

# Restorative Practices with Dr. Keisha Allen 1.2

May 20, 2024

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Well, hello everyone and welcome to getting to the core. This is a Wayne resa recording and today we have the pleasure of having Dr. Keisha Allen with us from BFDI. She's going to talk restorative practices with us. With us also is Nikki Irby, education consultant, education improvement consultant, and phonetic Clark tools. And I am Marvin Franklin. And so number one, I want to say thank you for joining us on this eclipse Monday. Did you get a chance to see the Eclipse today? Yes,

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yes, it was. Yes. Did you see it, Marvin?

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I did. I did. So I there's a golf course right across the street. So I went over to the golf course, just so I could have some open air and just see some of the other experiences other people were having. And there's a high school team that's practicing. And the boys couldn't focus at all. So they're just like, oh, this is so cool. And focus, focus in the weather, you know, the temperature dropped. And then all of a sudden, I heard a lot of birds chirping. I don't know if anybody else had any of those experiences with them. But that was my experience today, my first time experiencing an eclipse. Hopefully, I will be here for the next one. But that was nice. It was something different. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to do so. And I

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was able to go out and experience that with my neighbors. So it was fantastic. Very good.

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Yes, very nice experience have teenagers. So my teenagers dad just got off the bus about 210 or 215. And I given them their glasses before they went to school this morning and told them you know, when you get off the bus, you can put your glasses on and start to look. And so they did. So when they got in the house, they said nothing's happening. I said, Oh, I said, well come on out to the patio, because we do have the pleasure of living off the golf course as well. And so I'm like, you might not have been able to see because we were walking down the street with the trees and whatnot. But come on out here. So we went out on the patio. They were like, I see it moving in SEM move. I was like, yeah, absolutely. I was like so as we continue to watch, you'll be able to see the wonder of the moon as small as it is being able to cover our huge sun and then we're ecstatic. Yes, they were aesthetic. Yes. It was a wonderful experience. Yeah,

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yeah. My takeaway is that God always surprises right. There is nothing in nature that doesn't immediately, like take me back to a place of worship. So my daughter, a recent college grad, a song. And I said, Hey, are you gonna watch the Eclipse with me? And she was like, yes. And so we just watched it at different phases. In and out and like you, Marvin, I heard the birds were chirping a little bit louder. I feel like the squirrels were tapping a little bit more softly, like they were not as rambunctious as they normally are. We live in a heavily wooded area. And so we get all kinds of animals coming through all the time. It was really interesting for me, it felt like watching TV and black and white, right. And the sun was covered. Everything was less brilliant. Everything was less Damn. And so thinking about oh, my goodness, if we really had to live like this with this on all the time will be like and so immediately, I was like, well, thank you, God. It's not always like that. Right?

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That was a great, thank you moment. Yes.

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Absolutely, absolutely. And so as we continue this conversation about restorative practices, we are going to begin with a story today. It was a warm sunny morning, you could feel the heat rising through the glass walls of the media center adjacent to the courtyard, a circle of about 60 Powder Blue chairs occupied the center of the room and one might wonder if that space was big enough for the feelings and emotions that would soon fill it. personal reflections and tough calm. Conversations are relational trust. And what happens when that trust is misunderstood, manipulated, abuse and or broken would take center stage. The bright sunlight wasn't the only thing heating up the room. There was a stifling tension present to when the restorative practices facilitator arrived, she was early and so was I just wanting to get the thing over with I sat feeling alone betrayed, and a bit ashamed that I was losing a job I loved. My outlook started to change as the facilitator brought a pleasant and a hopeful energy into the room with her. She introduced herself as Keisha Allen from the Black Family Development Institute. She shared that the work of restorative practices was deeply personal to her a ministry in her own words, I introduced myself as the exiting principal conflicted, but hopeful about what my next steps would be. I shared with Miss Allen, my understanding of the purpose for the meeting, because I didn't want to have it, that it was to make a clean break for one and to create a smooth transition for another. Masala immediately challenged me to see this meeting as an opportunity for growth. Because things are meant to change, and that's not always a bad thing. As the other members enter the room, they were talkative, but respectful. Miss Allen called the room to order, introduce herself and shared her opening narrative as she had with me. It's been a long time since that meeting. But what I remember most is that when folks tried to come from me, she redirected them to think about their role in any conflict, to place themselves in my shoes, to have empathy for the person who was ultimately responsible for when the team loses, and the last to receive accolades for when the team wins. For those people, who reflected on what they would miss about my leadership, she challenged them to carry on those ideas and ways of thinking, seeing being and believing, so that those positive aspects of the school would live on, even with a new leader. There were even some people who declare that they did not want a new principal and resented the fact that I would be leaving. And once again, Miss Allen help them frame a new understanding that change isn't bad, but rather a new opportunity for good. It took some time, and we went around and around and around in our circle, a lot. But eventually, all hearts and minds reached a place of clarity, peace, and perhaps mutual understanding that allowed us

