



October 22, 2024

TO: Council President Mitra Jalali
Vice President Hwajeong Kim
Councilmember Anika Bowie
Councilmember Cheniqua Johnson
Councilmember Saura Jost
Councilmember Rebecca Noecker
Councilmember Nelsie Yang

FROM: Lyndsey Olson, City Attorney
Jessica S. McConaughey, Deputy City Attorney -- Criminal Division
Tamara Larsen, Supervising Attorney -- Criminal Division

RE: **REFLECTIONS / FEEDBACK FROM ETHOS PARTICIPANTS, VICTIMS, AND CIRCLE MEMBERS**

At the conclusion of their time in ETHOS, participants are asked to submit reflections and feedback to our office about their experience in the program. Below is a compilation of the feedback we have received from participants over the past five years:

Participants:

- *I can't think of any other program that is closer to what I believe justice is supposed to be. The circle members were empathetic, honest, real, and supportive; no aspect of it felt like punishment or made me feel ashamed or diminished. I sincerely hope ETHOS serves as a model for how so-called criminal justice functions in this state and beyond. I am extremely thankful for having been part of it.*
- *I honestly went into the group kind of closed-minded. But that didn't last long. I didn't expect the group to affect me like it did and it made me realize how much trauma I've been dealing with. It has inspired me to work on that. I feel like the group was beneficial for me. It was nice to be able to talk in a setting where I felt like I was being understood.*
- *Even though I was completing the program for theft, the circle keeper and the community members still treated me like a normal person instead of a criminal. We talked about taking responsibility for my actions and seeking help instead of making excuses...we talked about other resources out there that could help me in the future so I'm not in a situation like this again.*
- *In my circle I felt safe to discuss deeply personal matters that I otherwise would've kept bottled away...those deeply personal things were often the most pertinent in what led me to my actions and how I reflected on them.*



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- *It's hard to talk about your stuff when you're not used to doing that, but I liked hearing other people's insights and it made me look at the situation in a different light...with the agreement items, I felt like the circle members weren't trying to punish me but help me in my life.*
 - *The circle members gave me hope for the future. They have left an impact on my life and I thank each of them so much for that.*
 - *It taught me to channel my energy and time towards things that will actually help me reach those goals and visions I have rather than prevent me from them...I am very thankful for the opportunity to have been part of the program, and you all taking your own time and energy and investing in me and my life. The program changed my life for the better.*
 - *I really enjoyed the circle session. Speaking with [the circle members] has really helped me better understand my mistakes as the offender and heal from my mistake. Ever since the incident, it had negatively affected my mental and physical health. I recall expressing myself during the session that I was scared to attend the circle because I thought everyone was going to point a finger at me and tell me that I am wrong, bad person, or a threat to my community, but everyone was very open minded and offered wonderful insights on my situation and gave me the necessary reassurance regarding my incident. It also helped that they reassured me that the incident does not make a bad person in my community. I am really grateful for the opportunity and happy that I chose to go through the ETHOS program. And, for the attorneys and decision makers, I believe ETHOS should continue because anyone who finds themselves in my shoes deserves a chance to learn from their mistakes, take full responsibility, reflect, and seek the help they need and deserve.*
 - *Honestly, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be in this situation, not a lot of people go through the legal system like I did and get an outcome like this. I didn't expect my circle to be so open, so caring, so welcoming. They each shared their stories with me and it touch me and we connected more on certain topics I'll keep between us. And when I told my story they let me talk for as long as I needed, they didn't judge me not one bit, I felt like I actually had someone to open up to kind of. The two wonderful women that join the meet were so amazing, they couldn't have picked any better peers to be on the circle. They did everything they were supposed to and made me feel so welcome. I love how everyone was so engaged and actively listening to one another, I love the circle experience.*
 - *I'd like to thank Ethos program for pushing me in the circle to have an adult conversation about the whole situation and just look past it. Before speaking to everyone in the circle I had a lot weighing on me from just not knowing what was going to happen with my name and record from the incident even my relationship with my cousin. I've always been around her she's like a sister, it would have been a shame if we dropped our relationship over nothing. You guys would never know how thankful I am for this opportunity you gave me; I promise I won't waste it and there won't ever be anything on my record. I'm planning to be someone, and this is going to help me keep going and be who I know I am without people looking at me weird because I would have had a domestic on my record without them knowing the background of it.*



