

2. Participants' Statement

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT REFLECTS THE VIEWS, EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF ALL THE PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROCESS. THE PROCESS HAS FREQUENTLY BEEN DESCRIBED IN COMMENTARY IN THE MEDIA AS ONE INVOLVING ONLY THE MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CLASS OF DDS2015. FROM THE BEGINNING, HOWEVER, THE FACULTY AND THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTED TO PARTICIPATE FULLY AS ACTIVE PARTIES WITHIN THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROCESS. IN ADDITION, REPRESENTATIVES OF ORGANIZED DENTISTRY AND THE COMMUNITY ALSO PARTICIPATED. ALL OF THEIR VIEWS ARE REFLECTED WITHIN THIS FINAL PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM THE PROCESS.

A STATEMENT FROM THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PARTICIPANTS

FROM THE PARTICIPANTS FROM THE CLASS OF DDS2015

AS PARTICIPANTS in the restorative justice process from the Dalhousie Dentistry Class of 2015, we write to you again as our time in the process comes to a close. To rephrase that, our time in the restorative justice process is officially coming to a close but we can all attest that we will carry the lessons it has brought us long after we graduate.

As we reflect upon our five-month journey, we recognize how far we have come not only individually but collectively. We have challenged and supported one another as we confronted what happened with Facebook and the climate and culture within our school. These uncomfortable, difficult and complicated conversations have required us to delve deeper into societal and cultural issues of sexism, homophobia, and discrimination and how they erode the foundations of supportive and healthy communities. We did not create these issues, but we have come to understand our parts in perpetuating and tolerating them within our relationships and community. We have experienced acutely how harmful and destructive people can be to one another, and how people bring each other down. We have consciously learned to support one another and we have begun the process of building each other and our community back up. Having endured such a public fracturing of our class community and many of our personal relationships, our focus throughout the process has not been to return to normal but to create a new “normal” for the future.

We have engaged in the restorative justice process as individuals and as groups of men and women, Facebook group members and others. As the process developed we have worked through the harms and issues that divided us. At the end of this process, while we have some distinct experiences to share, we write not as separate groups of “the men” and “the women” but as the restorative justice group from DDS2015, united in our commitment to ensure our experience matters for the future.

AS FEMALE PARTICIPANTS, for us restorative justice was initially a solution to a complicated problem. We are a small class, from a small faculty, and a tight-knit community. Many of us are far from our families, making the need for a strong and supportive community at school that much greater. As a result, we had come to care deeply about each other, as classmates and as friends. It was this caring that made the realization that the Facebook group held content about us so upsetting.

Restorative justice provided us with a different sort of justice than the punitive type most of the loudest public voices seemed to want. We were clear from the beginning, to the people who most needed to hear it, that we were not looking to have our classmates expelled as 13 angry men who understood no more than they did the day the posts were uncovered. Nor did we want simply to forgive and forget. Rather, we were looking for a resolution that would allow us to graduate alongside men who understood the harms they caused, owned these harms, and would carry with them a responsibility and obligation to do better.

We also felt a responsibility as future dental professionals to our profession and to the public. We are women with the ability to stand up for ourselves, but we realized this is not always the case in the traditional dentistry setting where auxiliary staff is predominantly female. The relationships among classmates are different than employee-employer relationships. We are able to raise our concerns with less fear than in workplaces where it could potentially be far more detrimental to one's career. This may discourage employees from bringing forward complaints against their employers involving the sort of unprofessional and sexist material displayed in the Facebook posts. We also became increasingly aware that while women now represent the majority of students entering dental schools, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions within the profession. We wanted to be prepared to begin to fill these roles. While we have always felt safe with our classmates, we felt a need to participate first-hand in a process that would enable the thoughtful reflection required to behave differently both privately and publicly. Contrary to the more traditional form of justice, we were looking for positive changes rather than punishments.

