

Laraine: I currently work for the Minnesota Department of Human Services. They hired me to develop our Conflict Management Program for Staff, similar to the one that we did for the Department of Corrections. Everything we do has restorative philosophy embedded in it, and just about everything we do incorporates Circles. If you're working with restorative principles and restorative values, then it's whatever works the best with a given population.

Loretta: Right, the core philosophy is applicable in any setting because it's about developing relationships.

Laraine: That's really the core of our work. If we're working with a business, or if I'm working in DHS, we use team-building activities that incorporate Circles; it's a good way to engage and build relationships. If we're in a school, we might use check-in Circles.

Loretta: Have you done Circle with organizational managers and administrators?

Laraine: We have, right. In the Department of Corrections, we've been in Circle with wardens, of course, with commissioners, and high-level administrators.

Loretta: Does it seem to be a bit of a leap for them? Just curious.

Laraine: What I have found with higher level administrators, it's the vulnerability piece that's difficult—in other words, being me and not the title or the role that I have. So, it just takes longer to get over that barrier, I think. If I'm afforded the time, we generally can get there. We're talking about business, so it depends on the culture. It was harder in the Department of Corrections than it is now in the Department of Human Services.

Loretta: You use a lot of Circles, but you also do more traditional mediation processes. What are they?

Laraine: We use restorative conferencing—that practice is embedded into the work we do—direct one-on-one mediation, the Circle process, conflict coaching, or restorative coaching. In terms of practice, those are the kind

of dialogue formats that we use. And again, like I said, everything has restorative built into it.

I think Circle is the most amazing experience. Every Circle that I'm in, I think the experience itself is just incredible, as well as the ability to share it and enable other people to experience it too. I think it's so much of what we need in this world. We need that connection and Circle can do that.

Loretta: You have written a book, right?

Laraine: I've come across layers and layers of activities that could be very helpful for schools. So, I've published the *Making It Right Workbook* on that subject. I'm also in the process of writing about utilizing Circle in the workplace—relational capacity and how Circle can embed itself in the workplace. Kay [Pranis] is helping me because I feel like it's something that is incredibly important to share, especially the stories about how does this look in a business setting? There are unique factors that come into play in businesses, such as unions. If you are going to bring Circle into the workplace, union issues have to be considered. What type of agreements can happen in the workplace? So, the intake and the setup and the preparation for all of that is really important.

Loretta: Switching gears here a little bit: you're a person who has enough knowledge to write your own books. But I want to find out if you use *Circle Forward* or any of our other books in your practice.

Laraine: I use several of your books all the time; for me, that's *Heart of Hope*, *Building a Home for the Heart*, and *Circle Forward*. I just absolutely love *Building a Home*, and I bring it into Circle, especially Circle training. To me, it's just key—I have notes everywhere in it.

Loretta: You know, the authors came up with *Building a Home* when they were working at Shakopee [Women's Correctional Facility]. They were having Circle with these women who had no intention or desire to talk about themselves, and the authors had to figure out a non-threatening way to draw them out. The answer they came up was the different metaphors; they were a way to get people to participate when they didn't necessarily want to.

Laraine: Oh wow. I love that story! I would love to be able to share that

story about this book.

Laraine: *Heart of Hope* and *Circle Forward*, of course, are guides for me everywhere I go as well. I always recommend the purchase of those for every teacher, if I'm in a school. I've also used them in prisons, and with youth who have been caught up in the criminal justice system. I'm just now getting into *Colorizing Restorative Justice*.

Loretta: You've worked with many various racial and ethnic populations in your restorative practice. What kinds of feedback have you gotten over the years about RJ in relation to issues of race, cultural appropriation, or White supremacy?

Laraine: Certainly, within my first ten to fifteen years of doing this work, it was an unmentionable, but in the last two or three years it has come up consistently. At one point, I actually set my talking piece down for many, many months and thought I really should not be doing this work. I had to really go internal and talk with people who have mentored me, to kind of come to a place of feeling settled again with the work. I sometimes still struggle to talk about these issues. I'm also much more open to listening to criticism or other perspectives on my practice, especially Circles.

We work with the Duluth School District; it's a huge district. They're incorporating Circle, and there's been pushback about using the process, coming from a cultural perspective, from some of the staff there. Like I said, it's far more common now, and I actually expect it to happen, rather than it being a surprise. It's a good thing. It should not go unsaid, you know.

Loretta: Are there any particular modules in either *Heart of Hope* or *Circle Forward* that are universal?

Laraine: I think the Seven Core Assumptions are incredibly universal. I share that with staff at schools, DHS, DOC, and we have conversations about how we can live this, you know, every day. Because the idea is that Circle isn't just between two and four in the afternoon when we're going to a Circle gathering. Circle is a way of life, right? It's a way of being. I always try to emphasize that.