups embody the core principles of group therapy: sense of belonging, supportive relationships, and to empower personal and collective healing. It was because all of the group members shared an abusive past that they understood where other

group members were coming from, what their needs were, and how they could work to support one another. The women recognized that their problems or challenges were not unique to them, and that there were similar others who were unconditionally willing to support them in their times of need. The support that Revive provides these women is essential for their healing and empowerment.

The women also commented that on a given night, they did not need to speak or receive direct support in order to work through their own challenges. By listening to other survivors' struggles, challenges, emotions, or experiences, group members were able to internalize the discussion and gain insight into their own challenges or brainstorm action plans and positive coping mechanisms that were suggested to other group members. I believe that these women worked very hard outside of their weekly group to internalize and utilize all of the information and support they received in their Revive groups. Healing and restoration does not take place for two hours or a given night of the week; for these women their journey of healing and recovery is often life-long. Revive provides an opportunity for explicit support from which women survivors can begin to rebuild and restore themselves and their lives.

Variations in program content or program goals are often varied in mutual aid or therapy groups. However, programs largely focus upon common issues such as facing and discussing the experiences of sexual abuse, placing responsibility for CSA on the perpetrator, enhancing interpersonal trust, as well as learning positive coping mechanisms (Peleikis, & Dahl, 2005). The women communicated they received assistance through Revive in relation to several needs: the need to be heard and believed, establishing trust, learning positive coping mechanisms, and improved self-esteem and self-confidence. In this way, we can ascertain that the Revive program

provides members the distinct support that past research has implicated as particularly necessary for survivors of sexual abuse.

As mentioned in the introduction, the goals of mutual aid or group therapy programs are not often made to be explicit or concrete; Revive is no different. The question then arises how do group members progress in their healing if there is no explicit or common goal to be working towards? While the program itself may not have definitive goals, findings from the present research indicate that group members do have personal and collective goals that they are all striving towards. Participants communicated that the Revive program provided distinct and unique support that their other supportive or therapeutic groups or communities could not provide. This distinct support provided them with an opportunity to engage with other survivors who shared and were working towards similar goals. These goals included having someone truly listen to their story, increasing their self-esteem and self-image, reducing their isolation, empowerment, learning how to face and reduce conflict, learning how to live with and love themselves, and the reduction of future victims of sexual abuse.

Of the three participants who had graduated and stopped attending the Revive groups, all three communicated that they had stopped coming to group after successfully reaching their personal goals. The fourth participant had only recently begun attending the Revive groups, and therefore she had communicated her goals but she had not as of yet fulfilled them. Of the three participants who had graduated from the program, two continued to be involved in the program through becoming a facilitator for the women's survivors groups. This transition from group member to facilitator is an example of a common goal that the women communicated having: getting to a position where they are far enough along in their journey of healing to make an explicit effort to walk along side and continue to support other survivors. This was an extremely

powerful conviction that these women shared: to survive sexual abuse and then dedicate part of their lives to engaging others around the topic in the hopes that discussion and public education will reduce the likelihood of future survivors. This conviction stemmed their motivation to reduce future victims of sexual abuse as well as to repay or disseminate the healing and learning they have acquired as part of their membership in Revive.

Women who are survivors focus group members were passionate about the goals and effects of restorative justice. They discussed at length their conceptions and experiences of restorative justice, and how they feel that the principles of restorative justice are practiced within the Revive program. Daly (2006) in his examination of restorative justices' applicability to sexual abuse raises a number of pitfalls with the current justice system's handling of sexual abuse as well as several benefits that restorative justice can have in resolving a cases of sexual abuse. Cited pitfalls of the current justice systems' handling of sexual abuse cases include the victim being put on trial, the lack of victim involvement and voice in the case, as well as a lengthy process with no goals of repairing the harm done (Daly, 2006). The anticipated benefits of using restorative justice in cases of sexual abuse include giving the victim a voice, having the offender take responsibility, flexible environment, and relationships repair (Daly, 2006).

Participants in the current research commented both on the pitfalls of the legal system to effectively deal with cases of sexual abuse, as well as the purported benefits of using restorative justice. One participant shared her story of her experience within the victim offender reconciliation program (VORP) that she received through Revive. She communicated that with her endorsement the Revive staff contacted her abuser (her brother) and facilitated several meetings between the two of them where the goal was to repair the damaged relationship, have the brother take responsibility for the harm and abuse, and to provide an opportunity for this

woman to share the impact the harm has had on her. She did not want to charge her brother and go through the legal system due to her knowledge of the lack of impact it has had in others experiences, as well as her perception that he was not a potential risk or harm to others. She commented that the process was very rewarding and she was getting what she thought she was in need of, until her brother dropped out when her parents asked why he was involved in this program when what he had done “was no big deal”. Through the actions of her brother pulling out of the reconciliation, her brother effectively took power and control away from her once again. This participant went on to communicate her utter frustration with her parents for making such a hurtful and rude comment that ultimately lead to her brother giving up on the program. However, although her experience did not turn out as she expected or wanted, and her brother dropped out before they finished, she still communicated that it was a worth while process and she was glad she engaged in it. She learned how to respect someone who has offended, she was able to communicate the harm and pain she has experienced, and she now can respect her brother.

While she was pleased with the overall process, she was hurt by the action of her brother pulling-out of the program and taking power away from her. When engaging in processes of reconciliation or mediation between someone who has offended and their victim, careful attention must be made to the power and control dynamics of the process to ensure that the person who has offended is not able to regain that power and control over their victim. For this particular woman, she was able to regain some control over her experience, as she was adamant that she would not be seeking any type of contact or communication with her parents or her abusive brother. Power and control are issues that are particularly important to survivors of sexual abuse, and as such, programs that serve such individuals should pay close attention to



control and power. The prospect or possibility of harm should never outweigh the intended benefits. In this particular case, the ability for this survivor to have control and power over her dealings with her abusive brother was taken from her when he pulled out of the reconciliation. While this particular woman still perceived that the benefits outweighed the pain she was inflicted, it provides an example of how issues of power and control can become further imbalanced in processes of reconciliation and potentially perpetuate harm for the survivor. Therefore, I would recommend that issues of power, control, and the potential for further harm should be explicitly discussed by all parties involved in a mediation or reconciliation, to safeguard for potential abuses. Survivors who engage in such processes should be aware that there is potential for harm throughout, and that before they engage in such a process they perceive that the potential benefits outweigh the potential for harm.

Previous examinations of attempts to use restorative justice on cases of sexual abuse have discovered that one of the potential disadvantages in such application is a lack of impact upon the offender (Daly, 2006). As evidenced from the narrative above, this disadvantage is a real potential and occurrence. However, it is interesting to note that the survivor in this case was still satisfied with the process as she felt it was a safe way to attempt to restore herself, her brother, and possibly their relationship. While the final outcome was not at all what she had anticipated or wanted, she is still grateful she chose to attempt the VORP, and is now able to respect other offenders. It is not likely that this woman would have been given a similar opportunity for meaning and reconciliation if she were to have gone through the legal system and charged her brother. The goals or outcomes of our court system are quite different from the opportunities that restorative justice provides. Our current legal system gives little voice and opportunity for a victim to heal, and often leaves the victim feeling at fault as if they were on trial. Restorative

justice presents an alternative to the status quo, and more opportunities should be given to survivors who want to engage in reconciliation or mediation processes in a safe and protected environment.

Overall, the women survivors had a good sense of the principles of restorative justice, as well as goals and plans to achieve restoration in their own lives. A majority of participants commented that while they would not advocate for solely using restorative justice in the aftermath of sexual abuse, they did agree that the processes of restorative justice “humanized” their experiences in facing sexual abuse. As well, several participants commented that through the healing they had accomplished they became empowered to become advocates for restoration and survivors of sexual abuse. They advocate for discussions and education surrounding the topic of sexual abuse through a speakers bureau at CJI who’s purpose it is to go into other groups (e.g. a female survivor giving a “speak” to a men who have offended group) and increase awareness and understanding. One of the women also said that she gives talks to Conestoga College students, speaking on the effects of sexual abuse and advocating for other survivors to receive help. She expressed her frustration in not being able to reach younger audiences, as she said that when she was being abused as a young adult she would have appreciated a speak on sexual abuse so that she could have become empowered to seek help. In this way, I believe that the Revive program is instilling a sense of community amongst its members relative to all survivors of sexual abuse. Through meeting with and establishing an emotional connection with other survivors, these women become empowered to become advocates for all survivors of sexual abuse. In addition to the women becoming advocates for the restoration of all survivors, the women acknowledged that the program was also offered to men who had offended, and advocated for restoration of the offenders. The holistic nature and principle of the Revive program is thus instilled in all members

of the program. I believe that through Revive group members come to realize that in order to prevent future occurrences of sexual abuse, both pieces of the puzzle, survivors and those who offend, must be addressed.

The survivors in the current research communicated that they were pleased that Community Justice Initiatives recognizes that they were not the only ones in need of support and reintegration; the offenders are also desperately in need of support. I believe that through Revive offering programs that service both survivors as well as men who have offended, the organization encourages humanity, respect, and dignity. Through holding groups for both male offenders and survivors of sexual abuse, Community Justice Initiatives advocates that restoration cannot occur without addressing the two sides of a very real and very damaging social issue. Through advocating for both populations, the Revive program is able to rebuild people, relationships, and humanity.

The women all agreed that the Revive program unconditionally supported them through their journey of healing, and that the program was instrumental in getting them to where they are today. While there are other avenues for formal and informal support for survivors of sexual abuse, none are as holistic and influential as the Revive program and restorative justice.

