



## Restorative Conferences: Participant Satisfaction Data 2006-2008

The data in this report were gathered over a period of three years, from 2006 through February of 2009. They come from questionnaires completed by participants in restorative conferences<sup>1</sup>. These questionnaires are mailed to all participants after an offender has completed his or her plan. A self-addressed, stamped return envelope is included. Although an option to include contact information is provided on the questionnaire, it is not required and the great majority of respondents remain anonymous.

Typically several months have elapsed between the time a respondent completes the questionnaire and the time of the conference. This allows respondents time to make a more objective assessment of the conference and its impacts than they would be able to immediately after the conference itself. Often the conference process may create a short-term emotional high, which can result in distorted perceptions that clarify only with the perspective of elapsed time. Moreover, the end of a conference is too early to judge the actual outcome in terms of completion by the offender of agreed-upon reparative and restorative tasks<sup>2</sup>.

This report focuses on four questions answered either “yes” or “no.” Data analyzed are from a total of 430 respondents. Respondents included:

**Table 1: Number and Percentage of Respondents by Role**

Role	Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Victims of Crimes	35	8%
Victim Support and Family Members	23	5%
Offender	43	10%
Parent of Offender	97	22%
Other Family Member of Offender	20	5%
Offender Support	91	21%
Law Enforcement	68	15%
Probation	7	2%
Other (Agency, Community, Etc.)	55	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>100%</b>

The four yes-or-no questions addressed in this report included:

1. Did the conference process seem fair?
2. Was the conference meaningful?
3. Was the plan fair?
4. Did the plan fully address the impacts of the offense?

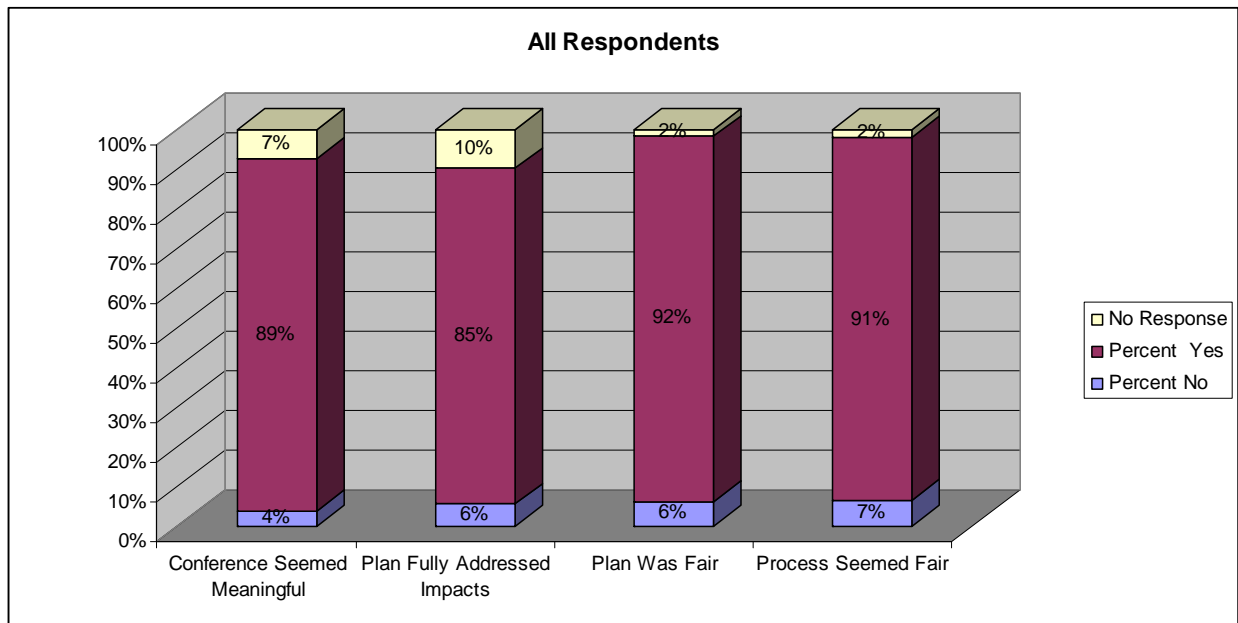
<sup>1</sup> For a summary description of a restorative conference, please see endnotes.