to let bygones be bygones, and to forge a path forward as more empathetic and restorative human beings. While many of us have been trained in restorative practices throughout our years working together, there were still a range of attitudes from those who were totally against restorative practices to those who were full on advocates for it. What I know today is that it was Miss Allen's facilitation that made the difference. And so today, we welcome you to the core with none other than the thoughtful, the proactive, and the dynamic, Dr. Keisha Allen, who at the time of facilitating that restorative circle, for me, had not yet achieved her doctoral degree, but was nevertheless masterful. And so we welcome you to today's conversation with gratitude, respect, honor and hopefulness for all that you will bring to our conversation today, as we continue to introduce and flesh out opportunities for folks to embrace and welcome restorative practices in the places where they work. Live. Wow.

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You know, Marvin and Nicaea, when she was talking, I was saying in my head, who was that person, that facade? who facilitated that? I said, that sounds like me. And it was me. Wow. Thank you, Vanessa, for bringing that back to my memory. It has been a long time. A long time. Wow. Okay, well, let's get going. Yes.

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For you to do for us, Dr. Allen has really kind of talk about, as you remember, right, your journey since then, and with Black Family Development Institute and how your restorative practice training has evolved. In that time, please let the audience know to more about Black Family Development Institute, because they may not be as familiar as we are on the call. But we would love for you to just share with us what you're able to, to fill in the gaps between that scenario that vanetta just shared. And today,

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yeah, so the official name of the organization is BFDI International Training Institute. Many people call this black time development because we were born out of black family development. But our legal name is BFDI International Training Institute. We are a distinct organization from Black Family Development. But yet we are still sisters in the work if you will family in the work, if you will. So to the point of evolving, I'm just going to be honest with you, spiritually, and we are spiritual people spiritually, it is impossible to walk this walk and not evolve. Not if you are engaged in presence. And so from the incident that vanetta, just so eloquently spoke about, there's been so many changes in me, and directly connected to restorative practices. You heard her say, initially, when I came into the group, I always talk about how restorative practices for me is not just professional, it is deeply personal. And because it is deeply personal, I have made some deeply personal changes, even up until that point where I did that circle with with vanetta, and the team. But now I am in a space where I knew about the power of the circle then. But not like I do now. I mean, I used to just believe sometimes you don't know what you don't know until you realize that you don't know it. And I remember teaching others about the circle. And I kept seeing the circle as this outward physical space. Right. But what I know now is that before the hour can exist, it has to exist on the inside. And so when we talk about the shape of the circle being important, we're not just talking about the physical space, like the light blue chairs that vanetta was just speaking about, we're also talking about is that inner circle that's on the inside, the shape of your circle is important. How is your circle moving? How is your circle evolving? Is it broken? Have you taken the time to manage the conflict intention in order to repair the harm and restore the relationship. And what