All of the participants in the women survivors group communicated that they had become staunch advocates for restorative justice and the Revive program. While a few of the woman had gone through the legal system to charge their abuser, none of them were advocates of that system in its ability to change offenders, heal survivors, or address the issue of sexual abuse. The utter regret and frustration communicated in regards to the legal system from those who the system is supposed to serve furthered my belief that the punitive nature of the legal system does not effectively address the issue of sexual abuse. At the heart of restorative justice are its

adherence principles of dignity, responsibility and respect, as well as the restoration of individuals, community and relationships. The Revive program accomplishes restoration for survivors of sexual abuse through providing opportunities for survivors to feel unconditional and on-going support.

*Q1. B) How does the Revive model facilitate remediation in persons who have offended?*

For the men who have offended sexually, participants communicated that the Revive program was an instrumental opportunity that provided them with a safe, honest, and open environment in which to interact with other men who had offended in order to begin to face their challenges and change their lives. The men commented that the support they received from the program started simply from the programs existence. Participants communicated that having a time and space dedicated to them and their issues meant a great deal to them, as they often felt shut-out and stigmatized by society. For these men who recognize that they are in need of serious personal change there are no other options for formal support. Without the Revive groups these men would have no safe space in which to communicate their thoughts, challenges and distortions; if these men cannot talk about their issues and challenges there is no reasonable expectation that they will improve or change. Revive is an essential program for these men to begin to recognize and change their very harmful and destructive behaviours and thoughts. These men have chosen to violate another individual and take away their dignity, control, and sense of self; that cannot be minimized. I also believe that these men are in desperate need of support if they are to change and safely integrate into our communities, and that this as well cannot be minimized.

Shame, guilt, and isolation are often cited as barriers for offenders to receive support, especially when the shaming acts as a disintegrative process (McAlinden, 2005). The men who

participated in the focus group commented that their membership in the program gave them a safe place to openly speak about their issues and challenges, and this allowed them to be able to verbalize their challenges and begin to receive support around them. Group members also commented that having the facilitators who were non-offenders allowed them to gain confidence that they could change and helped them reintegrate into the community after they had served jail time. The fact that there were non-offenders who were willing to support these men contributed to positive-reintegrative shaming: wherein the focus was upon the evil of the act and not the evil in the individual, and acceptance was at the heart of the group processes (McAlinden, 2005).

Previous research has highlighted both stable and acute risk factors that can either contribute positively, or act as a barrier, to future offending in men offenders. The five stable factors are listed as negative social influences, intimacy deficits, tolerant attitudes of sexual offending, sexual self-regulation, and self-regulation (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). The four acute factors are cited as substance abuse, negative mood, anger, and victim access (Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). The authors conducted a meta-analysis of recidivism studies and found that variables such as anti-social orientation, intimacy deficits, problems with self-regulation, and a history of rule violation were associated with recidivism rates. Participants in the current research cited multiple improvements or areas of gained knowledge regarding acute factors such as anger and negative mood. Almost all of the participants reported having lower anger and frustration levels, and increased positive mood, as a result of their membership and participation in their group. These are self reported subjective evaluations of these factors which contribute to their offending behaviours. It could be the case that these men want to appear to be socially acceptable, and therefore they will over emphasize the positive effects the program has

had upon them. In order to fully and objectively evaluate these self-reported claims, more research is needed.

Relating these past results to the findings illuminated in this research, there are a number of findings from the current research that could be used to support the notion that through influencing these stable factors, men who are sexual offenders can decrease their risk of future offending. Many of the men who had offended said that through their membership in the Revive program, they have reduced the isolation they feel contributing to more positive and frequent socialization.

A number of participants also said that it had helped them discuss their issues with their spouses, contributing to more communicative and intimate relationships. As well, the men commented that through their membership in their Revive group they are provided with a focused place where they can deal with their issues. This helped them alleviate the burden they felt they were putting on those around them, especially their spouses, as they no longer had to trouble those around with resolving their personal problems. There are little if any options for males who have offended to receive support towards their positive and safe reintegration into their community. Revive has provided these men with a powerful opportunity to change their thinking patterns, their behaviours, and ultimately their lives.

Self-regulation was another issue that the men communicated having improved upon since they joined the Revive group. The men commented that through discussing both challenges as well as potential solutions with other offenders, the men were better able to understand themselves and their issues, and were empowered to make positive personal changes.

Past research has illuminated the importance of the atmosphere of the therapy group in providing an effective and safe environment for the men to begin to support one another as they

seek change. Group environments that encourage members to speak and act freely, and have a high level of member commitment, friendship and concern for one another, have been correlated strongly with positive treatment outcomes (Beech and Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005). The findings from the present study confirm these past results. Participants commented many times about the level of honesty, connection, and concern that comes with membership in the Revive groups. Group members went on to reveal how the connection between members and a general concern for one another has facilitated trust, healing, and an intrinsic desire to change.

While there is no formal goal for the men who have offended Revive group, ultimately the goal is the same as other community-offender programs: the safe and successful reintegration of these individuals back into our communities through consistent informational, instrumental and general support as well as promoting personal accountability (Petrunik, 2002). Men who have offended participants said that a number of emotional, informational, and tangible needs that they had were fulfilled as a result of their participation in the Revive groups. Several participants commented that the groups were a “supportive community” where members could openly ask for assistance around issues or challenges that they were struggling with. Group members also communicated that the group was the best place to face those issues, as other men who had offended were in the best place to challenge one another’s minimization or lack of responsibility. One of the core facets, and entry criteria, of the Revive program for men who have offended sexually, is that they take full and complete responsibility for their actions and the harm they have caused before they are able to enter the program. Through beginning at this base of responsibility taking, the men enter the group ready to take onus for their personal challenges and struggles, and share a common responsibility with their group members in changing their thought patterns and behaviours. Unless these men are in individual counselling where they can admit their challenges

surrounding their offending behaviour, they are likely to have little or no other options for support.

Group members also said that the level of personal accountability was high amongst members, both inside and outside of group. This was in part due to the fact that they were discussing their challenges with other offenders, who could easily see through their “masks” or deception as they were facing the same issues. As well, participants mentioned that through the program supporting them and building up their self-esteem, they believed they could change in their lives, and that they felt accountable to perform that change.

Group members said that the goals of the group as well as members’ individual goals were highly similar. All of the participants said that their current goal was to continue to attend the Revive group in order to learn more about the offender cycle, making positive choices, and how to improve their self-esteem in order to empower themselves to change and make positive future decisions. Most of the participants said that their goal was to regain control of their lives in order to become a productive and safe member of society again.

All Revive Group members commented that the support they received from their groups was essential to their change and positive progress. The men communicated that they felt that without the program, they would continue to feel guilty and shamed for what they had done, and they would wallow in their own self-pity. Through their membership in the Revive group, their self-esteem has been raised to a point where they believe that they can take control of their lives and are worthy of change.

When participants were asked about their conceptions and goals for restorative justice, they communicated that restorative justice was providing them with an opportunity to take control of their lives. Several members expressed frustrations with the legal and prison system,



commenting that the system does not work or try to change them or help them deal with their issues, and so time served in jail ends up being “a waste of time” (though they did not advocate for or agree with no custodial sentencing). However, through the restorative justice that they have been involved with in Revive, they are taking responsibility for what they have done, and taking responsibility to repair the harm done and repair themselves in order to be a safe and productive members of society. Our traditional legal system discourages responsibility taking; individuals are encouraged to plead not guilty, to get a lawyer, and to fight the charges. This lack of responsibility puts the legal system into a position where they must prove culpability on the part of the offender; an often difficult task which often also puts the victim on trial. Restorative justice on the other hand encourages that the offender take responsibility both for their actions as well as for future harm reduction and repair. Through promoting the value of responsibility taking, restorative justice is challenging the status quo that these men are inherently going to deny their actions, the harm they have caused, as well as their culpability surrounding the crime. If we are to encourage responsibility taking and desire for change in these men who have offended, I believe that we must provide them with an environment and format to begin doing so. The courts often mandate these men to engage in some type of counselling program, however, no individual is ever mandated to join the Revive program. Drawing from the findings from the men participants, I believe that Revive provides a distinct opportunity for these men to engage in mutual-aid support with like-others; a distinct benefit that the men often discussed was instrumental to their personal change and safe reintegration into the community

The men also commented that the traditional legal system is justice the past tense, whereas restorative justice is looking towards the future in attempting to repair the harm as well as repair relationships such that the harm is not repeated in the future. Participants communicated that

restorative justice is providing them with an opportunity to change the path they are on; and if they find themselves at a cross road of which path to take in the future, they have been empowered and given the support to choose the right one.

When an individual breaks a law, there must be some type of punishment or reprimand; these processes are currently carried out in our legal and court systems. Often, punishment takes the form of jail time or community service. However, the underlying issue or problem that caused the criminal act often goes unexamined and untreated, leading to continuance and the perpetuation of harm. This is where the advantages and principles of restorative justice can be applied to compliment and address the needs and concerns created following court proceedings. I advocate for a type of developmental progression from punishment, to treatment and rehabilitation, to reintegration into the community. I do not believe that these men should go unpunished for their horrendous acts; however, I believe that punishment and isolation from society are not effective solutions to the problem. Restorative justice can be used as an effective solution to the problem through its capacity to pick up the pieces following court proceedings and punishment, wherein all individuals involved are given the time and space to address their challenges and needs while working towards building safer and more connected relationships and communities.