<sup>2</sup> A “reparative” action is one that directly repairs or pays for a concrete harm; for example, painting over graffiti. A “restorative” action is more symbolic in nature and aims at restoring relationships and community. Letters of apology are frequently included in this category.

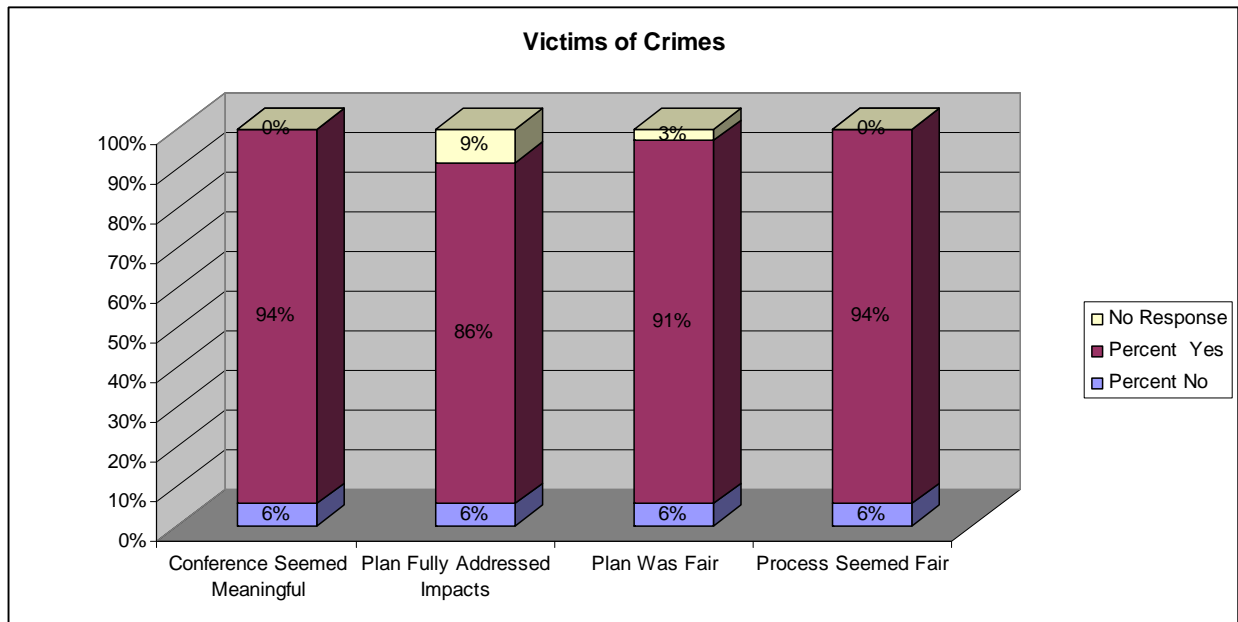
**Summary of Findings:**

The great majority of participants—93% to 96% of those who answered—answered yes to each of these questions. Therefore the main finding is **that participants in restorative conferences provided by Restorative Resources from 2006 through February of 2009 were highly likely to be very satisfied that the conference was fair and meaningful; and that the restorative plan created at the conference was fair and fully addressed the impacts of the offense.**

**Chart 1: All Respondents (N=439)**



**Chart 2: Victims of Crimes (n=35).** Victims of crimes report high satisfaction rates virtually identical to those of respondents as a whole.



At this point it is worth noting what types of crimes are addressed in restorative conferences facilitated by Restorative Resources.