we realize is that when you're not taking care of your circle, it's very difficult to manage and take care of circles that are outside of you. And if you think about it, whenever you come into any space, we are all circles. And our circles connect with other circles, the example that are often given my training Nicaea is if you think about making a cake, the ingredients that go into a round bowl, are very distinct. When you put them in initially, you see those ingredients, you see the eggs, you see the flour, as far as I go, because I'm not a baker, but you see the distinct ingredients, right? You need something. And usually it has to spin in the direction of a circle to begin mixing those ingredients together. And what you realize is that the more you mix, no longer can you see the distinct, separate ingredients, they become one they become so one, that you can't separate them from each other. So even when I think about us, we're independent, distinct circles. But the more we mix, the more we blend, the more we become so connected, that you can't separate me from you and you from me. And that's what climate and culture should look like, in our schools in our justice systems and our homes and our families that we are circling so much. We are so in tune that there's no distinction. And when you think about God, he's a circle. There is no beginning there is no ending. It is forever. Right? I'm gonna pause there because I can keep talking so you all better interrupt me.

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Well, that is a beautiful, beautiful segue in like just visualizing your description it 100% reconnected me one to that moment when you facilitated that so arco, but also to all of the things that have happened since and the opportunity to revisit the conversations with those folks and to be in community with them. And to know that there is absolute truth to this idea that we are all connected and where one of us ends, the other begins. So as you as you share that, that beautiful description with us, how do you begin this work with a district or an entity that doesn't or may not have four by but they think they want to embark on the journey? How do you how do you deal with folks who are trepidatious, about the work of restorative practices? Well,

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I my view of that is different. And let me tell you what I mean. So oftentimes, when people call us to come in and do trainings, I'll have someone from leadership who was saying something like, Hey, listen, I have a difficult staff. They don't buy into sort of practices, they don't like it. And it's difficult for me to receive that kind of information. Because what I honestly believe what my whole heart and experience has taught me this is you can't buy into, or you can't believe in something that you do not know, once it is presented, and who trains you matters, you cannot tell me, there are people who don't buy into and believe in this work. Because all of the tenants and the principles are to you as an individual, personally, you can't tell me that you're not happier and more cooperative when people do things with you and not to you or for you. You believe in that you buy into that. You cannot tell me that you don't buy into being fair, and building trust. Because you're doing in your personal relationships, you can't tell me that you don't buy into having a community of understanding because we all seek to be understood. You can't tell me that you don't buy into learning how to effectively communicate so that we get the best and there's expectation, clarity. So when people say that they don't buy into or they don't believe in it, I go, you haven't officially been trained on it. And so where do you begin? You begin with even even those who are unwilling, those are the ones that I want the most. You began with this idea of having a training that just gives you the fundamental basics and principles. And what experience is show me vanetta is for those hardcore people who have said they don't buy into it, I can guarantee

you. And I've been doing this now for over a decade. I haven't had one person who came in doubtful, say, Ah, I still think is mumbo jumbo. I've had them go, how do I get more, I want to know more. And so, you know, the unfortunate part is, when people do trainings, they retain about 20% of what they get into training. But then they take that 20% And they try to go back and they give it to other people. So now it becomes watered down. And so what people don't buy into is how it's presented. And when it's not done with the thoroughness that it should be done. That's when it becomes harmful. You

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started off by saying, We are all circles. And I love that I, I believe that within my heart. But I also understand working with schools and districts, many times systems become more of a square than circle. And so because they believe that they need to go from point A to point B, I know when I go in there, they want to change the culture by taking some magical pill overnight, and it's all about someone else and not me collectively in that group. And I also heard you mentioned it's all about the training. Sometimes those leaders, you have to make that adjustment really quickly for them. And you say buying is important, which I absolutely believe how'd you get that buy in more sooner than later.