Part of the motivation in using restorative justice in situations of harm or conflict relates to the emphasis upon not only repairing individuals, but also in repairing relationships and encouraging those have perpetrated the crimes to strive towards efforts to make amends and right their wrongs. This emphasis upon the offender making amends makes sense in cases of vandalism or property crime, wherein the offender can make amends by replacing the property they have damaged or donating their time towards making efforts to repair the physical harm they have caused. Such efforts to amend and to “right their wrongs” are not applied to cases of sexual abuse

where the damage inflicted often leaves psychological and behavioural affects that cannot easily be mended. Therefore, I must be critical in my conclusions as to whether or not the Revive program is achieving true restoration in its treatment and support of men who have offended sexually. I believe that the Revive program is making great strides to repair and restore these men to a state where they can function safely in society. However, I would recommend that the Revive program begin to consider whether or not they are truly achieving restoration, as well exploring potential ways they could move forward in having these men make efforts to repair the harm they have caused. I would not advocate that these men contact their victims and begin a relationship solely to meet the restorative principles of the organization and program; I believe the decision and power to restore a relationship damaged by sexual abuse should lie in the hands of the survivor. That being said, I do believe that there would be positive processes and outcomes that would result from encouraging these men to make amends in some way for their harmful actions. In working towards making amends, these men could potentially volunteer with Community Justice Initiatives, engage in speakers' bureau events that CJI holds in the community, volunteer with another community organization, or volunteer within the legal and prison system to advocate that other men who have offended receive counselling and support.

While the findings from the men who have offended reveal that they believe they are making great changes and strides in their lives, the current research did not examine their recidivism or crime rates and therefore cannot conclude with absolute certainty that these men are changed and rehabilitated. While no absolute conclusions can be made to state that these men are rehabilitated and have been safely reintegrated, I believe that they are working hard in collaboration with each other to reduce the likelihood of re-offending and ultimately the number of future victims. These men live in our community, they walk the same streets that I do. Without

the Revive program, these men would still be residing in my community; only they would be isolated and their offending thoughts and behaviours would go unchallenged.

One crucial element that was noticeably missing from the men's description of their group was that of putting sexual abuse into the context of gender roles and the role of patriarchy in our society. While the men may discuss such issues in their group, they did not communicate to me that they spoke of these issues. I would strongly recommend that through the facilitators training, they be introduced to themes and issues of gender, power, and privilege in relation to sexual abuse, so that they can raise these issues with the men who have offended. Without explicitly discussing issues of power, control, and patriarchy, the Revive groups may be unintentionally reinforcing men's power. These men must understand that they abused their already privileged power and control; they need to be aware of the extremely negative consequences of the abuse of their power upon another individual.

Q.2 What comparisons can be made between the group experiences of those who have offended versus those who have survived sexual abuse?

The following sections will be discussing both the points of convergence as well as divergence in the experiences and narratives of the women survivors and men who have offended sexually within the Revive support groups. The two groups will be compared and discussed based on their responses in the codes mentioned in the findings section.

*Q.2 a) How are the group processes experienced differently by their members?*

In this section we will be discussing the findings as they relate to how the women survivors and men who had offended sexually communicated experiencing the Revive program. The findings were analyzed to determine what differences there were in the two populations' experiences of the Revive mutual-aid program. Generally speaking, there were only two

differences in how the Revive program is experienced by the men offenders and women survivors. The variations in their experiences were characterized by the women survivor participants discussing how the program provided the potential opportunity for a mediation confrontation of their abuser, as well as the value of forgiveness.

Women survivor participants discussed that the Revive program provided potential opportunities to confront their abuser(s) in a safe, confidential and protected environment. One participant discussed her encounter with her abuser and how it aided her in understanding men who have offended and provided her with a safe setting in which she could discuss with her abuser the impact the harm he had caused her. Though she revealed that her abuser pulled out of the process abruptly before its conclusion and expressed her frustration in not being able to finish the mediation, she articulated that she was satisfied with the process and can now respect and understand her abuser. While she was satisfied with the reconciliation process, I recognize that her abuser took advantage of the process and his control on the situation through pulling out of the process. Throughout reconciliation or mediation processes, the facilitator or mediator must work vehemently to ensure that this type of abuse of control does not lead to further victimization of the survivor. Restorative justice does have the ability to further the power imbalance and exacerbate the pain and harm suffered by a survivor of sexual abuse, just as our current legal system does. However, through explicit attention to these issues and open communication about the potential failings of restorative justice to the parties involved in a such a mediation, those overseeing the process can make themselves aware of such potential harms and work to avoid them.

Other women participants discussed how they perceived that this mediation or reconciliation program had distinct advantages over the court system. Participants discussed that

through the mediation they could speak directly to their abuser, attempting to have them understand the harm they have caused and to provide an opportunity to reconcile damaged relationships. The women survivors also discussed how a mediated confrontation is preferable to going through the court system, as it is less burdensome on them, they get to directly confront their abuser, and they perceive greater benefits as a result. This finding confirms the advantages cited in previous research in applying restorative justice to cases of sexual abuse, wherein the victim is given a voice, their experience is validated, and the goal is to repair relationships and increase understanding (Daly, 2006). Most of the women shared their utter frustration and lack of confidence in the justice and legal system to heal their wounds, make their voice heard, and to act as a catalyst for change (both societal change and change in the males who have offended).

This is in contrast to the participants in the men who had offended group who did not mention opportunities for, or the need to have, a mediated conversation with their victim. This particular divergence in member's experiences is not surprising given the fact that survivors of sexual abuse are often very dissatisfied with the legal systems handling of sexual abuse, and are open to alternative forms of justice. As well, a mediation or confrontation with their abuser provides a woman survivor with the opportunity to gain some control over her abusive experience. It is surprising that the men did not mention hearing the impact of their harm directly from their victim as central to their remediation and desire for change. I would imagine that one of the strongest desires to change for these offenders would stem from hearing their victim share all of the negative impacts that a particular man has caused them. Though the men who have offended participants did not mention their victims directly communicating the hurtful impact to them, they did express the recognition that they had committed heinous and abhorrent crimes that caused life-long impacts and impairments for their victims. For these men who voluntarily

joined a mutual aid group in order to receive support so that they would not make their grievous mistakes again, the impact and seriousness of their crime spurred their motivation to seek help. This is in stark contrast to our legal and court system which would encourage offenders to show no remorse and admit no responsibility, until the evidence against them proved them to be culpable.

For the women survivors in the focus group, they communicated that they wanted to be able to confront their abuser and share that while they had suffered a great deal of pain and hardship, that they were more than just a survivor of sexual abuse. Through the opportunity to communicate that they are not a victim, they are a survivor, these woman expressed the desire to gain control over their lives and to communicate their regained control to their abuser.

This divergence in experience of Revive program participants is likely due to the distinct needs of survivors. Due to the perceived failings of the legal system, and the lack of control they have experienced, survivors of sexual abuse engage in a process of confronting their abuser to have their experience validated and heard, to regain control over their relationship with their offender, and to have their abuser truly understand the painful impact their actions have caused them. This need did not exist in the men who had offended participants and therefore they did not communicate the desire to meet and discuss the abuse with their victim. This being said, a mediated meeting with their victim provides an opportunity for the offender to take responsibility, to show genuine remorse, and to begin to understand the negative impact they have caused in order to empathize with their victim. I believe that reconciliation should be encouraged as an option for survivors of sexual abuse who seek it, provided that there is no or limited risk of harm to them as a result of the process; and that this risk is communicated to them ahead of time. Risk can be minimized in such reconciliation through trained mediators balancing

the needs of the survivor and the potential risks of the offender, their relationship, their goals of the process. The decision to engage in such a reconciliation or mediation should always lie with the survivors of sexual abuse; an offender should never be provided with an opportunity to once again regain control and power over their victim.

One woman participant discussed her confrontation with her abuser (who had been a member of the men who had offended Revive group), and her ability to forgive him for the pain and suffering he had caused her. Through her abusers ability to facilitate personal change in himself in the course of his membership in Revive, she perceived their relationship had been repaired to a point where it was safe enough to discuss the abuse with him; this ultimately led to her ability to forgive him for the harm he had caused her. While she forgives him, she maintains control over her perception of their relationship by stating “once an offender, always an offender; he now chooses not to offend”. Through this belief that he will always remain an offender she has regained power over their relationship as she has healed herself to become “more than just a survivor”, while in her eyes he will always remain an offender.

Forgiveness was discussed by several women participants in the Revive program, but was not mentioned by the men who had offended. It is not surprising that the men who have offended did not mention forgiveness as an aspect of the Revive program or its impact upon them as they are concentrating on putting effort into their personal work and change; they cannot begin to even think about forgiveness or reconciliation until they have accomplished very significant personal change. In addition, these men have no power over their victim’s ability to forgive them; the decision to forgive or never to forgive lies solely with survivors of sexual abuse. These men may be working towards bettering themselves in order to feel worthy of being forgiven, however they do not get to control forgiveness.



The women survivor participants discussed forgiveness, and the lack of impact they thought it would have on their healing and recovery. Participants mentioned that they initially felt that forgiveness was not important to them and would have no impact upon their ability to heal. However, one participant mentioned that her abuser, her father, had recently apologized for his offences and the irreversible harm he had caused her. She communicated that she and her father had been discussing their relationship when he began to cry on her shoulder uttering over and over that he was sorry for everything that he had ever done, and the harm that he knew he had afflicted her. This participant went on to share that the apology unexpectedly floored her; she was greatly impacted as she felt it was a genuine heart-felt apology. The ability to forgive lies solely in the hands of survivors of sexual abuse. While some men who have offended may seek treatment in order to repair themselves and the relationships they have damaged, the choice in allowing relationship repair to occur is solely that of the survivor. Forgiveness cannot be equated with healing; the ability of a survivor to forgive her abuser should not reflect the stage or progress they have made in their healing. Rather, the ability to forgive should reflect a survivor's needs, goals, and their ability to evaluate and believe the change in their abuser.

The context or environment in which forgiveness, apologies, confrontations, or relationship restoration occurs between a survivor and their perpetrator should be closely supervised or guided by trained facilitators or community agency staff members. Taken from the above story of the woman survivor whose abuser cried on her shoulder and pleaded his apology, there are very real potentials for future harm and abuse if situations of relationship repair are not monitored or guided. The above narrative describes the close physical and emotional contact of a man who has offended with his victim, and his whispering in her ear. We do not know the context of the abuse that he had inflicted upon her, and such close contact and whispering could

have triggered her into flashbacks and a very real reliving of the abuse. While it is unrealistic to assert that all aspects of relationship repair and restoration can be closely monitored, it is practical to communicate the potential for harm to female survivors engaging in such processes. Through communicating to the survivor the possibilities of harm, the potential lack of responsibility taking on the part of the offender, and role-playing different scenarios that may occur during relationship restoration, survivors can create realistic expectations of what they may achieve through such processes and keep themselves safe by creating and communicating explicit boundaries.

