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District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

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Approved: LOL
Date: Wednesday, June 29, 2022
Release No.: 22-080

Restorative Justice Program for Youthful Offenders

VENTURA, California – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today the opening of a new Restorative Justice Program for youthful offenders titled, Transforming Harm to Healing, in partnership with the Ventura County Probation Agency and Interface Children & Family Services. This new program will be available for non-violent offenders, age 12 through 21-years-old. The District Attorney’s Office and the Probation Agency will collaborate to identify cases that are appropriate to divert from juvenile court and refer to the Restorative Justice Program, beginning July 1, 2022.

Transforming Harm to Healing is an evidence-based, Restorative Justice Program that aims to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. Restorative Justice is a victim-centered process that allows the offender and the victim to meet in a safe environment and discuss how the crime impacted the victim.

For example, a youth who steals from a store may be referred to Transforming Harm to Healing instead of going to juvenile court. The store owner, the youth, and the youth’s parent would be involved in the conferencing process. The goal is for the youth to learn how their actions caused harm to the victim and the community.

Nicholle Gonzalez-Seitz, Regional Programs Officer at Interface Children & Family Services, stated, “Restorative Justice gives victims a voice. It puts them at the center of the process and provides them with an opportunity to safely express their feelings and emotions, which can be empowering and offer closure. It is also an important step toward accepting accountability and recovery for those who have caused harm.”

The District Attorney’s Office, in partnership with the Probation Agency and Interface, brought Transforming Harm to Healing to Ventura County to keep our community safe, and to ensure that juvenile offenders are held accountable.

District Attorney Erik Nasarenko said, “This program brings justice for the victim while holding the minor accountable for the harm caused by the offense. Restorative Justice provides rehabilitation but also serves as a deterrent—it is an opportunity for our youth to find a new path with a focus on education and hope for a brighter future.”

Interface is a Ventura County nonprofit social services agency that provides free services to address the physical and emotional needs of 59,000 Ventura County residents per year. Programs provided by Interface include services for mental health and trauma; domestic violence intervention and child abuse prevention; youth crisis and homeless services; human-trafficking intervention and prevention; and justice services. Interface pioneered several programs including California’s first 211 call center, the youth LIFT program, a domestic violence shelter, a human-trafficking shelter, and state-funded child abuse treatment. Interface has offices in Camarillo, Moorpark, Oxnard, Santa Paula, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura. Interface may be reached at www.icfs.org.

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The Ventura County District Attorney’s Office is the public prosecutor for the county’s 850,000 residents. The office employs approximately 290 employees including attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, and professional support staff who strive to seek justice, ensure public safety, and protect the rights of crime victims.