

2017

# Annual Report



**Peacebuilders  
Canada**

Youth Justice. Restorative Justice. Social Justice.

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Who We Are

## Our Vision

Youth realizing their full potential and building safe and peaceful communities.

### What does it mean?

Peacebuilders envisions justice and education systems that are committed to helping youth, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized. We foresee systems that adapt to young peoples' needs—that actually engage youth and communities and make them stronger. That's why we use restorative practices to work with youth and empower them to overcome conflict and realize their full potential.

## Our Mission

To increase the capacity of youth, schools, communities, and the justice system to communicate and manage conflict through Peacebuilding dialogues.

### What does it mean?

Peacebuilders promotes the use of restorative principles and practices in our justice and education systems, and in our communities, through advocacy and restorative justice programs that use Peacebuilding Circles.

## A Message from our Founder and Executive Director

2017 was a year of change both in Toronto and at Peacebuilders.

Peacebuilders launched two new programs in 2017 as part of our commitment to advance restorative practices, enhance youth access to justice, and work towards a more just and equitable society by advocating for the interests and needs of young people.

The first, our Restorative Schools Early Diversion Pilot Project, works in partnership with the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Police Service, Justice for Children and Youth, and other stakeholders to intervene at various points along the school-to-prison pipeline. We do this by using restorative practices as alternatives to suspensions, expulsions, and charges, and as a way of supporting youth in conflict at school.

The second, our Advocacy and Public Legal Education program, builds on Peacebuilders' 15 years of experience working in our justice and education systems, to advocate for the needs and perspectives of young people. We are also conducting an evaluation of our court-diversion program with criminologist, Scot Wortley.

These programs demonstrate our ongoing leadership in the field as our city adopts new policies and programs. In June, the Toronto Police Service launched a pre-charge diversion program for youth. Its aim is to keep young people out of the courts by diverting them to supportive community services for non-violent offences. The initiative is an important opportunity to prevent young people from getting trapped in the revolving door of the criminal justice system. With the right consultation, evaluation and feedback, this protocol has the potential to



divert more young people from court and keep them out of the criminal justice system altogether.

We also welcome the Toronto District School Board's decision to end the School Resource Officer Program and remove 36 police officers from 45 of the TDSB's 112 schools. This decision is an important step in rethinking the relationship between our education and criminal justice systems—a policy shift that Peacebuilders continues to champion.

Increased referrals to our court-diversion program and new initiatives have allowed us to bring on several new staff, volunteers, and board members this year. We are inspired by the tremendous work of our staff, volunteers, board, advisors, and especially the commitment of our young people, who remind us of what we can accomplish when we work together.

Sincerely,

**Eva E. Marszewski,**  
**O.Ont, L.S.M.**  
**Founder and CEO**

**Elisha Muskat**  
**Executive Director**





# A Statistical Snapshot of Youth in Conflict with the Law

Most youth who come into contact with the justice system are vulnerable or marginalized. The justice system is not equipped to address the underlying issues that lead to conflict with the law. Peacebuilders' work with young people focuses on diverting them out of the justice system before trial and focusing on longer term solutions that go beyond the specific incident.

While we track our work with statistics, the value of Peacebuilders' programs is about more than just the numbers. We take a youth-centred approach that builds conflict resolution skills in young people that we hope will guide them over their lifetimes.

**56%** of all individuals charged with a crime in Ontario are youth. But youth only represent 23% of the province's population.

Few of the young people who end up in court are serious offenders. But an interaction with the justice system—even just one appearance in court—increases a young person's risk of future conviction by almost 25%.

**19,490** school days were missed as a result of suspensions from the Toronto District School Board in 2015-2016.

We know that suspensions are not only ineffective, but also inequitable: racialized students are 3 times more likely to be suspended for the same behaviours as their white peers. Students with special education needs make up more than 60% of suspensions annually. Evidence shows that harsh school disciplinary measures are associated with entry into the justice system.

**More than 50%** of Toronto youth between the ages of 15 and 24 don't have jobs. Young people in Ontario—especially in Toronto—are among the least employed in the country.

A criminal record, or even an encounter with the criminal justice system, can make it even more difficult for young people to secure employment.

**Only 1 in 5** children who need mental health services receive them in Canada.

Many youth with diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health issues end up in the youth justice system instead of receiving the mental health care they need. Approximately 40% of youth in custody in Ontario have mental health diagnoses.