This is in contrast to another participant's experience with her abuser who went to prison, where upon his release she was sent a standardized apology letter where he simply signed his name at the bottom. She communicated that she was angry and frustrated with the letter, the prison system, and her abuser as she knew he did not write it and it was not at all genuine. Herein lies an example of how the survivors of sexual abuse take control of forgiveness. It is because this particular woman perceived no change in her abuser, and because she did not desire an apology or forgiveness, that she ultimately does not forgive her abuser.

Herein lies the substantive opportunity that restorative justice can provide in healing the damaged persons and relationships in the aftermath of sexual abuse. While survivors of sexual abuse may not identify forgiveness or an apology as a common need or desire, the above experience from a woman survivor demonstrates that an opportunity for genuine relationship repair that can come as a result of restorative justice. In order for forgiveness to occur, there must be substantial effort and exhibition on the part of the man who has offended that he desires and has achieved personal change. The desire and demonstration of change on the part of the

offender is necessary but not sufficient for forgiveness and relationship repair; ultimately, survivors of sexual abuse hold the power to forgive and to seek relationship repair.

Relationship repair and personal change on the part of the offender are not explicitly dealt with within our traditional legal system. The focus in our system is upon punishment and removal from society; we are attempting to exert power and control over men who have offended for abusing their power and control over others. Restorative justice's goal lies in repairing individuals and relationships, and in the empowerment of female survivors and men who have offended to reduce the number of future victims; I believe these goals are being accomplished through CJI and the Revive program.

*Q.2 b) What are the commonalities in the way the two groups are experienced?*

In order to discuss the commonalities between the experiences of the women survivors and men who have offended sexually, this section will examine participant's responses in relation to the following codes: learning about and choosing the Revive program, first experiences in group, program supporting its participants, participants supporting one another, and restorative justice.

In reviewing the codes of how Revive group members first heard about and came to choose the program, there are a number of similarities in how participants first learned about the program as well as their initial motivations for joining the groups. Women survivors said that they had largely been referred to the program via their individual counsellor, and that the program was supplemental to their one on one therapy. Of the participants in the men who had offended group, the majority of the men said that they first learned of the program either from their individual counsellor or from their probation officer, and that this group therapy was in addition to individual counselling they were receiving. As evidenced from the findings in the code related to learning about the program, the majority of participants regardless of the group

said that their individual counsellor suggested the groups as additional support they could receive. The majority participants from both groups said that their counsellor had suggested a group type therapy, as it would provide them with additional distinct support that they could not receive elsewhere. Participants affirmed this by communicating that their initial motivation to and acceptance of the groups stemmed from the identification of similar experiences that arose from discussing their abuse histories and challenges with likeminded and similar others. This identification of parallel challenges also enabled members from both groups to open up and be honest about their story, as both groups said initial anxiety in sharing their story. Men who have offended have little or no forms of formal and informal support in the communities in which they reside: discussing their challenges, cognitive distortions, and unhealthy sexual identity or sexual arousal with friends, family or other community members, they are likely to be met with shaming opinions of themselves as inherently evil persons or police investigations. Through having an environment where these males can openly and safely discuss the issues they face, and that they are motivated to change, they no longer have to face these challenges alone.

Both focus groups discussed in great detail the many forms of support that they receive through their membership in the Revive program. Support was conceptualized as having two distinct components across the two groups; there were the *processes* of support, which included the program supporting its members as well as members supporting one another, and there were identified support *outcomes* which included emotional, tangible, informational, distinct support, and support beyond group. Both men who had offended sexually as well as the women survivors discussed the important processes through which the program and their group's members supported them on an ongoing and unconditional basis. Participants from both focus groups discussed the ways in which their Revive groups' members would challenge, mentor, and guide

one another towards common goals. These support processes were separate and distinct from the outcomes of support that both groups identified. Outcomes of support included informational support regarding court proceedings and referrals to other organizations, support beyond the two hours per week they were engaged in-group, as well as distinct support that members perceived they were not provided with through their other networks and formal avenues of support. Participants discussed at great length the ways in which their group community processes of support led to identifiable support outcomes, which were quite common experiences across the groups.

Previous research on marginalized or non-dominant communities has characterized these groups as lacking competence and resiliency, citing that they cannot provide adequate support and resources for the members to cope with challenges and adversity (Rappaport, 1977; as cited in Sonn & Fisher, 1996). The present research findings contradict the notion that marginalized communities can not sufficiently support their members through hard times and challenges. Both the women survivors as well as the men who have offended said that the support they have received from their Revive group, and from the CJI community, has been instrumental in their ability to face the challenges in their lives. Group members said that other group members were in the best position to support them and guide them in their processes of healing or remediation.

In contrast, the findings from this research support the notion of supportive alternative-communities, where group members perceive and evaluate themselves and their progress towards their goals on their own terms rather than the expectations set out by the dominant population (Sonn & Fisher, 1996). For example, the men who had offended commented that they were shamed and judged by the majority of society, and that the general population would like to see these men locked up and have the key thrown away. My findings indicate that these men

have found a supportive-alternative community wherein they can set their own expectations of themselves and others. Men group members communicated that they wanted to get past the guilt and shame of their offences, in order to make themselves feel like they were worthy of change.

From their common ground, members from both groups communicated that they were able to reciprocally support one another. Both women and men group members discussed the fact that they were working on their very personal issues and challenges with what were “relative strangers”. Both groups commented the experience of sharing their story with strangers to be liberating, nice, and easy. They commented that because the only thing they shared in their lives was either a history of sexual abuse or sexual offending, that they could get right down to providing the focused support they were all in need of.

The women survivors commented that from the common ground they all shared, they were able to understand each other’s story or challenges, and provide support around those common issues. A sense of security was also communicated by the women survivors, which led to participants feeling a level of comfort in sharing their highly personal story.

Within the men who had offended focus group, members said a highly similar experience in being able to trust and feel safe with group members. This sense of security allowed the men to share their offending history, their triggers, and their personal challenges. Once they were able to share with the group and put their challenges out on the table, they were then able to receive support and guidance around issues that members could relate to and provide assistance on.

While members from both focus groups communicated that the safety they felt in their groups was important to their membership, this safety that each group experienced is quite different. For survivors, they are likely to not feel safe most anywhere in their community or

surroundings; they look over their shoulder when walking down the street, they believe it is not safe for them to walk by themselves, and they are likely be distrustful of others. These women have had power and control taken from them, and as such they are prone to feelings of helplessness and insecurity. In contrast, the men who have offended are only apt to feel a lack of safety around those who explicitly know their past offending; they are the ones who have abused their power and control and therefore they are not prone to feeling helpless or vulnerable.

In addition to the work or processing that both group's members communicated having accomplished within their group on a weekly basis, both women survivors as well as the men who had offended said that the group provided them with support or structure which they carry with them outside of the two hours they met every week. The women survivors said that the support the group provided did not end after the two hours that they met each week. Participants said their ability and willingness to call group members outside of their scheduled time, and their ability to receive support from the Revive staff whenever they were in need, contributed to the feelings of consistent and ongoing support.

In a parallel way, the men who had offended sexually commented that the support they receive from the Revive group continues on after the two regularly scheduled hours each week. The men communicated that the support is extended through the perspective taking that they can accomplish after attending group for sometime. They cited that when they are facing a situation or conflict outside of their group time, they are able to take on the perspective of the groups' members and cognitively go through what these group members would do or what they would give as advice. This provided them with another avenue or form of support which is sustained on an ongoing basis. This is confirmatory of Frost and Connolly's (2004) theoretical model of change and reflexivity in men who have offended sexually, wherein one of the phases of true

therapeutic engagement is ruminating on topics discussed *in* the therapy group with members or oneself *outside* of the actual group. This reprocessing and re-engagement on topics or personal issues from within the therapy group, presents a constructive opportunity for personal change as the individual strives to build meaning surrounding the experiences from their group session (Frost & Connolly, 2004).

Restorative justice seeks to repair the harm sustained by individuals, relationships, and the wider community in the aftermath of harm or violence (Classen, 1996). The opportunity that restorative justice provides lies in its goal to empower community members to actively engage in repairing harm and relationships, and making the community a more connected and safe environment. Both the men who had offended as well as the women survivors said that restorative justice (through the Revive groups) has empowered them to take an engaged role in their own healing or remediation. Participants in both groups commented that they were responsible for their own healing and change, and with the support of Revive they feel they are empowered to do so.

Members in both groups discussed their perceptions of the difficulties or disadvantages of the traditional legal system in effectively coping with the phenomenon of sexual abuse. Both the men who have offended and the women survivors expressed frustrations in the lack of ability on the part of the legal and prison system to effect change, either in the individual who had offended, or in repairing the damaged relationships.

The research findings regarding group members' experiences and perceptions of restorative justice confirm previous research which has said that one of the impetuses in using restorative justice stems from the perceived failings and inadequacies of our criminal justice system (Hudson, 2002). Both Revive groups expressed that they perceived and confirmed the



advantages in restoring survivors as well as offenders in the aftermath of sexual abuse; instead of punishing offenders and leaving little options for confrontation and healing for survivors.

