



Respect Works Here

Community Champion

Margaret Clark is a truth teller.

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

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

“I’ve been on stages,” she quips. “I sometimes prefer to be the stage-hand.”

She recognizes the opportunity to share about the work being done by her organization, the Restorative Justice Society North Okanagan and the complexity of issues being faced in the community, and so she agrees to share her truth.

Restorative justice is an alternative to the court systems. “We deal with public matters in a private way,” explains Margaret. “We involve only the people in the process that need to be involved. People get answers to questions they may or may not get through the court process. Like just knowing what was going on for somebody and if it was personal.”

“If you are a person harmed – victim – you want to hear what the person who caused the harm – offender – was thinking, doing and wondering,” Margaret continues. “With the full story, the person harmed has a sense of safety returned to them.”

“Being in a circle, you get a sense of that person, and you see regret and remorse. They hear the pain and anguish they have caused others. There is a magic moment, where everyone gets a deeper understanding.”

“It’s hard to explain to people how it works,” she says. “In that circle, there is an openness and vulnerability that you cannot avoid. There is no table between us. And when that magic moment happens, it’s validating that you are doing the right thing, at the right time, with the right people. It is just right.”

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

Margaret grew up not knowing anything of her mother or her heritage, as it was never talked about in the home. “I lived with my father, his mother and five siblings.

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

When she was 15, Margaret really started to question what had happened on the fateful day her mother died. “I have spent most of the past 45 years trying to

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- Margaret Clark

piece together what happened on the day my mother died – just that one day.”

“My saving grace was meeting Elders when I was 28. Just talking, I had this clarifying moment, helping me to understand who I was and that it wasn’t bad to ask questions and that it wasn’t bad to get upset by the questions you asked, because people need to talk and talking is healing.”

Restorative justice is about repairing relationships: with yourself, with family, with community and yet in my own original family that possibility never existed,” says Margaret. “Now with my own children I work diligently because I value the truth.”