As the subjects of some of the offensive Facebook material, we wanted to be active participants in responding to it. It became clear to us that only through the restorative justice approach could we play the active roles we wanted. The men began making apologies in December, and through the restorative process we have accepted those apologies. More than that, though, we have seen the men learn why they are sorry and what that requires of them.

As we moved through the restorative process, eventually we also had to unpack the assumptions we as women brought with us. We are a part of a generation in which inappropriate sexualization is more common and widespread than ever before and we have become used to this. Because such attitudes are everywhere, we rarely take time to

question them. For example, we had always known about the men's Facebook group but had always assumed that, as a rule, there were no posts about women in our class. We assumed though, and did not address the fact, that the material on the site was likely by times sexist, unprofessional, and inappropriate. It was only when we knew it was about us that we took real offense. This made us realize that we, as women, also contribute to the culture and climate that allows Facebook groups like the one at issue to persist and flourish. We had to ask ourselves: why we are only up in arms when it is about us, but unconcerned with the objectification of other women? Why was this tolerable? We needed this restorative process because we had work to do ourselves.

Dentistry is a self-governing profession, a fact we didn't think about in detail five months ago. Having been through the restorative justice process, we have seen first-hand the immense responsibility that comes with being accountable for ourselves and ensuring accountability for how our colleagues act. In the restorative process we became comfortable questioning the status quo and demanding of ourselves that we come to the table with honesty and integrity. We have come to circle with members of our class, but also with our faculty and every level of leadership at Dalhousie, each time posing the same underlying question—how can we be better?

AS MEMBERS OF THE FACEBOOK GROUP, *from the earliest moments of the restorative justice process when we realized the hurt and harm our comments caused for our classmates, faculty and staff we wanted to convey our overwhelming regret. But we learned that saying sorry is too easy. Being sorry, we have come to see, is much harder. It takes a commitment to hear and learn about the effects of your actions and an ongoing and lasting commitment to act differently in the future. We have hurt many of those closest to us. We do not ask for our actions to be excused. They are not excusable. We do commit to doing better as professionals, employers, alumni and friends.*

We have engaged honestly and completely in a restorative justice process that has helped us more fully understand and address the effects and impacts of our actions and the situation as a whole. The Facebook posts that have come to light were unacceptable, and they have caused more hurt than we ever could have imagined. Throughout our restorative justice process we have reflected on what we see as our role and relationships as students, as future professionals, as colleagues and as friends. We have asked ourselves questions with no easy answers, such as – How did I not notice? Why did I make those assumptions? How did I let this happen?

We were given the choice to join the restorative justice process as a way to start to repair the harm we caused, rebuild the relationships damaged, and improve ourselves. We have actively participated in seminars and workshops that have taught us much about inclusion, diversity, sexism, misogyny, rape culture, homophobia and discrimination. We also participated in many group discussions in which our friends, classmates, colleagues and facilitators gave us personal insights into different viewpoints we hadn't fully considered. Restorative justice has allowed for an environment of learning, growth and development.

We have come to understand professionalism more deeply over the last five months. Professionalism is not just about how you act when you don your white coat and treat patients; it extends into your private life as well. We have also seen how easily these boundaries

can blur. More than ever we understand how personal integrity is crucial to maintaining patient confidence and public trust.

It is a privilege to be a member of the Dental profession and to care for patients and we do not take that for granted and we know it comes with significant responsibilities. Honesty and accountability are key to gaining and maintaining this public trust. Our reflections and discussions have revealed and reinforced public expectations of us as health care professionals. We failed to live up to our responsibilities and what was expected from us. As we prepare to begin our careers we commit not only to uphold our professional responsibility, but to raise the standards of professionalism even higher. Our work within the restorative process has inspired and prepared us to be better advocates and examples of professionalism. We are more prepared and committed as professionals to stand up for what is right both inside and outside the workplace. We believe our efforts will make our faculty, classmates and the profession proud to call us colleagues.