**Table 2: Types of Crimes Addressed in Restorative Conferences, Feb. 2008-Feb. 2009<sup>3</sup>**

Charge	Count	Percent
Assault	15	22%
Burglary	12	18%
Petty Theft	7	10%
Vandalism	5	7%
Illegal Fireworks	5	7%
Conspiracy to Commit Crime	4	6%
Arson	3	4%
Vehicular Manslaughter	3	4%
Possession of Controlled Substance	2	3%
Trespassing	2	3%
Receiving Stolen Property	1	1%
Reckless Driving	1	1%
Resisting a Peace Officer	1	1%
Grand Theft	1	1%
Failure to Obey Court Order	1	1%
Threat	1	1%
Bomb Threat	1	1%
Vehicle Theft	1	1%
Public Intoxication	1	1%

One of the questions sometimes asked by people who are not familiar with restorative justice is “what types of offenses can be effectively addressed by restorative justice?”

The table above provides a partial answer. Restorative Resources helps victims, offenders and community work toward “making things right” in response to a broad range of offenses. It is our view that the type of offense is not the most critical factor in determining the appropriateness of the case. Instead, in order of priority, the factors are:

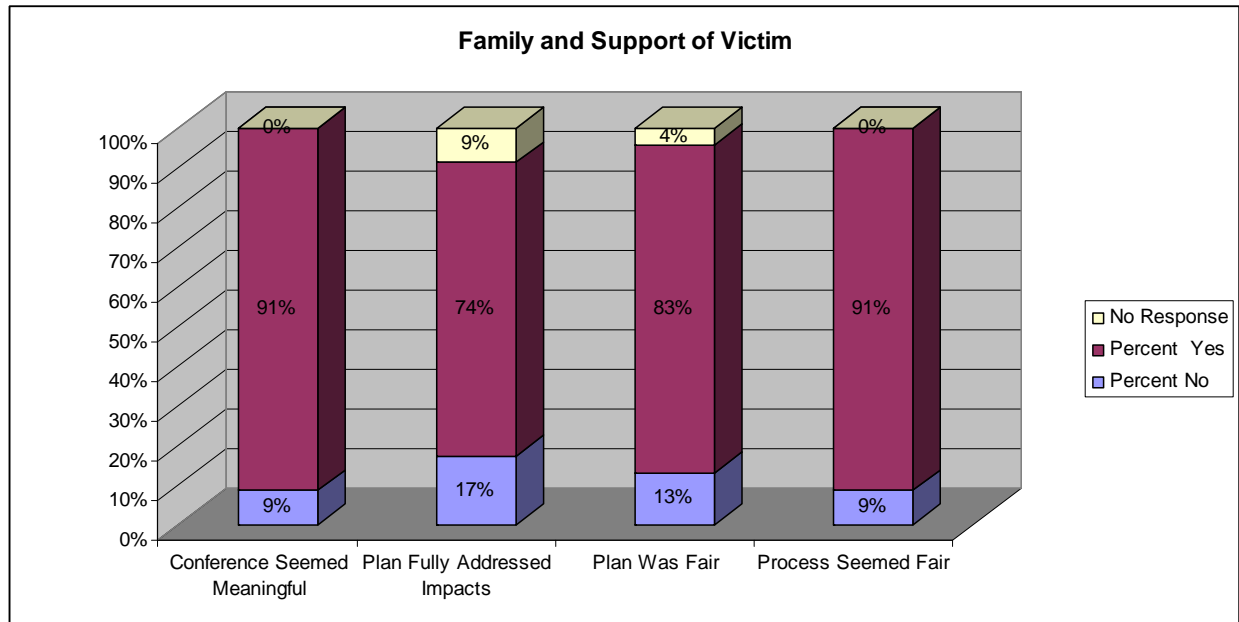
1. Is the offender willing to admit responsibility?
2. Is the offender motivated to make things right?
3. Is there an identifiable victim? In some cases the victim is not an individual, but is the community. Who from the community can authentically participate as its representative?
4. Is there a victim, or someone who will represent a victim, who is willing and able to participate?