Restorative justice is naturally holistic in its goals and principles. The goal of such justice is the active engagement of community members (who are both directly and indirectly affected by the offence) in repairing individuals and relationships, in order to create safer and more connected communities (Petrunik, 2002). The findings from the present research indicate that most group members perceived and lauded the holistic perspective of restorative justice as well as the Revive groups. Both women survivors and the men who have offended discussed that there were groups for both populations, and that both groups were equally as necessary in repairing the damage and preventing future harm. In order for the true restoration of individuals and relationships, and safe community reintegration, I firmly believe that both survivors and offenders must be supported.

Participants said that through the work they had accomplished in Revive, they have empowered themselves to become advocates of restorative justice. Group members saw distinct advantages in the principles of restoration over a focus solely on punishment. While no participants advocated negating prison time or punishment for an offender, both groups communicated that the legal system does not do a good job of fulfilling the needs of either groups. The women survivors stated that their needs of restoration, confrontation with their abuser, and to be heard and believed were accomplished through Revive, and not through the legal system. Participants in the men who have offended group communicated that their needs of receiving support, feeling worthy of personal change, and education on the offender's cycle and common challenges were not fulfilled in their dealings with the legal system. It was through the

Revive group that the men were given an opportunity to better themselves, to learn how to make positive decisions, in order to never repeat the harm they have caused again.

Participants in both focus groups communicated that the Revive groups were a distinct community of support in their lives. Individuals who are affected by sexual abuse come to the groups in order to fulfill common needs and work towards shared goals. After analyzing the codes of needs fulfillment and goals from both focus groups, many similarities were drawn from their experiences. Both populations reported similar needs, shared goals of de-stigmatization, and the prevention of future victims of sexual abuse.

Past research has demonstrated that survivors of sexual abuse communicate that they have a number of needs that relate to both formal and informal support. Research regarding women who have participated in mutual-help residences has found that these women share a high sense of community, reciprocal responsibility, harmony, and mission Olson et al. (2003). In a similar fashion, participants in the women survivors Revive groups commented that there were a number of needs they perceived they have fulfilled as a result of their membership and participation in Revive: the need to interact and have social contact, to be heard, to be believed, and not to share their experiences without being judged or shamed. Participants in the focus group said that they felt the Revive program provides opportunities for a survivor to become actively engaged in fulfilling all of their needs. In this way women participants in the Revive program are given opportunities to empower themselves and others to seek out support and begin their processes of healing and recovery. In a similar fashion, the men who had offended sexually reported similar needs of sharing their story with other men who had offended, not to be judged or shamed, and the need to reintegrate back into their community. The men in the focus group

commented several times that the groups empowered them to gain the self-confidence to rebuild themselves in order to become safe and productive members of society again.

Previous research has suggested a correlation between the group environment (expressiveness, cohesiveness) and treatment outcomes (Beech and Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005), indicating that men who have offended need a supportive, non-judgmental, and cohesive group environment in order to affect change in victim empathy and cognitive distortions. Confirming this previous discovery, our findings suggest that one of the essential aspects of the Revive group for men who have offended is the safe, open, and non-judgmental atmosphere of the groups and the organization. Participants commented that they needed to feel worthy of change: the men needed to be shown that they were worth being supported, that others believed they could change, and to be given a space in which to begin their work. One man said that the programs existence, as well as the fact that there were facilitators who had never offended before that were willing to support them week after week, empowered him to actively be engaged in his remediation. The Revive groups for men who have offended offer a unique environment in which members are provided an opportunity to empower themselves and others in attempting to safely reintegrate back into the community.

While the goals of community support programs such as Revive are rarely explicit or concrete, group members are expected to support, help, and influence one another towards the potentiality of greater personal control over their lives while navigating through high-risk situations (Gitterman & Shulman, 2005). For individuals who have offended sexually, the ultimate goal of safe community reintegration is facilitated through alleviating behavioural deficits, developing empathy, acquiring social skills, and modifying cognitive distortions (Pfafflin, Bohmer, Cornehl, & Mergenthaler, 2005).

In regards to the present research findings, both women survivors as well as the men who have offended communicated that the goal of the Revive program was three fold: 1) to provide ongoing non-judgmental support to both survivors as well as men who have offended, 2) their safe and successful reintegration into the community, and 3) to prevent future victims of sexual abuse.

All members of the Revive groups stated that the overarching goal of the program was to provide support to all persons affected by sexual abuse: survivors, those who have offended, and spouses who are affected. Both the women survivors as well as the men who had offended sexually affirmed the need to be supportive of both populations, as individuals in both groups need to become empowered to restore themselves and their relationships. Additionally, both the men who had offended as well as the women survivors commented that the support they were provided with and the opportunities for healing or remediation they had received as part of their membership in the Revive groups were distinct and unique from the other formal and informal supports that they each have.

Participants in both focus groups commented that they hope to rebuild or remodel themselves such that they can become functioning and productive members of society. Both the men who had offended as well as the women survivors communicated that they felt isolated and marginalized from society and that through their membership in Revive, they are given an opportunity to become empowered to make positive changes in their lives that enable them to become interdependent and functioning members of society. Participants reported becoming empowered through meeting each week with common survivors or offenders who deal with the same struggles and challenges and working through those challenges through mutual support. Members are able to see the progress and change in group members, providing them with

potential directions or paths to further their healing. As well, participants stated that those group members who had been in the program for a year or two acted as “veteran” members who could inspire younger or less experienced group members through sharing their journey of healing or remediation and their successes in restoring their lives.

Restorative justice is typically thought of as forward or progressive in its thinking; attempting to repair damage done to individuals as well as relationships and the greater community in order to prevent future harm. Participants from both focus groups truly believe that the work that the Revive groups are accomplishing is preventing future victims of sexual abuse. The groups equally discussed the importance of the program supporting both survivors as well as men who had offended sexually as they are both pieces of a very harmful puzzle and they are often both desperately in need of support. A common characteristic of participant’s descriptions of the program included the recognition that the program was distinct, unique, and provided unconditional support to two populations who often had little other options for support. The two groups shared a similar notion that through the programs existence (and the members becoming advocates for the program) sexual abuse would be discussed more in the community and become less of a taboo topic. As the result of more community members being educated on sexual abuse and discussions of sexual abuse becoming more accepted, there would be more opportunities for support for persons affected by sexual abuse. The participants commented that they had become empowered through their membership to become advocates of restorative justice; hoping to reach other survivors or offenders of sexual abuse, and ultimately reduce its occurrence.

The current study’s findings, as they relate to both women survivors as well as men who have offended, have a number of implications for programming and practice. To begin, the

current findings suggest that it is possible for a single organization to use restorative justice principles to form support groups for both survivors and offenders. These findings are in contradiction to the majority of the literature in the field that suggest that these two populations on two very different sides of the same issue cannot be supported within communities using identical principles and values. By providing mutual-aid groups to both populations, there exists a powerful opportunity to move communities towards repair and safe reintegration. The findings from the current study confirm that by providing supports to both offenders and survivors, the Revive program has provided an alternative community from which these individuals can work together towards common goals of healing, personal change, and the reduction of future victims of sexual abuse. As well, the experiences of the participants reveals that both groups admired that the Revive program was providing support to the other population: the female survivors recognized the need of men who had offended to be supported through the personal change they seek, and the men who had offended understood that Revive was helping alleviate or address the harm they had caused others. This is an important revelation for community agencies working to support individuals affected by sexual abuse. This research and the success of the Revive program should demonstrate to other agencies the ability of restorative justice to support all individuals affected by sexual abuse. Services that support individuals affected by sexual abuse should take note of the holistic scope and powerful potential for change that restorative justice provides, and begin to work towards supporting all persons affected by sexual abuse within their community.

### Q. 3 How does the Revive model promote sense of community?

In the following section the findings from the current research will be compared with the theoretical model of sense of community as proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in order to

understand how the Revive groups may provide an alternative-supportive community. Sense of community, as proposed by these two authors encompasses four core dimensions which characterize “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan, 1976; as cited in McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The four dimensions membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection: each of these four dimensions will be discussed in the subsequent four sections.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) define the dimension of *membership* in having a sense of community as a conscious feeling that one has a right to belong stemming from a devotion of part of oneself to a particular community. Membership is also characterized by boundaries; there are people who belong and those who do not. These boundaries create a feeling of emotional safety in its members that enables them to have their feelings and needs expressed, allowing for intimacy amongst the members to develop. The findings from the current research are congruent with the dimension of membership, as Revive group members expressed a feeling of safety and openness as a result of their membership and participation within the program. Participants communicated that there were clear membership boundaries, and these boundaries were in part what motivated them to join Revive. Both men and women group members shared that they came to the Revive groups in order to discuss their challenges and pain with other women survivors or men who had offended. Through this connection that members felt to one another, a high level of intimacy was able to develop as they could safely and honestly share their experiences with sexual abuse. Revive participants also commented that they felt like their membership within the program gave them a sense of belonging and security, a feeling of acceptance. Several participants commented that the Revive groups were the first place they felt

like they belonged, as the other forms of support they received did not give them the same connection and level of intimacy. In general, participants communicated that their membership in Revive provided opportunities for them to heal or work on their personal issues, significantly more so than their other formal and informal networks of support.

Sense of community's dimension of *influence* is described as a bidirectional concept wherein members feel that they can influence the community and community members; group cohesiveness is dependant upon the group's ability to influence individual members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Findings from the current research study confirm that members of the Revive program feel a strong current of influence that flows both from the group to individual members as well as from members to the overall group. The code of reciprocal support from both the women survivor as well as men who have offended sexually focus groups illuminate the bidirectional support that members perceived they obtain from their membership within Revive. Participants stated numerous times throughout the focus groups that one of the central aspects of the program is in the ability of members to relate, challenge, and unconditionally support one another. Members sustained their membership within Revive in order to share their sexual abuse experiences with like-others, who were in a distinct position to relate to their needs and goals and positively influence their healing or remediation.