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Um, it's the same thing. So let me say this in the absence of a training, speaking with people individually, they have ability to be able to connect with the person in front of you. And to be able to answer what is not being asked. becomes very important, right? And so when I'm speaking with those leaders, my ears are very attuned to what is this person asking for? What is it that they really need? Right. And if you listen well enough, then people will tell you what they need in order to move forward. Right. So when you talk about, you know, being able to speak with them on an immediate basis and getting them to that place, it is really about being able to identify where they are, what they need, and then addressing that right then and right there. I remember when my mother was doing social work, got restaurants, so she used to come home, she graduated from the University of Michigan, and I can't recall the name of the class. But she came home and she asked me, she said, Keisha, if you're dealing with a person who is on drugs, and you are trying to help them get off of drugs, and they're also homeless, what do you deal with first, the homelessness, or the drugs? And I ignorantly answered and said, Well, you want to get them off drugs first. And she said, No, you have to address the homelessness. Because if you don't get them in a place of stability, then you cannot address what they need the most. Right? So to address the immediate need for water shelter. So when I'm speaking to my leaders, I am looking for what is the basic? What is it that you need? How can I connect with you fishing, if you will, so that you bite this and that you go on this journey with me, again, the unfortunate part Marvin is we have so many people who do this work, who do it for a capital gain, if you will, and not because they really believe in the power of what this work can produce. And so when you are having that kind of person, speak into, and I do mean it that way, speak into a leader and trying to explain this process, if there is no connection to we're not moving anywhere. So part of the work that we do with BFDI International Training Institute is letting every person know that this is connected to who you are as a human being irregardless of title status station, it is who you are as a human being. Let's start there. And I've had great success. As far as that's concerned.

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That's so encouraging. Dr. Allen, thank you for lifting it in that way. And maybe even throughout the state of Michigan, look at restorative practices as a strategy for an alternative to suspension. When you hear this, I wonder and I wondering from you what your thoughts are? How are they truly implementing using the tools that are a part of restorative practice training? Or are they using those tools to basically just lift up the name to say, well, this is what we did, instead of suspending?

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Yeah. There are many people who are just lifting up the name to say that, you know, this is what we're doing. But what I will also say is this. I won't name the organization, but there are organizations out here that exist in Nicaea, where people will call and say, Hey, can we have restorative practices training? And they'll go, okay, yes, what do you need, and they'll just provide them with the training. When people call us, I actually just got off a call with the principal, I'm not too long ago. And I said to him, tell me what your vision is with restorative practices. Because based upon that, now we can determine the role. It's not enough for me just to say to you, let's get training. Right? There is a whole process to this. And so what people miss is, they'll say, Okay, we checked the box, we had training days one and two. So now we can go and we can implement restorative practices, how? How do you implement 20% of what you remember. And so I'm always saying to people, I know that you want to get the t o t, where you're training other people on how to do this training. But think about this. If your person just attended a day one and day two training, they retain about 20% of what they got. Now you're sending them to do a t o t, they really don't have experience in the world, but you want them to train other people. So now they're getting 5% of a product that they haven't even tried or they haven't even experienced, and it's not really a product, but it is a journey. So to that point. I'm always educating people that The t o t is not what you want. Next, what you want next is coaching, yes. So that you can understand and deepen the practice within the community, right? Have someone to come in who can walk you step by step implementing this now, because many people don't do coaching, and they attended just a training, that's when you get a lot of the Well, we did restorative practices. No, you didn't. Because if you are only using restorative practices when a harm has occurred, when a student has cursed out a teacher, or when somebody is offended, then you are using restorative practices wrong. Yes, it is not a discipline model. It is a relationship model that teaches us how to be a proactive relationships first with ourselves, then what those who are around us that way, when a harm occurs, we know how to address the harm, because a relationship has already been established. Right? So just checking off the box, you know, saying we don't suspend kids, but instead you send them to ISS. We didn't suspend them, they just went to ISS, and they've been there half of the year. I've seen this

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kind of stuff over and over again.

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And so then that says restorative practices not truly being integrated into the system. And it's not working like it can, yes, thank

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you for that. So it brings me to, you know, our job is the continuous improvement business, if you will, it is the continuous improvement of our sales, we believe first right, but also helping to build the

continuous improvement of others. And so I will say or ask, with this model, from start to finish, I know that it's a lifelong journey. But how much training and coaching do you recommend for it to become sustainable? Do you have sort of a rule of thumb? You know, do you have recommendations based on how you have implemented this and other places, because the more we learn, the more we want to launch that we are able to support folks in a way that makes sense. And we want to be realistic when we share this information.

