

## Restorative thinking and action. What is going on?

Greg Morgan

In 2023, [Onewa Christian Community](#) launched a local wellbeing project supported by a grant from the [Justice-Compassion Trust](#).

The project has three strands: (1) hosting a practicum whereby a counselling student delivers free counselling to members of the public. (2) upskilling a small group of people as facilitators in community settings and (3) the restorative practice/restorative thinking initiative.

**Background to (3).** In late 2022, we had hosted a couple of talks on Restorative Justice in the legal system but could see that the principles of restorative practice apply in many settings. Could we create a local network to promote and support restorative practice in the wider community? What would it look like? Who would join in and why?



After meeting with supportive people including the team at [ANCAD](#), we decided to hold a workshop on 'Better conversations in communities' to create momentum and ideas for the initiative. (Co-creation without labouring it.)

The main outcomes of the workshop on 20 October were participants meeting each other and generating a list of potential [future topics](#) to progress restorative thinking and action.

Excellent facilitators got us talking. Kim Bulluss kicked off the workshop with a session on assumptions and diverse perceptions of truth. Are assumptions always 'wrong'? What happens when we assess a situation and then hear other people's responses to it? How do we modify our views based on more inputs?

## Better conversations in communities: exploring restorative thinking

- ways to talk about what really matters to us
- hearing what matters to others
- taking conflict out of conversations
- conversations that go from hurt to healing

### LET'S START A CONVERSATION FREE WORKSHOP & LUNCH

Join us to talk about restorative thinking right where we are.

Friday 20 October, 10.00 a.m. - 2.00 p.m.  
172 Hinemoa St, Birkenhead

More info: [www.owacc.org.nz](http://www.owacc.org.nz)

Hosted by Onewa Christian Community

& supported by ANCAD



navigating  
**CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS**  
FREE workshop

- The fundamentals of non-verbal language
- Identifying stress in others and yourself
- Understanding the Cycle of Escalation
- Sharpening the skill of asking good questions
- Confidently handling difficult conversations

Hands-on workshop  
with Erica Fairbank

Wednesday 6 December  
10.30-1.30  
172 Hinemoa Street, Birkenhead

**FREE**

Register at  
[www.owacc.org.nz](http://www.owacc.org.nz)

Onewa Christian Community  
Auckland North Community and Development

Rebecca Smith (Neighbourhood Support) explored the question, 'Do you belong?' and led a discussion through a series of questions. 'What does it look like on your street if you had a group where everyone felt like they belonged to, felt like they were supposed to be involved, felt connected? How would that change your world/their world?'

Sarah Thorne from ANCAD discussed the importance of timely feedback. Pointers included inviting feedback and permission-giving, listening and communicating carefully, employing 'I' statements, being specific and describing actions rather than making judgements, avoiding assumptions or exaggeration, making sure we understand, reflecting and evaluating, expressing gratitude and valuing feedback.

Erica Fairbank offered insights on communication secrets: reconnecting through the Language of Every Body. She emphasised our common need to feel safe, to be understood and to be validated. In 30 minutes of communication, said Erica, we give around 800 non-verbal signals. The purpose of understanding the power of non-verbal communication is not to diagnose people but to ask ourselves, 'How can I support this person?'

Rev. Richard Ward, a prison chaplain and chaplain service manager, drew on his experience to discuss making conversations safe and a safe place to be when so many settings are non-restorative by default. Safety includes making space for other people to have the freedom to be vulnerable and for the listener to be hearing behind the words to the deeper context. Whose agenda is dominating? Richard noted the high incidence of trauma and powerlessness experienced by people in non-restorative settings.

Rev. Daniel Connolly reflected on the long tradition of churches as places people come for help, and the witness of standing to help those who are marginalised. And yet groups turned to for help might be lacking the people, skills and other resources to be as useful as they might be. What is the potential for a common ground that might bridge the gap? Discussions acknowledged the importance of groups besides churches.

Cross-cutting themes emerged across the conversations. Themes included agency and power/powerlessness, timely conversations, the intent to support others and allowing the vulnerability to receive support.



The second workshop on 6 December took the theme 'Navigating challenging conversations.' The facilitator was [Erica Fairbank](#). Once again, a diverse range of people attended and generously brought their experience and spirit of enquiry to the occasion. This hands-on workshop encouraged conversations and sharing. It covered topics such as:

- The fundamentals of non-verbal communication
- Human needs (to feel safe, values, understood)
- Ekman's seven universal emotions (happiness, sadness, disgust, contempt, anger, fear, and surprise)
- Conflict and power relationships
- The four life positions (dominate, avoid, accommodate, collaborate), empathy and assertiveness
- Understanding how escalation occurs and how to de-escalate stressful situations
- Bringing it together in exercises to adopt collaborative approaches and listen well to others in a validating way.

Following the session, people provided feedback that will shape future activities. Comments included: 'It was a well thought out interactive workshop. It had a relaxed atmosphere and held our attention' and the most valuable part was 'Meeting and having meaningful conversations with others.'



## What next?

A number of topics have been identified for future workshops.

Several attendees recommended opportunities to explore some of the restorative thinking themes within the context of diversity.

Current actions:

- Give the project a web home so that people can connect with it easily.
- Send out this newsletter (tick) and gather more ideas ([gregm@onewacc.org.nz](mailto:gregm@onewacc.org.nz)).
- Make it possible for people to sign up for future newsletters. Recipients of this newsletter are on the list; let Greg know if you want to opt out. Please share this newsletter as you wish. 'New' folk can sign up to future newsletters [here](#).
- Approach potential presenters and organisations who could help us with future workshops or activities.
- Invite others to form a small group to drive this initiative forward. This is *your* invitation. Let Greg know.

## If you are wondering: why is Onewa Christian Community involved?

In this initiative we are driven by our values (community, diversity and inclusion, open heart/open mind, and a living faith). Through the talks we'd hosted last year, we saw an opportunity to create a network that could serve communities around us. Simple as that.

### Our interim aims

Interim aims for 'Better conversations' and 'restorative thinking' have evolved.

Help us develop them further.

- Sharing tools and techniques that help people to maintain and restore relationships in community settings.
- Building a network that promotes healthy and respectful relationships locally.

Also, we can connect you with the formal Restorative Justice system if that is of interest. See the website for the [Auckland Restorative Justice Trust](#).

If our initiative were formally linked with RJ or another restorative practice setting (e.g. schools, health), what would that look like? Share any ideas.

### Next workshop/s

Our next public event will be in February. Let Greg know if you'd like to be part of a one-hour planning discussion in late January. Could be in person or online. Or would *you* like to be a guest speaker?

### Free counselling

If you know someone who might like to take part in counselling sessions next year, Kim Bulluss will be doing a further placement with us in February-June. This is part of her supervised study at MIT. Sessions are confidential and without charge. Greg can put you in touch with Kim.

Kia ora!

Thanks so much for your interest in this initiative. If you wanted to come to a workshop or did, if you gave feedback or are about to share an idea (< hint) - fantastic!

This initiative will benefit from your active involvement. Contact me at any time.

Please stay in touch to see what happens next.

**Greg Morgan**

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT

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