Participants also commented on the role of veteran members, who acted as role models or beacons to their groups' members. These veteran members influenced the group by empowering other participants to believe that they too could achieve the same extent of healing or personal change that they had undergone through their membership in Revive. The authors of the model of sense of community argue that within a tightly knit community influence flows concurrently from a member to the community and from the community to its members (McMillan & Chavis,



1986). Revive can be characterized as a tightly knit community within the theory of sense of community as members perceived reciprocal support and influence to be one of the core facets of the program that enabled them to create the change in themselves. Revive group participants commented the group processes allow for them to support and influence members through discussing their experiences with abuse and sharing successes or fallbacks in their own healing or remediation processes. Group members also commented that because there is no defined agenda or topic from week to week they are able to influence and control what topics are particularly relevant each night, given that there are often specific topics that members are in need of support surrounding. In general, participant's characterized reciprocal support, influence, and challenging as one of the central pieces of the Revive program that empowered them to heal, remediate, and feel accepted within a community.

The authors define the third dimension of sense of community, *integration and fulfillment of needs*, as classic reinforcement (McMillan & Chavis, 1986): members of a group or community maintain a positive sense of togetherness through a sense that their group is rewarding and fulfills members common needs. The authors also theorize that members of a particular community come together to fulfill one another's needs as they often have shared values, priorities, and goals. These shared values lead to the belief that in joining together with like-others, members can better satisfy their needs and seek reinforcing rewards (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Participants of the Revive program stated several times within the focus groups that members of the program often share goals and needs with others in the group, and that through their membership in the group they are better able to satisfy their own needs while lending similar support to other group members. When we look to the codes of needs from both focus

groups, we can observe that both the men who have offended and the women survivors said that the groups provide positive reinforcement through fulfilling their informational, tangible, and emotional needs. Group members said that through their membership in Revive they were able to learn how to put their lives back in order by means of having a safe environment to express their emotions and challenges, while being provided with information and advice from veteran survivors or offenders who could guide their progress. In a similar vein, all participants communicated sharing similar goals of personal change, conflict resolution, and ultimately their positive and safe community reintegration, that they were working towards as a result of their membership in the Revive program. Membership within the Revive program is positively reinforcing for all group members as they are offered an opportunity to be provided with distinct direct support from others who know their experiences and share the same ambitions.

The fourth and final dimension of sense of community as theorized by McMillan and Chavis (1986) is a *shared emotional connection*. The authors state that a mutual emotional connection in a community is founded upon a shared history, or, a common history that all group members can identify with. The authors state that within the dimension of shared emotional connection, there are several features such as contact, quality of interaction, and shared valent event theory, which increase the emotional connection amongst community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Findings from the current research illuminate the strong shared emotional connection that Revive group members experience as a result of their participation in their mutual-aid groups. Both the women survivors as well as the men who have offended sexually communicated that their primary motivation in joining the mutual aid groups was to connect with other survivors or offenders. Participants stated that group members shared a history of offending or abuse that they

could all identify with, and as such were in a unique position to provide one another with the support and guidance they needed. Confirming the theoretical model, participants in the current research stated that their emotional connection to one another increased as they had more contact with their group from week to week. As well, participants communicated that the bond between group members was strong right from the beginning, or soon after starting, as the personal work they sought to accomplish was significant to each member.

Group members expressed a wider sense of community tied to those involved with Community Justice Initiatives, and restorative justice in general. There was a sense of admiration for all of those involved with CJI, as there was a strong belief that those who were involved in processes of restorative justice were working towards creating safer communities. Both survivors and offenders of sexual abuse are stigmatized and isolated from society. By creating a positive sense of community within their group and CJI, the Revive groups are working to restore these individual's overall sense of community and connectedness to society. Participants commented that it was the connections that they made with their group members that kept them coming back to Revive from week to week; members wanted not only to heal or change themselves, but they had connected with others and felt a shared identity and responsibility to support their group members. Beyond supporting their group's members, participants expressed an interest in going out into the community to speak about sexual abuse and its impacts in order to break the silence that keeps communities in the dark about the horrific nature of sexual abuse. The sense of community that members felt towards their Revive group empowered them and acted as a catalyst to seek out others who were in need of membership, influence, and an emotional connection.

Overall, both women survivor as well as men who have offended participants communicated that the Revive program was a safe and supportive alternative community in which they could begin or continue along their journey of healing or remediation. In addition, findings from the current research implicate the opportunity that an alternative community can have an impact in enhancing positive senses of community for both women survivors as well as men who have offended. Findings also indicate that mutual-aid groups that operate using principles of restorative justice promote dignity, respect, and communication amongst their members, leading to a positive sense of community for its members. Confirmatory of past research, the Revive community allows its members to perceive and evaluate themselves and one another on their own terms (Sonn & Fisher, 1996) rather than those forced upon them by the wider community and society. Participants discussed that their membership in the program provided them with a distinct opportunity to receive support from like-minded survivors or offenders and to have all of their needs fulfilled, while becoming empowered to influence and support their mutual aid group. All of the participants agreed that the most essential aspect of the program as well as their motivation to join Revive, stemmed from their shared emotional connection they felt with other survivors or offenders. Group member's ability to positively influence one another as well as the overall group provided them with a sense of empowerment as they found that it was therapeutic to help other offenders or survivors while receiving support themselves. On the whole, I can say with confidence that the Revive program functions as an effective-supportive community wherein its members can be supported while they walk along side like-others who are on parallel paths of healing or remediation.

## Limitations of the Present Study

The present research utilized a case study methodology and as such the findings may not be transferable to other community programs that support persons affected by sexual abuse. In a similar vein, Community Justice Initiatives a distinct community agency that supports both survivors of sexual abuse as well as men who have offended sexually, and therefore, Revive member's experiences may not necessarily be transferable to other community support programs that support either survivors or offenders. Nevertheless we can deduce that similar types of community support programs provide comparable opportunities for support for either survivors or person who have offended sexually due to the fact that they are likely operating out of an expressed need or desire for support from these populations.

Due to constraints of time, the current study operated using a case study approach utilizing only one data source; participants engaged in the Revive program. This is a limitation as case studies often employ multiple data sources from multiple stakeholders leading to a more in-depth description of the context or phenomenon of interest. This limitation notwithstanding, I consulted with both the service and program coordinator of the Revive program throughout the research process to ensure that my methods and data were representative of Revive participants. This continuous consultation process throughout allowed me to achieve the rich description and analysis I was able to achieve.

It is possible that due to the use of convenience (voluntary) sampling rather than random sampling, our findings may not be truly representative of all members of the Revive program. The participants' desire to contribute and participate in the current study may reflect their positive feelings regarding their groups and the support they receive, and as such we may have neglected to sample negative cases. This being said, the Revive program functions as a voluntary

support group and therefore members who are not receiving the support they need are likely to drop out of the groups and search out other avenues for support.

Finally, having not conducted the originally scheduled follow-up interviews with the Revive participants, the collected data may not be a true representation of group members' experiences. This being said, the rationales in not conducting the interviews following the focus groups were three-fold: 1) The principle investigator concluded that the data was saturated and was true to the Revive participants' experiences of their mutual-aid groups, 2) participant burden was a concern as all participants who said interest in participating did so via the focus groups, and therefore follow-up interviews were considered a burden upon participants, and 3) individual interviews with the principle investigator would not have yielded significantly different or more in-depth accounts from participants as the focus groups acted as a comfortable environment in which they could openly share their Revive experiences with their group members; it was thought that the focus group yielded sufficient data as participants were already used to and comfortable with a focus group discussion, as opposed to a one-to-one interview with an "outsider researcher" which would not have yielded more in-depth narratives.

#### Future Research Considerations

A number of suggestions or considerations for future research developed during the course of this project. For example, a full participatory program evaluation could be conducted for the Revive program wherein participants, staff, and community facilitators would act as a steering committee to investigate the outcomes of the program as they refer to all of the groups offered: men who have offended sexually, men survivors, women survivors, and spouses affected by sexual abuse. Another consideration for future research would be to investigate a cost-benefit and/or a cost-effectiveness evaluation of the Revive program as it relates to men

who have offended sexually. These findings could then be compared to incarceration costs, court costs, and outcomes in order to investigate and advocate for optimal opportunities, both within the community as well as the prison system, for men who have offended sexually. Ultimately, the goal of these projects would be to investigate the effectiveness in different methods that strive to safely and positively reintegrate these men back into our communities.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the Revive program functions as an empowering opportunity for persons affected by sexual abuse to heal or remediate, while working towards positively and safely reintegrating back into the community. The Revive program provides a distinct supportive community for women survivors as well as men who have offended sexually to both give and receive support on common issues and challenges that they face. The benefits of the program are achieved through personal effort to change, group members supporting and challenging one another, an unconditionally supportive staff and through community-facilitators assisting in the administration and delivery of the program. As well, participants communicated that it was not just the Revive program that supported them; the entire organization of Community Justice Initiatives, especially the Revive coordinators, were implicated in the powerful and unique opportunity for healing and personal change that Revive offered. In the words of one women survivor:

“I would tell somebody that...um...it’s a program that supports you and offers, um, just offers everything someone needs at that time in their life going through something as sexual abuse.”(SUSAN)

An excerpt from the men who have offended group, reflecting on the program:

“DAVID – What would happen without that kind of support – like what do you think would happen? Like, I’m just turning it around.

MICHAEL – We certainly wouldn’t be getting any better. I think that our thought processes would just spiral us right back down...

(Agreement from members)

MICHAEL – Without a life to look forward to then you’re going to be – it doesn’t matter might as well offend again.

TIMOTHY – Battling myself. And it’s not a very good feeling to just – I still do that. I look forward to coming here – just to uh, get my head straight. I couldn’t do it without this group.

ERIC- Yeah, and, I feel good when I leave here, and I look forward to coming here, you know. It’s – definitely part of the road of recovery, the road to a better life.”