We know that many people want to know who the worst among us are and who the more “innocent” by-standers are. The truth is, none of the Facebook group members are innocent but nor are we monsters. Despite how we have been portrayed in the media, we care deeply about our classmates, Faculty, University, our patients and our communities. Within the restorative justice process we have come to accept our personal and shared responsibility for the fact that over the three and a half years, as members of the Facebook group, we did not examine the harmful ways in which we were building connection with one another. We are more, though, than what we were shown to be in the limited selection of Facebook posts or in the public response on social and mainstream media. Accepting our personal shortcomings has been difficult but necessary as we work toward being the image that we want to portray in our private, public and professional lives.

We see the world through a different lens now. We recognize more clearly the prejudice and discrimination that exists inside and outside of dentistry. We understand we have contributed to this through our actions and by failing to stand up when we saw it happening. It may be impossible to undo the harms but, we commit, individually and collectively to work day by day to make positive changes in the world. The problems extend far beyond us, and we will work to ensure the lessons we have learned will as well.

We realize there are some who are suspicious of us and our sincerity and have sought greater access and transparency from our process. While we have been open and transparent with those most directly involved and affected, we have tried not to add to the incredible public attention given to this situation because it has contributed to, and compounded, the scope and reach of the harms involved. As a result of this publicity, our actions have indirectly harmed individuals and groups that we do not know and cannot reach directly. It is hard to address all the worries, outrage, frustration and trauma the Facebook posts triggered especially since there has been so much speculation and accusations and few facts about what really happened, who we are, our intentions and the work we have done to try to make this right. We hope the report from the restorative process will offer some of that information.

We know the media and some in the public will only be satisfied, however, if they know our names so that they can investigate our lives for themselves, including our families and friends. Indeed, the efforts of some to gain information about us have resulted in significant threats and

harms against us and our families. We have struggled significantly with whether to share our names more broadly. Based on what we and our families have experienced over the past five months, we have decided not to do this now. We know some feel that broader apologies are owed to “the public”. Just as it is difficult, however, to believe our apologies, when they come without names and faces, it is equally hard to apologize to a general and unknown “public”.

We know our Facebook posts impacted and harmed members of the public that include current and future patients, neighbours, future colleagues and employees. In particular, our patients have the right to honesty from their healthcare providers. We care deeply about our patients and understand some of them may have lost personal and public trust in us because of our actions. Our actions also impacted our profession and contributed to access-to-care issues within dentistry. We deeply regret if this has made even one person more reluctant or afraid to access the oral health care they need and deserve. We owe it to each of these individuals, groups and other members of the public to seek to understand their concerns and try to address them. We cannot do that work with sincerity or success without knowing to whom our efforts are directed. We have made a commitment that we will be honest with our patients, colleagues, the profession and our future employers and employees about our involvement within the Facebook group if asked. We have upheld this commitment since our return to clinic. We know that earning trust back does not happen overnight or even over five months. We commit to continue this work both individually and collectively in future.

We are incredibly thankful for the opportunity to take part in the restorative justice process. We are grateful to the women in our class for their courage to choose this process and believe we could be worthy of their investment by being upstanding professionals in the future. We are also thankful to our restorative justice facilitators who have been there for us, and our classmates, throughout this entire process. The lessons we have learned we will take with us through the rest of our lives.

FOR ALL OF US IN THE DDS2015 GROUP *the restorative justice process created space to have the difficult conversations we needed to learn from our mistakes and experiences. It has helped us develop our abilities to reflect critically, communicate, and resolve problems and conflicts. We are more aware of our actions and their impacts on others. We have grown as people, gaining a deeper understanding and commitment to the importance of acting with respect, trust, integrity, equality and acceptance. Facebook posts have shaped our story, but we will not let them be our only legacy. We commit to using and sharing what we have learned for the benefit of others to contribute back to the communities we hope to serve one day.*

We want to acknowledge and thank the Dalhousie Faculty of Dentistry for preparing us with excellent clinical knowledge and skills. Through a challenging and demanding four-year program, we have learned from experts in the field and gained the technical skills to excel as dentists. We believe, however, that the lessons we have learned throughout the restorative justice process have enhanced the “hard skills” gained on the clinic floor. As we prepare to enter the profession, we bring with us an important set of skills acquired throughout the restorative process, from conflict resolution techniques to the importance of reflective practice. We have become accustomed to having difficult conversations, which often require as much self-reflection as they do articulation. We are proud of our dentistry education, and now

equally as proud of the education we received through this restorative process. Combining the two we feel confident to enter the profession with a commitment to lifelong learning for personal and professional development.