If all of these answers can be answered affirmatively, the basic criteria for moving ahead with a restorative process have been met.

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<sup>3</sup> Some offenders are charged with multiple crimes. These data are for offenders who successfully completed the program.

**Chart 3: Family and Other Support of Victims (n=23)**



The highest percentage of “No” responses to these four questions came not from victims of crimes themselves, but from their family members. Family members of victims were less likely than victims to think that the plan fully addressed the impacts of the crime; or that the plan was fair.

**Table 3: Percent of “No” Response, Victims vs. Family Members**

Question	Victims	Victims’ Family Members
Conference Seemed Meaningful	6%	9%
Plan Fully Addressed Impacts	6%	17%
Plan Was Fair	6%	13%
Process Seemed Fair	6%	9%

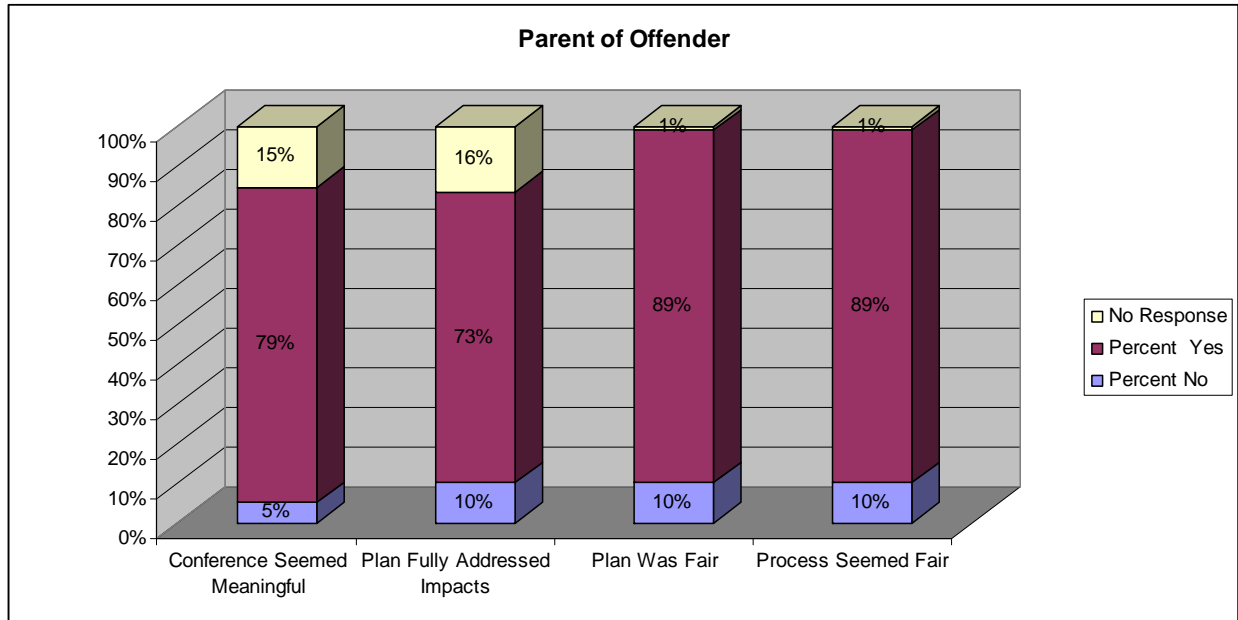
We speculate that family members of victims do not experience the depth of emotional impact that victims themselves typically do, and may therefore base their assessment on the more concrete and visible outcome, which is the plan. For victims, much of the impact is emotional, and participation in a restorative conference is often healing.