The final conclusions from this research advocate in favour of models of restorative justice and sense of community as effective models for supporting and working along side all persons affected by sexual abuse. Further work is needed to evaluate the true potential of restorative justice in reducing recidivism in offenders. However, the findings from the current study advocate for the opportunity provided to these men who have offended. The opportunity that Revive provides for these men to openly discuss their challenges surrounding their sexuality, cognitive distortions, and safely address their personal challenges is unparalleled by the other support they receive. For survivors, the findings also speak to the unique and distinct support that they receive from Revive: the normalizing of their experiences with other survivors, the opportunity to confront their abuser, as well as the opportunity to become an advocate for all survivors as well as restorative justice.



In utilizing restorative justice principles, the Revive program recognizes the gendered nature of sexual abuse and attempts to redistribute power and control from those who have violently abused their power, men who have offended, to survivors of sexual abuse who have had control and power taken away from them. Within the present research data, there was no explicit mention of patriarchy or the gendered nature of sexual abuse. The silence surrounding this important issue is somewhat worrisome, as any dialogue regarding sexual abuse requires an analysis or discussion of the gendered nature of sexual violence and abuse. I would recommend that the Revive program address this gap through providing a session or workshop for the Revive facilitators that explicitly deals with patriarchy and the role of power, control, and gender in relation to sexual abuse. Through providing this information to the facilitators, they can begin to discuss these issues with their Revive group members so that issues of gender and power do not go unspoken or unchallenged.

Restorative justice instils a sense of community between mutual-aid group members, as well as a sense of community to the organization and the greater community. For the participants of the focus groups engaged in this research, restorative justice provided a distinct opportunity to feel a connection to others, to the wider community, and to begin to safely and positively reintegrate themselves back into the community. In the aftermath of harm, there are many individuals and relationships that are in need of healing and support: Community Justice Initiatives and the Revive program recognize and successfully fulfill this need for the Kitchener-Waterloo community.

#### The Relevance to Community Psychology

The primary goal of the current research was to give voice to survivors and offenders who are traditionally silenced both in the research and in the community, in order to understand

the narratives and experiences of group members' participating in the Revive program for person affected by sexual abuse. In working to achieve this goal, my research framework and methods were driven by the desire to promote individual and collective well-being. The following section is a reflection upon the values related to community psychology, and their application throughout this research as well as within the Revive program.

The discipline of community psychology advocates that there are specific values that ought to guide community research in order to promote, personal, relational and collective well being. Nelson and Prililtensky (2005) suggest that there are six overarching values that promote the stated ecological levels of well-being: self-determination, caring and compassion, health, respect for diversity, participation and collaboration, support for community structures, as well as social justice and accountability.

#### *Self-determination*

The Revive mutual-aid groups provide opportunities for individuals affected by sexual abuse to be supported by like-others, while determining their individual needs, goals and paths to pursue their safe and successful reintegration into the community. Alternative settings or communities function as empowering tools wherein members can evaluate themselves on their own terms (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), and individually determine the path they need to take to restore their mental and physical health: the Revive program functions as such, allowing members to take control of their healing, remediation, needs, goals, and ultimately their lives.

#### *Caring and Compassion*

The Revive program is a unique formal support network for men who have offended sexually, who ordinarily would receive little or no support within their community. The mere fact that the Revive program offers support to these men demonstrates that there are members in

the community who care about them, their health, and their reintegration into society.

Correspondingly, the message the Revive program sends to the community is that CJI cares and is compassionate towards all individuals affected by sexual abuse, as the ultimate goal is the creation of safer and more connected communities. As well, the findings from this research indicate that Revive group members care about one another, and are passionate about supporting both survivors as well as men who have offended.

### *Health*

The current study focused upon Revive members' perceptions and experiences of the program, and as such, health was prominent theme as one of the goals of the program is the restoration of healthy individuals and healthy relationships. Both individual and community health are affected by sexual abuse, and therefore in trying to reduce its occurrence the program is also striving to improve overall community health.

### *Respect for Diversity*

At the heart of the Revive program lies the principle that all persons affected by sexual abuse are in need of, and should be provided with, opportunities for support, healing and remediation. In the same way, this research strived to be respectful of all Revive participants regardless of group, gender, and creed. Sexual abuse is not confined to one population, one culture, or one community, and as such the Revive program is respectful of the diverse nature of sexual abuse in attempting to support all of those who say they are in need.

### *Participation and Collaboration*

Due to the fact that the Revive program functions as mutual-aid groups, participation, collaboration, and mutual responsibility lie at the heart of the programs processes. Group members take an active role in providing support, in determining group topics and agendas, as

well as greater advocacy roles within Community Justice Initiatives and the greater community. Participation and collaboration were valued within this research as participants came together in focus groups in order to collaborate and share their experiences and perceptions of the program.

### *Support for Community Structures*

Within the value of support for community structures, there are several needs and objectives that are required in order to maintain community: pursuit of personal and communal goals, sense of community, cohesion, and formal support (Nelson and Prililtensky, 2005). One of the goals or objectives of this research was to highlight the importance of the Revive program as a unique and essential community support structure. Through the program members enhance their sense of community, are provided with formal support, and are brought together in solidarity in pursuit of personal and community change. Through researching an alternative setting this study challenges traditional notions of community support and promotes the value of community structures.

### *Social Justice and Accountability*

Through their participation in Revive, the man who had offended said that they had taken responsibility for the harm they have caused and are attempting to create personal change in themselves and others in order to not repeat their hurtful actions. The men said that they were accountable to their groups' members and to the program, which gave them a sense of empowerment as they were implicated in changing the cycle of sexual abuse. Through the Revive programs mandate to support all person affected by sexual abuse, they are attempting to repair the harm and bring justice to the community.

## Appendix A

## Informational Letter



Would you contribute to this study by participating in a group discussion? We are interested in learning about your experiences and thoughts regarding the Revive program at CJI.

You are invited to participate in a project being conducted by Mr. Chris McEvoy, under the direction of Dr. Colleen Loomis, as part of master's thesis research at Wilfrid Laurier University. We are conducting a study entitled:

*"Sense of Community and Restorative Justice as Models of Support:  
Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Males Who Have Offended Sexually"*

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness and experiences of the Revive program as told by Revive group participants. You have been invited because you attend the Revive groups. Your participation is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate. Choosing not to participate will have no impact on your membership within the Revive program. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions about the project please contact Chris McEvoy, (519) 884-0710, ext. 2879, or his supervisor Dr. Colleen Loomis at Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, ext. 2858.

Your participation would involve contributing to a group discussion, an individual interview with the researcher, or both. The group discussion would be one 2 hour conversation regarding your personal experience in and satisfaction with the Revive program. For your convenience the group discussions will be held in a private room at CJI, with the group you meet with weekly. Scheduling the times of the focus groups will be negotiated with the group members. In order to minimize inconvenience to participants, it is suggested that the focus groups take place before or during your regularly scheduled weekly meeting. Two focus groups are being conducted; one for males who have offended, and one for female survivors, and each discussion group will consist of approximately 7 individuals. Thus, approximately fourteen individuals will be involved in the group discussion component of this study. The discussion will be recorded, and then typed. Two members from the males who have offended group, and two members from the female survivors group will be randomly drawn and asked to take part in a one hour interview with the researcher regarding their personal experiences within the Revive program. Thus, approximately four individuals will be involved in the interview component of this study. Participants for the individual interviews will be randomly selected from a pool of all of those who express interest to participate in an interview. For your convenience, the interview will take place in one of CJI's offices and will be scheduled for a date and time that is convenient to you.

Your participation can take one of four forms: 1) Participate in the discussion groups but not interview, 2) Participate in both the group discussion and an interview, 3) Participate in an interview but not the discussion groups, 4) Not participate in either the group discussion or the interview.

If you choose to participate, you may choose not to respond to any one of the questions, and you may withdraw from the project at any time. Your responses to the questions will be kept strictly

confidential. Please note that your name will not be associated in any way with your responses. We will not ask any information during the focus group that could identify you. You will be encouraged not to use actual names during the course of the focus groups. You may use a different name (pseudonym) for this research. As well if any names are used during the course of the groups, pseudonyms or otherwise, they will be changed for the final report. The information you share during the discussion will be accessible to only Mr. Chris McEvoy and Dr. Colleen Loomis. To further protect your confidentiality, the recorded discussions will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, within a locked office at Wilfrid Laurier University. These data will be locked in storage for seven years and then destroyed. Audio recordings will be stored on a password required computer in a locked research office, and will be erased after seven years. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have previously provided will be immediately destroyed.

Although we can assure that we the researchers will keep your information confidential and that your name will not be associated with your responses, we cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will not discuss what they have heard during the session. At the outset of each session, the focus group facilitator will explicitly state that all information shared during the focus group sessions be kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee that the information will stay confidential.

The information gathered during your discussion group will be reported in group format with information from the other discussion group and possibly with individual, non-identifying direct quotations. If quotations are used they will be anonymous. Names used during the discussion will be changed. The discussion groups will be conducted in a conversational manner, and it will be difficult to identify who has said which comment in the audio-tracks. If you withdraw from the study after participating in the discussion groups, you will not be able to have your data (quotes and conversation) destroyed or returned to you. Therefore, if you are not comfortable with having your quotes used in the final research report, you should not participate in this portion of the study.

Quotations will also be used from the individual interviews. However, before any interview quotes are put in the research report, the researcher will present you with your quotes in order to obtain consent to use them. You may refuse the use of any of all of your quotes.

This project is the master's thesis research of Mr. Chris McEvoy, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University, and is expected to be completed by August 31, 2008 at which time a final summary report of the findings will be sent to the CJI offices. The researchers will also prepare academic reports of grouped information to be published in journals and presented at conferences. No individually identifying information will be published.

