

# Bainbridge Island Juvenile Diversion

## A Division of Kitsap County Superior Court

Located at Bainbridge Youth Services  
Corner High School Road & Madison Ave

PO Box 11173 BI WA 98110

Telephone: 206-855-0459

Date: 5-30-01

Re: Teen Talking Circles Project (Linda Wolf and her work with teenage girls)  
From: Mary Woodward, manager, BI Juvenile Diversion

To Whom It May Concern:

I have managed the Island's alternative to Juvenile court, Diversion, for more than twenty years. I work with a volunteer board and our job is to assign consequences to juveniles who admit their guilt to criminal charges including misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, and class C felonies. We meet with the youth and his/her family in separate interviews, and then present our requirements in contract form. Most often we assign community service hours, counseling, and educational classes, and/or a written apology detailing the child's understanding of the event and what he/she has learned from it.

As you can imagine we see a wide variety of responses from the juveniles, and their parents. Some families address the situation constructively and in such cases our job is to support the work they have already done. Some kids are not so lucky; here we try to devise a plan that will help both the child and the community. It can be very challenging and is often hard work.

On occasion we meet with a youth that has done all the right things, made amends for his/her action, and learned a valuable lesson from a bad choice. We don't see many cases like this and almost always it happens because of the support of strong parents.

One such case stands out for its uniqueness. This involved a high school girl charged with misdemeanor theft for shoplifting some jewelry from a local store. She told us of a remarkable group of girls, led by Linda Wolf, who helped her take responsibility for what she did and repay the shopkeeper.

In their regular discussion circle, she told her friends what she had done. The girls talked it through and decided to take action. What they would do was go to their homes, and retrieve all the things they had stolen in the past, return these items to their respective stores, and apologize to the owners for their actions.

Imagine the courage it took to face the storeowners – and with no one telling them they had to! If the goal of Diversion is to teach kids to make better decisions so they don't offend again, then these girls met that goal. I believe they were able to do that because of the confidence and support they gave each other under the guidance of their group facilitator, Linda Wolf.

They revisited the discussion several more times until they were satisfied they had dealt with the issues completely. The girl who sat before us had very effectively taken responsibility for her theft and had made it right without direction from adults. She and her peers tackled a very big issue and came away with a big lesson learned. We wish all our kids could have an experience like this.

I strongly support the work Linda and her staff is doing with teenagers. The community is better for the growth and self-confidence she inspires.

Mary Woodward  
Manager, BIJD