Interestingly, the group second-most likely have higher percentages of “No” responses are the parents of offenders (whose responses tend nevertheless overwhelmingly toward the positive). Experienced facilitators indicate that in cases of juvenile crime some parents may be very defensive of their young person. This can manifest as denial, rationalization, minimizing, and even blaming the victim. This can be transmitted to the young person, who may either adopt the same attitudes, or if they don’t actually believe them may feel pressured to behave as if they do out of loyalty to, or fear of, their parents. The outcomes of the conference may be compromised as a result. Some programs working with juvenile offenders keep open the option of excluding offenders’ parents if, during initial screening, it becomes apparent that they show signs of covering for their young person.

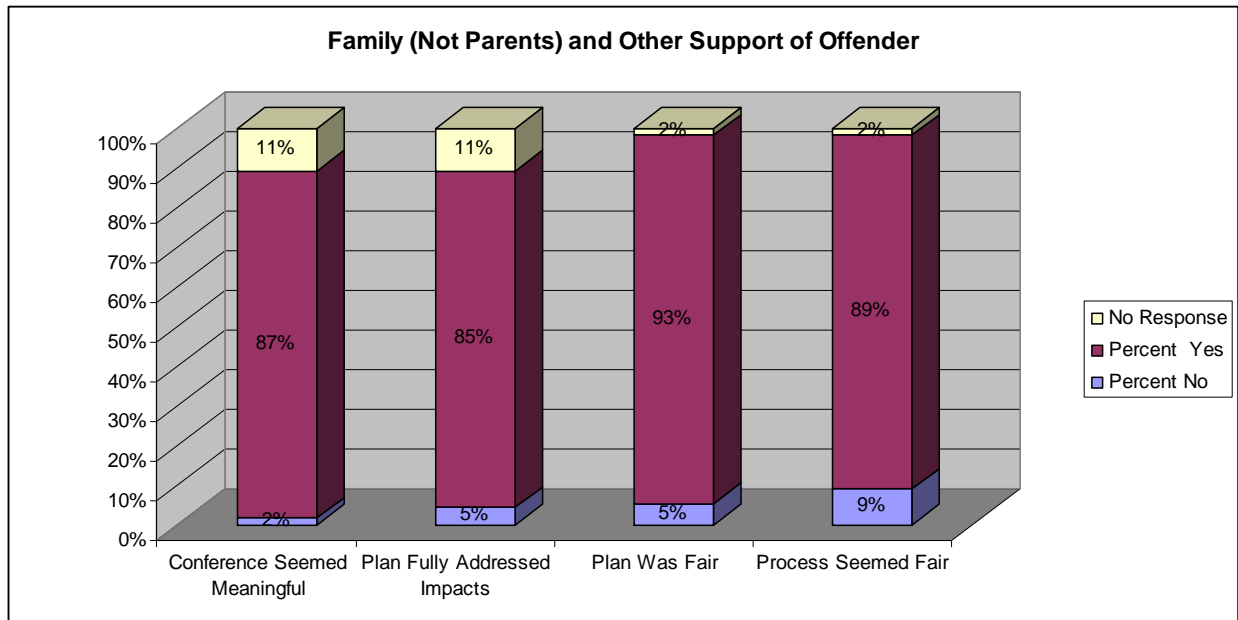
Another dynamic that sometimes appears are the parents who are deeply ashamed of their young person, or who hold a punitive philosophy of parenting, and who wish for greater punishment

than they feel is inherent in the reparative and restorative actions asked for by victims and other community members.

