Youth Restorative Conference Case Study
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Incident
In a small city in upstate New York, three 14-year-old boys sprayed graffiti around the village and burned down a large dugout at a baseball field. The request for a restorative conference came six months after the incident and after it had been dealt with by the local courts. The detective assigned to the case as well as the boys' families observed that the boys were making little progress in rejoining their friends or the community and were dangerously isolated. The incident occurred on a subzero winter night and the boys had wandered the streets after drinking alcohol together. They spray painted mailboxes and parked cars, a swastika on a church, and an elementary school, museum, performing arts center and several handicapped parking signs were defaced with penises. At the Little League field, the dedication sign had the family name crossed out and replaced with "the N word." Before heading home, the boys used their spray paint cans to start a fire that burned down a large dug out put at risk the concession building and the neighborhood homes close to the field.

Restorative Process
The pre-conference process included many meetings because of the large number of people harmed. We sought to understand the intentions of the boys' harmful imagery and the willingness of the boys and harmed parties to work together to repair the harm of that evening. Two conferences were held to help manage the number of people involved including the boys and their families, police and firefighters, little league members, church congregants, performing arts center staff, the school's custodian, car and mailbox owners, and representatives of the disabled, African American and Jewish communities. Harms were clarified such as: The little league felt betrayed that former players would destroy the park; Jewish neighbors thought the swastika was a message for them; disabled students felt mocked; the boys went from being successful students and athletes to pariahs of the school and community.

Outcome
A comprehensive plan was brainstormed to address the harms:
- A formal alcohol abuse assessment
- Attending events with members of the Jewish and African American communities to understand the power of the symbols and words
- Community service to maintain the Little League fields, assist with graffiti cleanup, and to support the police and fire departments
- Community service with a Special Olympics soccer team to understand and connect with disabled youth

The participants agreed that the plan would only work if it provided a method for the boys to repair the harm they had caused, rebuild trust with the community, and create ways for the boys to reconnect with their community and alter their paths of isolation and shame.