**1 in 4** kids in Toronto live below the poverty line.

Young people who live in poverty experience barriers to accessing services and resources that support positive development and future success. These barriers contribute to conflict with the justice system.

**40,000** youth in Canada spend part of the year homeless. In Toronto, 78% of homeless youth reported at least one negative encounter with police over the past year.

Many of the "criminal behaviours" that street-involved youth are arrested for are a result of the many challenges associated with being homeless.

**2x more** Black, Indigenous and racialized youth report being stopped and searched by police than non-racialized youth.

Black and Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the youth justice system at 4 to 5 times the rate of their white peers.



# Restorative Justice

## Keeping young people out of the criminal justice system

When the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* was passed in 2002, Canada had one of the highest rates of youth incarceration in the western world. In the last fifteen years, the shift towards community-based interventions and the Act’s emphasis on non-court responses and alternative measures, such as restorative justice, have led our youth incarceration rate to decline by 75%.

Shortly after the Act was passed, Peacebuilders began running restorative justice and court-diversion programs in Toronto. In the first year, we received 20 referrals. Our program now receives more than 100 referrals annually. We also help hundreds of other youth and families navigate the justice system through court support and by connecting youth with community services, such as education, employment and counselling.

But there’s more we can do. Despite declining incarceration and crime rates, our most vulnerable and marginalized youth


56%

of all individuals charged with a crime in Ontario are youth. But youth only represent 23% of the province’s population.

continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system. With more funding and recognition for the effectiveness of restorative justice—and less reliance on police and courts to address youth misbehaviour—we could keep hundreds more young people in Toronto from ending up in court every year.


That’s why our restorative court-diversion program, Restorative Youth Circles (RYC), takes a different approach to access to justice—one that is about more than getting access to courts and legal services. It’s about meeting young people where they’re at and providing services that wrap around the individual and adapt to their needs. It’s about empowering young people and investing in their futures—and keeping them out of the criminal justice system.

## OUR IMPACT




100

referrals were made to Peacebuilders’ Restorative Youth Circles Program




80

young people had charges withdrawn before trial



41

peer-to-peer Peacebuilding Circles with court-involved youth



3,000

lunches were provided to young people appearing in court

“...in Peacebuilders I learned methods to stop our drama, take a deep breath, take a step back, and work through any problem.”

### A Poem by M.A.

First off, let me take responsibility,  
I know that I was wrong because this was a loss and not a victory.  
Jail is not where I belong, just the thought of it sickens me.  
I want to forget this fight but I remember it vividly.  
I wish I could change all the variables.  
Maybe shouldn’t have answered the phone or walked away and trust me  
I know it’s terrible, losing my friend is unbearable  
To the point where I’m hysterical.  
I literally see the new change in me because I know I am unbreakable.  
I learned how to avoid the fight; I’ve had nightmares every night.  
Me and S were so close, and now our friendship is out of sight.  
I regret the fight every day, if I saw him I would say,  
“I’m sorry bro, and I hope you know, that if I could I would’ve walked away.”  
After the fight, in Peacebuilders I learned methods to stop our drama.  
Take a deep breath, take a step back, and work through any problem.  
Now everything’s done, and the pain has just begun,  
And now we can never solve them.  
I hate the fact that I can’t be friends with you anymore.  
All these charges and issues made me ask what really was it for?  
I know it was a problem as soon as I walked out my front door,  
I was never happy after this fight, just tired—confused—and sad.  
Trust me and way more.

M and S got into a fight over a girl that led to M’s arrest. M completed Peacebuilders’ RYC program in 2017. At the end of the program, he wrote this spoken word poem about his experience and shared it with the judge and Crown attorney who agreed to drop his charges.

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# Restorative Schools

## Making schools safer for learning and development

When young people get in trouble at school, suspensions and expulsions often follow. But research shows that suspensions and expulsions do not make schools safer or alter bad behaviour; nor do they address the underlying circumstances that led to the conflict.

Punitive forms of discipline negatively impact young people's well-being, health and academic achievement, and are associated with entry into the youth justice system. Peacebuilders' Early Diversion Pilot Project builds on our experience running restorative programs in schools and courts. With funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we partnered with Toronto District School Board, Toronto Police Service, Justice for Children and Youth, community organizations, and high-school students to develop an alternative model for addressing school-based conflict and student misbehaviour. The model is being piloted at Central Technical School and Eastdale Collegiate Institute from September 2017 – May 2019.