**Chart 4: Parent of Offender (n=97)**

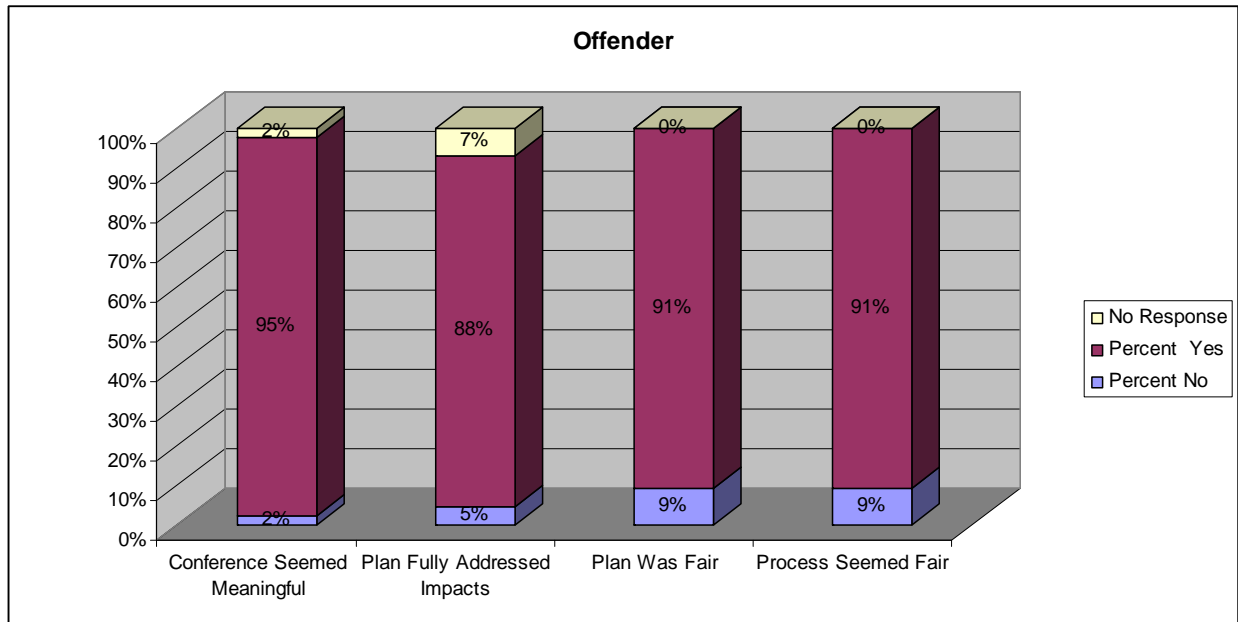


**Chart 5: Family (Not Parents) and Other Support of Offender (n=111)**



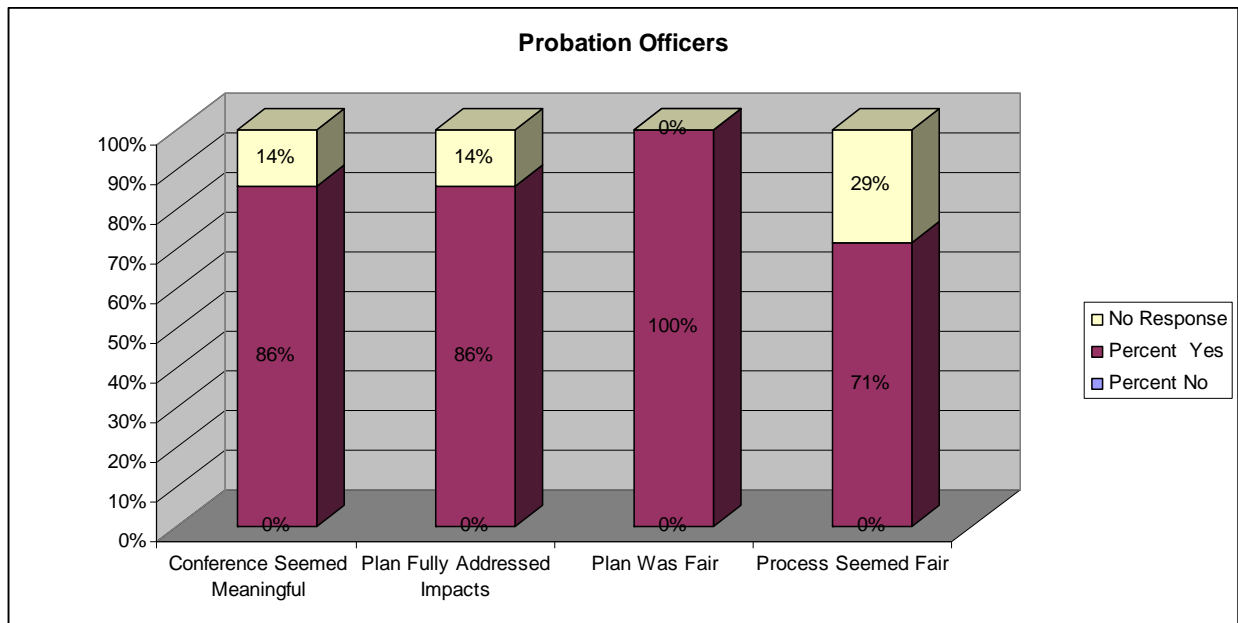
Family members and other persons present in support of offenders tended to respond more positively than parents. “Other persons” may include friends, teachers, therapists, employers, etc. who agree to participate in the restorative conference as a part of the young person’s community. These individuals sometimes take on significant roles in supporting and holding the young person accountable to completing the restorative and reparative actions in their plan.