Lastly, it is with heartfelt thanks that we recognize our families and friends who have endured undue hardship as a result of this incident. The past five months have been incredibly painful for them, as they had little choice but to sit back and watch as our final year of dental school unfolded in the media. While trying to deal with the harms of the Facebook posts, we were hit with an onslaught of attention by social and mainstream media that was at times more harmful and painful. Our families and friends, who most wanted to support us and protect us, felt helpless. It was largely due to the support of our families and friends that we had the strength to persevere, both independently and collectively. Now, as we approach our graduation, it is a time to celebrate and reflect on all we have learned and accomplished in the past four years. We ask that the media respect our right to privacy, if not for us, then for our families, so they may share in this time with us free from worry. Please respect our time and space to celebrate our success with those who stand beside us and those who stood behind us.

FROM THE FACULTY OF DENTISTRY AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

T*he last several months have been extremely challenging. The events themselves and the resultant media spotlight have had a profound impact at many levels on every single person associated with this Faculty – our staff, patients, students, faculty members, alumni and members of our profession. We were shocked, saddened and ashamed that an incident such as this happened on ‘our watch’, in our Faculty. Managing our response to the Facebook scandal was complicated by the multitude of voices with strong opinions on the right thing to do. Many felt the issues around the Facebook incident were black and white – a group of students did a terrible thing and should be expelled. However, first and foremost we are educators. Punitive measures such as expulsion do not change attitudes or positively influence future behaviour, nor do they address underlying systemic problems. A number of the young women, harmed by the Facebook posts, showed insight and eloquence by choosing education over punishment. They saw restorative justice as the most promising path towards meaningful change.*

We have drawn on vast and credible resources across our campus and from within our own Faculty. Engaging in restorative justice provided an opportunity for us to remediate professionalism and ethics while reflecting on the climate and culture contributing to the Facebook incident. It has enabled a process that was trauma-informed and victim-centered in order to address the real harms. Members of the Academic Standards Class Committee tasked with overseeing remediation of the suspended men observed firsthand the power of their personal expressions of truth and remorse. Remediation for behavior related to the Facebook incident was determined to have met the high standard of professionalism expected of a graduating dentistry student. These men have taken ownership and responsibility for their actions, have been respectful and humble in the face of adversity, and have persevered to become better men. These attributes will continue to shape their personal and professional lives.

For the rest of us, restorative justice was inclusive; it empowered students, staff and faculty

alike to be part of the process. It has given us a better understanding of what it means to have a 'safe' environment in which to have difficult conversations and to proactively identify risks and challenges. However, it has also held up a mirror forcing us to look more deeply at aspects of our own culture and climate. We see clearly and more fully how broader societal norms such as sexism, homophobia, and racism are reflected within our Faculty. These have been difficult issues to face and are deeply troubling. However, we are determined not to continue to operate under the premise of 'business as usual'. We are deeply committed to make significant changes. The restorative justice process has shown us some of the next steps required and provided some of the skills and tools we will need to build a more inclusive and supportive learning and working environment.

We are now moving forward through a "Next Steps" initiative. This initiative builds on the outcomes from restorative justice to identify priorities and to focus on positive cultural changes within our Faculty. We are working with our students to ensure insights gained from the Facebook incident support an evolving and affirmative environment in the Faculty for years to come. Lessons learned will not be forgotten. We will emerge a stronger, more supportive and inclusive community, continuing to build on our proud heritage. We are positioned to be leaders in a restorative approach to addressing problems and building better relationships, and to serve as an example of how education can be used to be positive and transformative.