The Early Diversion Pilot Project is not just about responding to specific incidents, it is also about changing the way we think about student misbehaviour and working within the education system to create more effective and responsive disciplinary policies. There are numerous ways we can stop a young person's progression down the school-to-prison pipeline. That's why our Restorative Schools program offers programming to prevent conflict, intervenes when conflict arises, and supports reintegration into the school community after the conflict has been resolved.

**19,490** school days were missed as a result of suspensions from the Toronto District School Board in 2015-2016.

## OUR IMPACT



**2**

schools adopted restorative programs



**40**

school staff, including teachers and administrators, trained in restorative practices



**80**

school staff trained on issues that impact youth in their communities



**87**

referrals to Peacebuilders' Restorative Schools program between September and December

### “We’re the youth. Our voice needs to be heard because we’re who this project is about...”

– Moses, grade 12 student at Eastdale Collegiate Institute and member of the Youth Advisory

Far too often, the voices of youth are missing from discussions and policy debates about school discipline. The Restorative Schools Youth Advisory ensures that student voices are not only heard, but also inform every aspect of the project.

Students from Eastdale Collegiate Institute and Central Technical School meet regularly to discuss the project, as well as issues at each school and in their communities. In addition to being regular participants at our monthly Steering Committee meetings and our biannual Advisory Council meetings, the Youth Advisory participates in many community activities and discussions. These include the School Resource Officer consultations in October, Peacebuilders' Community Forum on the Future of Youth Courts in November, and focus groups with the Toronto Youth Cabinet (the official youth

advisory body to the City of Toronto) on the relationship between youth and police in the city.

As Moses, a grade 12 student at Eastdale and active participant in the Youth Advisory, described it, “We’re the youth. Our voice needs to be heard because we’re who the project is about and we’re a big voice in it.”

Some students joined the Youth Advisory after they participated in the Peacebuilders' program. As a member of the Youth Advisory at Central Technical School explained, “It’s important to hear from kids because we’re the ones that get in trouble. We know what’s going on at the school.”

The Youth Advisory is an important opportunity for advocates and decision-makers to meet with and hear directly from young people.



# Circle Keepers

## Building strong and healthy communities

Peacebuilders’ Circle Keeper program provides training and workshops on restorative justice and Peacebuilding Circles to community members, students, teachers, justice professionals, and many others.

Over the last decade, Peacebuilders has trained hundreds of volunteers to use restorative practices and

Peacebuilding Circles to resolve conflict and repair harm. Volunteer Circle Keepers play an essential role at Peacebuilders because they co-facilitate our restorative court-diversion and school-based programs.

Growing research shows that initiatives that cultivate positive relationships with strong role models have transformative effects on young people and help foster resilience. For young people in conflict with the law or in trouble at school, the support of our dedicated staff and volunteer Circle Keepers makes an incredible difference.

## OUR IMPACT



**16**  
trainings on restorative practices and Peacebuilding Circles



**20**  
new volunteer Circle Keepers trained



**80**  
active Circle Keepers



**400**  
Peacebuilding Circles facilitated by volunteers



**1200**  
volunteer hours

“Circles provide a safe space for young people to speak and be heard.”

Natasha Boakye-Yiadom has volunteered with Peacebuilders since 2015. She is a Circle Keeper and member of the Volunteer Committee. She shared some reflections.

### What have you learned about young people by volunteering as a Circle Keeper?

I have learned not to judge a youth by their charges. There are a number of things that might have happened that could lead a young person to conflict with the law. It’s easy to stereotype kids who get in trouble with the law, but in a Circle you find out that things didn’t exactly happen the way they were reported by the police, or there was miscommunication, or it was just ‘kids being kids’ and they were charged as criminals. Volunteering with Peacebuilders has encouraged me to have an open mind about people—especially young people.

### What have you learned about the justice system?

Sometimes the justice system can be very unjust. We should really be serving our youth. We should be providing them with the tools they need to succeed because they are the next generation. And yes, people who commit serious crimes need to be dealt with, but there’s another way—a more effective way—so youth aren’t destroyed for the rest of their lives.

I was working with a youth who was charged with assault, but he was just trying to break-up a fight between two other boys. A month after the fight, he got a call from the police asking if he was involved. At first, he thought it was a prank, and then they told him to come down to the police station. He was charged. The police took his fingerprints. It was just boys roughing around and he got caught up in it. Then he got caught up in the system, and Peacebuilders had to divert him.