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So I'm gonna give you the the Keisha answer first, and then I'll go to the other. Keisha answers what you just said, it is a lifelong journey, you are always learning, I've been doing this work for a long time. And I still am always seeking out opportunities to learn more to do more. And so in that sense, the learning doesn't stop. Now, as a rule of thumb, when it comes to ensuring that restorative practices is implemented. In any particular kind of organization where efficacy, we say, a minimum of three to five years, three to five years, what that looks like, is the entire staff. And when I say entire, I mean the receptionist, the bus drivers, the social workers, has been trained in at least days one and two introduction to restorative practices and using circles effectively. The next one is days three, and four, which is facilitating the restorative justice conference. And that particular training, you at least want all of your admin, your social workers, your counselors, those who may deal with those more serious kinds of issues, everyone does not have to be a part of that. But for certain, you need those to be a part of it, who may deal with more of the serious issues, family group decision making conference, same crew from days three, and four should be a part of days five, and six. And then along with that, while we are doing days, three through six, you want to develop what's called a restorative leadership team that we started a leadership team is a team that should receive ongoing coaching, then, that ongoing coaching that restorative leadership team will take him back to the broader PLCs to make sure that whatever principle is being worked on at that moment, that month, whatever is being implemented with efficacy, so a minimum of three to five years. And the other reason why we say three to five years is because we are no longer in institutions where people are there for generations. I remember in high school, having teachers and they would ask about my uncles, and they would ask about my parents, you know, they were like part of the family. And because we're more transient now than we ever have been in the system of education, just the work field period, right. People are now giving their life to a particular job. And so you know that when a piece moves, it changes the dynamics of what's going on. That was one of the things that we had to learn in restorative practices, which many people still make a mistake with is they'll say, Okay, this one person is assigned to restorative practices. Well, what happens if that one person leaves, right? It has to be systemic and has to be integrated into the climate and the culture. One of my favorite stories that I tell when I'm doing the training is about my great grandmother, Lucille, who was an amazing Baker. And I remember as a little girl going to her and say, Hey, Grandma, would you teach me how to make your homemade bread, and she was excited to do so. And I was excited to hear the information. And then I remember going into the kitchen, and her instructions to me where it's a little bit of business, a dash of that need unroll. Why. And she will say, Honey, you have to do it to taste. But my taste buds are not your taste buds. And unfortunately, when she passed, all of her recipes die with her, because she didn't know how to explain it. That's what happens when we started practices recipe, one person in the building, or one person in the district, they leave, the recipe dies with them, the intent of everyone being a part of the training is that we all have the measurements, we

all have the explicit framework, so irregardless of who is there, and who is not there. when change happens, it is able to be sustained,

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Excellent analogy, I love how you've been so articulate and being able to explain that this is a process. This is not a magic bullet. You know, we get those kinds of requests all the time, and I'm sure you get them as well. We had the pleasure of talking with Kentwood school district few months ago. And they are also on this journey of implementing restorative practices throughout their district. We feel like they gave us excellent information about the steps that they're taking to try and make this systemic. Are there any entities and you don't have to name them, or even school districts that you worked with, that you feel have some successful indicators that you can share with us about how they are truly making restorative practices, just that their practice, and not a one time event that is held with just one person in their district or organization? You know,