- *Going into this program I didn't really know what to expect. I have never done anything like this before so it was definitely something new to me. Going through this program helped get my record back now it was CLEAN! I went to a group meeting where I met a group of people who were willing to listen to what I had to say. They were definitely the most helpful people on my journey. After that day I made sure to take care of my problem and take responsibility for my actions as a young adult. Once I understood what I had to do I was on it. Now don't get me wrong there were times where I couldn't do everything on time but when I was able to provide an outcome it made me feel good because it meant that it was getting closer to being done and over with. I took the program serious because I didn't know the outcome going in, but I knew actions needed to be done in order to move forward. For anybody who is new to the system or has been in it for a while I would definitely recommend this program. This program is here to not only help you but is a non-judgmental outlet for those who are looking for that in life. The people who have helped me on my journey have sort of become like my mentors. I hope for those of you looking to do better and wanting to be better ETHOS is for you. Like I said before this is a NON-JUDGMENTAL place where you can speak your truth but you are learning how to become better for your society without the harshness of metal bars in your face.*
- *Circle was an excellent example for inclusive facilitation, fair process.*
- *This program made me feel like you all wanted more for me than just to punish me.*
- *They always listened to me and never made me feel bad. This helped me get a job and be more a part of the community.*

Victims:

- *After hearing about ETHOS, I decided to waive restitution in full. I felt like the young man would learn more and do better with the support of the circle than simply trying to repay me the vet bill. I didn't want to press charges so hearing about ETHOS and this opportunity felt fair and I was able to have input on the situation which was nice. I hope others are able to take advantage of this program as well.*
- *I have a better understanding of what the restorative circle means as a form of justice. I was surprised but very happy the city contacted me for my input. I was skeptical at first of how this could go, but really did feel heard, like my situation was understood, and in return felt a mutual respect from everyone. I appreciated getting to hear about how the circle usually works, it's purpose for helping folks in similar situations. I think this program helps people not be caught in punishments that victims have no say in. I will be walking away with more appreciation and understanding of restorative justice. I was glad about the outcome of my case and the time spent with explaining everything to me.*

Community Circle Members:



- *ETHOS treats participants as humans. Participants are cared for by focusing on engagement, responsibility, healing, overcoming obstacles and finding sustainable solutions through connection. I'm proud to be an ETHOS volunteer and participate in this community-building program.*
- *My Circle experience has been very positive. I believe ETHOS provides opportunities for restoring community through the process of alternative solutions instead of being limited to the punitive ones we've been accustomed to before in our communities. It is a way of still providing justice. Yet, this goes further in providing healing and support to all affected. Instead of bitterness, I feel there is a sense that the community is in a much better place as well as being more involved through the ETHOS Circles. I also believe that the participants, once they complete the process feel better about themselves because they were supported and treated fairly in a transparent process. Which has brought restoration to themselves and the community.*
- *I am so happy to be a part of this program, of this change in St. Paul! I do not hear of any program like ETHOS in Minneapolis or anywhere else in Minnesota. This is what community looks like. This program is the type of change we are looking for in the system. Being in circle with the participants makes me feel like I am making a change.*
- *The City of St Paul's ETHOS program takes people who have entered the legal system at an entry level and seeks to support them as a neighbor in our community. ETHOS treats participants as humans. Bringing the community "around" the participant in support to understand and mend helps participants heal what's broken in talking about what happened. Participants are cared for by focusing on engagement, responsibility, healing, overcoming obstacles and finding sustainable solutions through connection. I'm proud to be an ETHOS volunteer and participate in this community-building program.*

Case Examples:

- A 21-year-old man accepted a pre-charge offer of ETHOS after being involved in an incident that would have resulted in a 3rd Degree Property Damage charge. If convicted, he would have lost his football scholarship, resulting in him not being able to attend college. He has expressed his thanks for ETHOS and the opportunity to keep one bad night/decision from ruining his life. To date, he has had zero additional criminal charges 3 years later.
- Two neighbors have been having ongoing disputes about their dogs. Unfortunately, one of the incidents involved one of the dogs biting the neighbor and neighbor's dog. On their own they were unable to come to any agreement or resolution. However, through ETHOS circles and the participant following her agreement, there is now a fixed fence between the property, a schedule of hours for the dogs to be unsupervised in the back yard, an apology, payment of restitution to repair the harm. Without ETHOS the neighbors would still be involving the city and other officials



in a volatile relationship, but there have been no further reports of incidents since engaging in ETHOS.

- A young man went through ETHOS for a misdemeanor traffic charge. The agreement reached as part of the circle process included reading the driving manual, apologizing via letter to the victims, performing self-care by starting a journal, and applying for at least one job per week. Since successful completion and expungement of the charge, he has found a job as a truck driver. He loves his new job and tells us it would not have been possible without ETHOS.