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## Strength in the Circle



## Introduction

Jonathan Meikle and his friend Matthew Shorting were on a Winnipeg City bus in November of 2018 when they found themselves in a dangerous situation. A young man named Devon Henderson was wielding a knife and threatening passengers. Meikle and Shorting were declared heroes for getting Mr. Henderson off the bus and holding him until he was arrested. The story, however, doesn't end there. While Devon was in prison serving his sentence for assault, he got an unexpected visitor. Believing strongly in the powers of restorative justice, Jonathan decided he was not only going to meet his attacker, but also offer him help when he got out of prison. According to Unicef, restorative justice, "is a way of responding to criminal behaviour which emphasises repairing the harm caused by the crime and 'restoring' harmony as much as possible between offender, victim/survivor and society." Today, Jonathan runs the Strength in the Circle program which helps young men who have struggled. He and Devon have become family and are working hard to help other men turn their backs on violence.

## Key Take-Aways

- 1 People are generally not born violent. The environment one grows up in has a big influence on whether a person becomes violent later in life.
- 2 Violence has been part of the generational cycle that began with the government's residential school program.
- 3 The current justice system needs to use more tools such as restorative justice and Indigenous teachings to prevent crimes from reoccurring.
- 4 Forgiveness can allow healing to take place for both the victim and the perpetrator.

# Discussion Questions

- 1 Could you forgive someone who committed a crime against you?
- 2 Does the traditional justice system help to ensure that people who are convicted get rehabilitation and reintegrate into society?
- 3 What are some factors that might lead a young man to turn to violence?

**Before Viewing**

- 1 What were some of the stressors that led to both men being violent at some point in their life?
- 2 How do you feel about Jonathan's act of forgiveness? Could you do something like that?
- 3 How have Jonathan and Devon helped each other to heal after the incident?
- 4 Do you think restorative justice is an effective way to prevent violent offenders from reoffending?
- 5 How important was rediscovering culture in helping these young men turn a corner?

**Post Viewing**



## Senior Years

- 1** The Truth and Reconciliation Report has 94 recommendations for the government of Canada in the form of calls for action. Here is number 30: “We call upon federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in custody over the next decade, and to issue detailed annual reports that monitor and evaluate progress in doing so.” Do an inquiry to find out the most effective ways to keep Indigenous people out of the prison system.
- 2** Strength in the Circle is a local Winnipeg group that tries to help rehabilitate young men and reintegrate them into society. Look for a group in your area that does similar work and invite them to come and speak to your class or school.
- 3** Do an inquiry exploring the effects of the residential school system on violence in Indigenous communities.
- 4** Learn more about restorative justice and encourage it as a way to resolve conflicts in your classroom or school. Organize a group in your school that trains students to be moderators in conflicts between students or between students and staff.
- 5** Start a mentorship group in your school where older students are paired with younger ones that are having difficulty adjusting to school life.
- 6** Jonathan mentions making a decision to take the “Red Road”. What does he mean by this? What are some things he has done to demonstrate this new path?

