



COUNTY OF YOLO
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**Yolo County District Attorney's Neighborhood Court renamed
to the Yolo Restorative Justice Partnership**

(Woodland, CA) – (August 4, 2021) – Neighborhood Court is now known as the Yolo Restorative Justice Partnership (RJP). Since 2013, the Yolo County District Attorney has diverted over two thousand increasingly serious criminal cases through RJP. In RJP, cases are resolved using a facilitated conference model which utilizes the principles of restorative justice to encourage accountability and involve the people and communities most impacted by crimes in their resolution. Yolo's RJP is aided by the engagement and support of the Yolo County Public Defender's office, Health and Human Services Agency, Probation, local law enforcement agencies, community volunteers, restorative justice practitioners with the Yolo Conflict Resolution Center, and various other community-based organizations. Thus, law enforcement, county, and social service agencies, impacted communities, victims, and people who have committed offenses are all involved in this collaborative effort to address crime, while reducing negative cycles of punishment and re-offense. The Yolo County District Attorney's Office (YCDA) has set a goal of diverting 10% of filed felonies by 2022. While other standard diversion options may be available, programs within RJP will specifically adhere to the tenets of restorative justice.

As the benefits of the RJP model have become more evident and the reach of the program has grown, YCDA has developed a statewide reputation as a leader in restorative justice and innovative measures. At the same time, the push to differentiate more clearly between the traditional adversarial "Court" process and the restorative process utilized by RJP has increased. YCDA Program Coordinator, Nicole Kirkaldy, explains it this way: "For Neighborhood Court, we find ourselves constantly emphasizing the idea that this is in fact *not* court. There are no attorneys in our conferences and the volunteers are not a jury. Participants are not there to prove their case. This is meant to be a process to address the needs of those most impacted by criminal acts through honesty and accountability. By moving away from the name "Neighborhood Court" we are emphasizing how RJP is much different than the "court" process and we are moving in a more accurate direction. We are very excited for this next phase in our progression."

Kara Hunter, Executive Director of the Yolo Conflict Resolution Center (YCRC), adds: "YCRC has been a significant partner in the YCDA's restorative justice efforts since the beginning in 2013. By providing hundreds of hours of restorative justice training to both staff and volunteers, YCRC continues to aim to ensure that the intention by which the YCDA provides restorative justice services, is truly restorative

and not simply diversion. The YCDA's office, and its leadership, should be commended for its willingness to venture into new territory and for being willing to evolve its program efforts as we continue to learn how to provide the highest quality service to our community members. YCRC is pleased with the name change, as it acknowledges that the YCDA is not doing this work alone, and that these efforts are truly a partnership not only with YCRC but with the community."

RJP truly is a partnership. It relies on the efforts of community volunteers to hear from those who have committed crimes and accept accountability, and also hear from victims who are open to seeking restorative agreements to redress the harm they experience. Joseph Gocke, a Supervising Deputy Public Defender in Yolo County, and key collaborator in the program says, "Yolo Restorative Justice Partnership puts right out in front the positive, collaborative approach of the restorative justice model, a model that can be less stressful and more healing to defendants and victims than the traditional adversarial process."

RJP will continue to prioritize engagement of victims in the restorative justice process. The YCDA's Victim Services Unit has been critical in supporting victims in cases handled by RJP. Victim Services Program Manager Laura Valdes, shares, "Victim participation in the RJP process is essential as it provides a sense of involvement in addressing how they've been wronged and allows for some measure of closure. Victim Services advocates support victims and allow their voices to be heard through this innovative program. For some, the outcome is much more healing than that of the classic courtroom setting."

The new name is yet another progressive development in the YCDA's work to "Seek Justice, Do Justice," through innovative and effective methods. Jeff Reisig reflected on Neighborhood and the name change, "As the District Attorney in Yolo County, I serve a constituency that has made it clear that they want to see criminal justice that protects our communities and offers resolutions, rather than only punishing those who commit crimes. The creation of Neighborhood Court was a bold step on a path towards innovative and community-based approaches to handling criminal offenses. The name Restorative Justice Partnership reflects how we have evolved and the ways in which we are continuing to move forward to embrace transparency, equity, and restoration."

To learn more about the Yolo Restorative Justice Partnership (formerly Neighborhood Court), visit www.yoloda.org.

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