### Why are programs like Peacebuilders important?

Peacebuilders provides another means to deal with conflict—another way for young people to talk about the problems they experience. Using a talking piece to ensure the youth’s voice is heard. Everyone respects the youth’s voice. They don’t have to fear that what they’re saying will be relayed to other people—or back to the court. There is confidentiality. So you’re really able to build trust with the youth. Circles provide a safe space for young people to speak and be heard.



# Advocacy and Public Legal Education

## Effecting change in our justice and education systems

Peacebuilders' Advocacy and Public Legal Education program seeks to enhance youth access to justice and fundamentally transform our justice and education systems so that they meaningfully engage youth and make communities stronger.

We do this by advocating for more restorative responses to conflict in our justice and education systems, and by promoting the needs and perspectives of young people. Youth are rarely consulted on the decisions that affect their lives. In order to design the best policies for youth, we need to develop them with young people.

With the support of a staff lawyer and two articling students, we developed research on diversion, both pre- and post-charge, and on record suspensions and peace bonds. This research will be used to educate young people and their families about the justice system and advocate for better policies and practices. We also began addressing the access to justice issues for youth that will arise from the Ministry of the Attorney General's plans for the new Toronto courthouse.

**Few of the young people who end up in court are serious offenders. But research shows that an interaction with the justice system—even just one appearance in court—increases a young person's risk of future conviction by almost 25%.**

## OUR IMPACT



50

justice professionals and experts participated in a roundtable discussion about youth courts in Toronto



100

community members, youth workers, parents, and young people with lived experience participated in a community forum about the future youth courts in Toronto



18

youth-serving organizations consulted on best practices for youth courts

## Promoting the needs and perspectives of youth and families

On November 27, Peacebuilders held a community forum about the future of youth courts in Toronto that brought together justice professionals, youth workers, parents and young people with experience in the justice system. It was an opportunity to discuss how the Ministry of the Attorney General's plans to include youth in an amalgamated criminal courthouse designed for adults will affect young people in conflict with the law.

Over 100 people attended and shared their concerns. Safety and security concerns were repeatedly raised by parents who worry about how young people will be protected at a criminal courthouse that is expected to handle 40,000, mostly adult, criminal cases a year. One of the most consistent concerns was lack of accessibility for young people—some of whom will have a two hour commute to make court appearances. Most importantly, no one wants to lose the child-centred approach to youth

justice, currently in place at the Ontario Court of Justice at 311 Jarvis Street.

Youth, families, lawyers and judges all made repeated reference to 311 Jarvis Street, a highly-regarded youth court in Toronto, and the home of Peacebuilders' court-diversion program, Restorative Youth Circles. 311 Jarvis has pioneered a very different model for youth justice that brings together family courts, youth courts, and youth support services under one roof. Opened in 1957, it was designed to be "more clinic, than court," fostering a child-centred approach to youth justice that aims to address the underlying factors that lead young people to conflict with the law, including problems at home, poverty and under-housing, substance use and mental health issues.

Peacebuilders will continue to advocate for the needs and perspectives of youth and families to ensure that any plans concerning justice-involved youth are based on youth input and best practices.

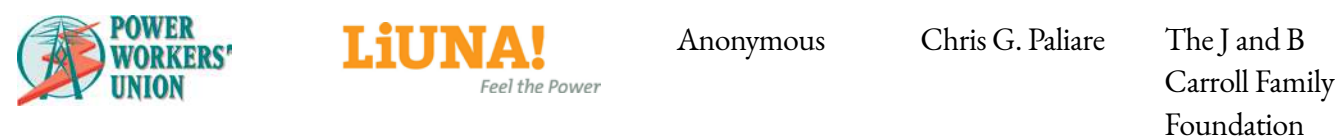
# Thank You to Our Supporters

We are proud to acknowledge the following foundations and organizations whose generous contributions between January 1, 2017 and December 31, 2017 helped us work towards a more just and equitable society for our young people.

## Institutional Funders



## Peace Partners and Colleagues



## 2017 Financial Highlights

In 2017, Peacebuilders' total revenues were \$1,006,987 and total expenses were \$1,092,379. Please contact us for our 2017 financial statements.

## Annual Report Design

**Design:** Scott Newlands Creative | [scottnewlands.com](http://scottnewlands.com)

**Photography:** Yasin Osman | [yescene.com](http://yescene.com)  
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Each Spring, Peacebuilders  
holds its annual fundraising  
gala, Spring for Peace.  
Visit [www.springforpeace.com](http://www.springforpeace.com)  
for more information.



**Peacebuilders  
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