FROM DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

In December, deeply offensive comments on Facebook by male members of our fourth-year Dentistry class caused significant harm to their female classmates, the dental profession, the Dalhousie University community, and beyond.

This incident was particularly discouraging because we had committed, in our Strategic Directions, to creating a diverse and inclusive environment at Dalhousie. These past five months have both tested our aspirations and strengthened our resolve to realize them.

From the beginning, we sought neither to rush to judgment nor to sweep this incident under the rug. Instead, we knew that as a university we had an obligation to learn and to educate.

At the heart of our response was restorative justice. This was the approach chosen by most of the women directly impacted. Restorative justice isn't easy or swift, but we fully supported the women's choice. We believed restorative justice was the best route to a just and meaningful outcome – for the women, for the university, and for society.

Restorative justice enabled us to get at the facts, to understand underlying issues, and to achieve real change both now and in the future. It has led us to those meaningful outcomes that express our core mission: to seek knowledge, to educate individuals and to transform lives. Restorative justice provided an opportunity for broader participation and learning to create real and lasting change across Dalhousie and in our community. The process has been inclusive and collaborative; focused on reflection, understanding and growth; precisely what a university should be. The process has already resulted in positive change at Dalhousie and, although we still have work to do, it has laid the groundwork for continued progress.

Nearly two centuries ago, our founder proposed a new, inclusive university with access for all regardless of class or religious belief. That vision continues to motivate us today, as we strive

to create an even greater university, free from exclusion and discrimination, that embraces and inspires all of us.

FROM THE NOVA SCOTIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

The Nova Scotia Dental Association is grateful to have been invited to participate in the restorative justice process that transpired at Dalhousie University during the winter/spring of 2015. The opportunity to interact with 4th year dental students and faculty from the dental school gave us both the ability to communicate impacts on the dental community and at the same time understand and appreciate the factors and stresses that cause behaviours, the reparations that are underway and what we as the representatives of organized dentistry need to do to better serve the next generation of practicing dentists.

FROM THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

As a diverse group of professionals in various disciplines committed to restorative justice work in Nova Scotia, we were approached early in January to be part of a Local Advisory Committee on the restorative justice process being undertaken at the Dalhousie Dental School. We were asked to function as a sounding board for the facilitation team working to respond to the situation unfolding after the public revelations of the Facebook postings in early December.

The committee met several times during the period the process was underway to listen to emerging developments, to reflect with the leadership, and to support and encourage them in their work. In addition, members of the committee met separately with the women in the class affected, others with the men responsible, and still others took part in the Day of Learning which was a significant marker in the unfolding restorative justice process.

One of our group observed, after taking part in a meeting with the young women affected, “how clearly these young women exercised their agency and how much thought they had put into understanding the dynamics of the situation they were in. They were a group of powerful, thoughtful young professionals who together were making sense for themselves of a very challenging situation.”

Another noted that “it took a lot of courage for both the men and women to participate together in the Day of Learning but they did so in a way which reflected mutual respect. While the men took responsibility for their actions, the women articulated clearly their capacity to express for themselves their needs from the process.”

We hope that the insights which many shared at the Day of Learning will benefit not only these students but the institution, faculty and staff of the Dental School, and future students as well. In addition, it is our sense that the restorative justice process undertaken at Dalhousie to address this very challenging interface of social media, misogyny, and professional formation may well form a template for other institutions to address similar issues, not if, but when, they occur.

For those involved and those directly affected by this experience, though undesirable and unwanted, the process which they engaged in may actually strengthen the capacity of these

young women and men to take their professional roles more seriously and to address future issues of personal and professional conflict with resilience and integrity.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not mention the professionalism of Melissa MacKay, Jacob MacIsaac and Jennifer Llewellyn, which has made this restorative justice process the timely and effective response it has been.