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when you think about systems, I don't know about you all, but I remember thinking about systems as this mechanical kind of like machine, right? But when you break it down systems are really made up of human beings. They are people who are making decisions, right? So yes, there are several institutions, organizations that I can name that are doing this work with efficacy. And they will tell you that what you just said is absolutely true. It's a journey. If you think that attending one or two days of a training is going to impact your climate and culture in such a way where you see that transformation that you're seeking is not going to happen. I'm just going to be honest with that, it is not going to happen. There has to be a commitment to this process. One organization in particular that I'm thinking of, they're so committed to it, that under the tagline of their school name, they say we are a restorative practices community, like they brand it and they put it out there to let people know right away, that we are restored, not a restorative justice community. Because we sort of justice is different than restorative practices. We have a whole lot of people who want to implement the justice, but they don't want to do the practice, right? So but they branded and we our restorative practices community, that particular organization, they saw a decrease in their suspensions over a three year period, what it looked like in the first year when we came if I'm getting my numbers, right, I think they had 189 suspensions that year. The second year, they hit in the 70s. The third year they had seven, seven, right, staff reported being happier to show up to work. So staff morale had increase their parent engagement and increase. They did what they were supposed to do in terms of making sure every stakeholder They had been trained in restorative practices, and that they were receiving the ongoing coaching. The principals, schools or organizations that really buy into restorative practices. One of the first thing things that they do is they go back to their policies and their procedures. And they say, let's look at our policies and procedures to see if they're even in alignment with restorative practices, and 99.9% of the time they are not. So now there is work to make sure that we are aligning restorative practices with our policies, and our procedures, they go back and they look at their student codes of conduct, is make sure our student codes of conduct are in alignment. With restorative practices, let's make sure that our PTOs are trained. And we still have practices those make sure that we're doing proactive circles in our staff meetings, and not just in our classrooms. I mean, so there's a whole gamut to it, if you will, I hope I answered your question. Akia.



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Oh, absolutely. And that's what I was hoping you would share. Because I know that so many of our constituents are seeking out this type of training, but not truly understanding what comes along with it. So thank you for sharing that information. As we get ready to close out, I think vanetta was going to share something with us. But I am so appreciative of you sharing your knowledge and expertise, but also your time with us. And we're hopeful that those that hear this particular podcast will embrace the practices even more and want to go along on this journey with all of us so we can see a more restorative community through our different districts. Thank you for that.

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That is absolutely where I was going as we prepare to wrap up. Dr. Allen, what advice would you give to a leader to a parent to a teacher, as it relates to a restorative approach, right, everybody won't necessarily have access to the training, the coaching, just because that's not everybody's priority. But as we speak, and go back to where we started with the individual. What advice would you offer to individuals who are seeking to be more restorative in their daily walk?

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You know, you just said that. And one of the things that hit me so hard when you said that was, why wouldn't they have access. But then the very next thing that you said, was those who may not be willing to, and so for me, there it stops. Because when you want something bad enough, then you're willing to do what it takes to make sure that you get it and that you get it the right way. And so I'm not going to skirt around the fact that if you are truly interested in restorative practices, you need to be trained in it. What they'll find when they attend the training is that many of the things that we consider to be restorative are things that we already do. But what the training does is it gives you an explicit framework, so that you can recognize it, be it and do it more often. And so I don't care if it is a child, I don't care if it is a parent, there is always access to be able to attend a training so that you can know what you're talking about. One of the things that we are launching in May of 2024, which I'm so excited about, we did it before, but then COVID hit, and we stopped it. And that's our restorative practices, Youth Ambassadors. So going towards this idea of building civil society, it starts with our young people, even our young people can be trained in restorative practices is not just the responsibility of the adults in the space. It is the responsibility of the entire community. So my advice if people are truly interested, and doing this with fidelity is attend our restorative practices training, and to vet whoever is doing the training before you agree that that person should train here. Right. But yes, everybody that attended.

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That was great, wonderful. I always enjoy the time we have with you, Dr. Allen, we truly appreciate it. And from the bottom of my heart, I want to say I really appreciate everything that you've done for our educators in this community. Our children deserve an opportunity to go through education and life with this restorative framework within their hearts and how they work through school and You've been very empowering in everything that you said. We truly appreciate it. And we look forward to the next conversation that we have as well as you're always such an inspiration to us. And we're looking forward to seeing some great things in Wayne County. So thank you so much. And thank you. Thank you for listening to getting to the core on Wayne resa.