We do not believe that you will experience any major risks to your well-being by participating in this study. On the one hand, you may have had a negative experience with respect to this topic, either in the past or during group meetings, and you may find yourself becoming upset recalling such experiences. To address this issue you will be provided a list of counselling resources, and you will be informed that either the service or program coordinator (Richard Messier or Jennifer Davies) are available for you to talk to in private: the researcher will not be present in such discussions. On the other hand, there are significant benefits from your participation in the study.

First, this study will contribute to current understanding regarding the success of the Revive program and its ability to support all persons affected by sexual abuse. The research findings will also contribute to existing knowledge of what components of the program designs work well, and what components may not be achieving their intended goals. Finally, the research findings have implications for designing and implementing programs which support populations in need in other communities, as well as other social welfare agencies within Ontario and across Canada. Such widespread implementation can potentially work towards reducing sexual abuse and its negative effects in addition to creating safer more accepting communities.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact either, Chris McEvoy, in the Department of Psychology, WLU, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, and mcev6030@wlu.ca, or Dr. Colleen Loomis, (519) 884-0710, extension 2858, Cloomis@wlu.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468, bmarr@wlu.ca.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information please complete the volunteer form on the attached sheet. Please indicate your willingness to participate on the attached sheet.

Sincerely,  
Chris McEvoy, B.A.  
Master's candidate

Colleen Loomis, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Psychology

## Appendix B

## Volunteer Form



If you are interested in participating in a discussion group, or individual interview, regarding your experiences in the Revive program you attend, or if you would like more information about this study, please complete the information below. If you do not wish to participate please indicate so below; you do not need to give your name. Please return the form to your Revive facilitator who will pass it on to the Revive coordinators. Your facilitator will be contacted by Mr. Chris McEvoy, within the next few weeks in order to confirm your participation and schedule a date for the focus group.

Your participation can take one of four forms: 1) Participate in the discussion groups but not interview, 2) Participate in both the group discussion and an interview, 3) Participate in an interview but not the discussion groups, 4) Not participate in either the group discussion or the interview.

Please note that no personnel of Community Justice Initiatives will be involved in facilitating the focus groups..

1. Revive Group: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you like to take part in a focus group? Yes No

Would you like to take part in an individual interview? Yes No

I would like more information Yes No

3. Preferred focus group date, time and location (Please check one):

☐ During your regularly scheduled Revive program night (7:00-9:00pm)

☐ Two hours before your regularly schedule Revive program night (5:00-7:00pm)

☐ I would like to suggest an alternate time: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

### Group Discussion Informed Consent Statement

#### WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY GROUP DISCUSSION INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding the Revive program at CJI. The purpose of this study is to examine the processes that take place in the Revive program in order to better understand how the groups positively influence and benefit the participants. The focus of the present research is to examine how Revive can support both those who have offended sexually as well as survivors using the same model of support and the principles of restorative justice. The study is entitled:

*“Sense of Community and Restorative Justice as Models of Support:  
Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Males Who Have Offended Sexually”*

My name is Chris McEvoy and I am a graduate student in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I have been involved with Community Justice Initiatives both as a student placement and Revive facilitator. I have become very interested in the Revive program as it seeks to provide a safe, confidential and comfortable atmosphere for people affected by sexual abuse to begin their journey of healing or remediation. This research project aims to identify the aspects of the group, group environment and its processes that are essential and beneficial to group members.

#### **INFORMATION**

As part of this study your Revive group will be asked to participate in a focus group either before your group's weekly meeting or during your regular group time. The focus groups will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. In addition, you have the option to take part in an individual interview with Chris McEvoy.

You have been selected to participate in this research as you are a member of the Revive program, and this study is investigating the experience of Revive group members in order to better understand the program from the perspective of those who use it. Two of the revive groups are being asked to participate in separate focus groups in order to better understand participants experience of the groups: males who have offended and female survivors. In addition, two members from each of the groups will be asked to participate in an hour long interview with Chris McEvoy. There will be approximately 14 people participating in the discussion groups, and 4 people participating in individual interviews. The focus group and/or interview that you participate in will be recorded using an audio-tape recorder. These discussions will serve as the primary data in this study.

As the focus group discussions will be the primary research data, we are asking for your permission to use direct quotes in the research report; we will not ask for your name or any other identifying characteristics. Names and other identifying characteristics will not be used in the final report, and any names used in the focus groups or interviews will be changed. The study will be completed by August 31<sup>st</sup> of 2008 when a brief report will be made available to you through Community Justice Initiatives, or mailed to you by request. This project is in no way affiliated with the staff or administration of CJI, and your participation or non-participation in this research will in no way affect your ability to be a member of the Revive program.

#### **RISKS**

As you know, sexual abuse is a highly sensitive and personal topic. You may feel discomfort in talking about your experiences with sexual abuse in relation to the Revive group. However, the

focus of the present study is not on the experience on sexual abuse, but on your groups' journey through the processes of recovering or remediation. As such, we will not be explicitly asking about your experiences with sexual abuse, but rather, your experiences as a group member within the Revive program. Should you feel any discomfort before, during or after your participation in this study, you are free to contact myself, my supervisor, or the Revive coordinators to discuss how you feel and possible actions to take. You are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time before, during or after the focus groups. The discussion groups will be conducted in a conversational manner, and it will be difficult to identify who has said which comment in the audio-tracks. If you withdraw from the study after participating in the discussion groups, you will not be able to have your data (quotes and conversation) destroyed or returned to you. Therefore, if you are not comfortable with having your quotes used in the final research report, you should not participate in this portion of the study.

### **BENEFITS**

You may feel there are benefits from participating in the study as you have the opportunity to talk about your Revive experiences and share your journey through surviving or recovering throughout the Revive program. Research has found that "telling one's own story" may have positive psychological effects. Research participants have reported greater appreciation of sharing experiences they have had, while this information may have been unspoken prior to sharing one's account. The scientific community has much to gain from this study as little has been done to investigate the usefulness and productive features of community programs that provide support to persons affected by sexual abuse. This research is important to communities beyond the individual as the goal of the project is to identify those aspects of Revive which are most productive and useful from the member's perspectives. This study explores similarities and differences in the Revive group experience between survivors of sexual abuse and those who have offended sexually. Information from this study may be used to shape the Revive program and to develop other programs.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name will not be tied to the research. No individual identification of research participants will be used in connection with the final document and/or the presentation of the findings. The focus groups will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at Wilfrid Laurier University for seven years (in accordance with research standards) after which time they will be destroyed. Consent forms will be stored separately from the research data. The names of the only people with access to your interview data are Chris McEvoy and Dr. Colleen Loomis. Both the primary investigator and the academic supervisor have completed ethical training and have signed a confidentiality agreement before having access to your information.

### **CONTACT**

If you have any question at any time about the study or its procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact myself Chris McEvoy at 884-0710 ext. 2879 (mcev6030@wlu.ca), or my supervisor Colleen Loomis at 884-0710, ext 2858 (cloomis@wlu.ca). This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the description in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519-884-0710), extension 2468.

### **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty (from Community Justice Initiatives or otherwise). If you decide to participate, you may

withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled (such as attending CJI's Revive groups). If you withdraw from the study you may ask for your information to be used or destroyed. You have the right to not respond to any question(s) you choose.

### **FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION**

This project is the master's thesis research of Mr. Chris McEvoy, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University, and is expected to be completed by August 31, 2008 at which time a final summary report of the findings will be sent to the CJI offices. Summary reports will also be made available for the participants of this research through the CJI offices. The researchers will also prepare academic reports of grouped information to be published in journals and presented at conferences. No individually identifying information will be published.

### **CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in a focus group as part of this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **CONSENT TO USE QUOTATIONS**

I have read and understand the above information. I agree to have my quotes from the focus used in the research report.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Guideline

#### *Revive Focus Groups*

First off I would like to thank you all for agreeing to participate in this research and coming this evening. As you know, you have been invited here to share your experiences within your Revive group.

Before we get started let's talk about confidentiality. I ask you not to share any of the information heard in today's group. Quotations from this conversation will be reported in the final research report. However, names will not be used and quotes will be unidentifiable. If names are used during our conversation, they will be changed. I invite you to create and use alternative names when referring to other group members during our discussion.

Are there any questions or concerns?

May I turn on the recorder?

1. Choosing the Revive program: Let me begin by asking you how you how did you choose Revive?

Probe / listening for:

- A. first learning of Revive, or, Community Justice Initiatives
- B. degree of choice
- C. why they participate in Revive

2. Entry into the group: What was it like when you first began attending?

Probe / listening for:

- A. First experiences with Revive
- B. Entry process, including intake
- C. Nervousness, anxiety,
- D. Meeting other group members

3. Characteristics of Revive:

- a. I know Revive from a facilitators view point. I'd like to hear how you see it.

Probe / listening for:

- A. How would you describe Revive to someone else?
- C. self-help, mutual-aid
- D. social support
- E. the role of community justice initiatives
- F. restorative justice

- b. How does the Revive program support you?

Probe / listening for:

- A. characteristics of the program
- B. unique aspects of the groups

C. do members describe the program as a group or community?

c. How do Revive participants support one another?

Probe / listening for:

- A. membership, belonging, needs, emotional connection
- B. support outside of group

4. Goals: What do you want to achieve by coming to Revive?

Probe / listening for:

- A. Needs and goals
- B. Whether they have achieved their goals, or, whether they are future goals.
- C. Direct or indirect fulfillment

4. Needs: What needs are fulfilled as a result of participating in the group?

Probe / listening for:

- A. social support, emotional support, informational support, concrete support
- B. telling their story, validating their experience
- C. normalization of their experience
- D. how the group is unique from other areas or sources of support

5. Restorative Justice:

a. What does RJ mean to you?

Probe / listening for:

- A. Definitions of RJ
- B. Restorative principles

b. How do you see RJ at work in the Revive group?

Probe / listening for:

- A. restorative justice as a framework of support
- B. negotiating their own outcomes and goals

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