**Chart 6: Offender (n=43)**



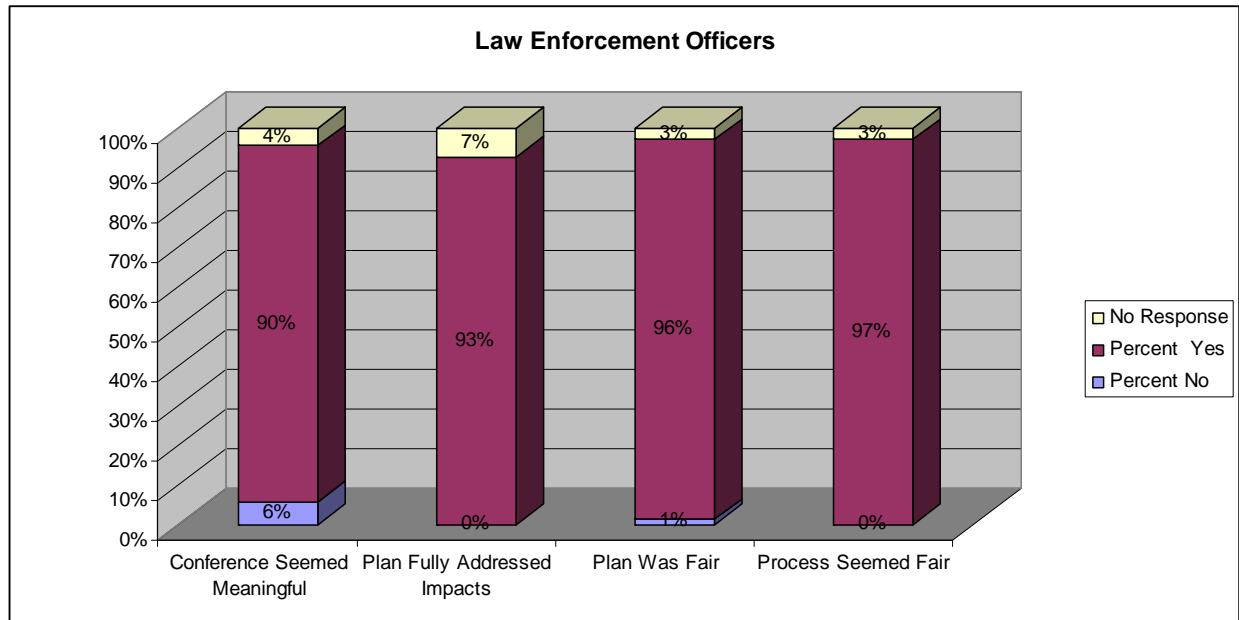
Offenders tend to have a very positive reaction to the conference. As a group, they highly likely to view the conference as a meaningful experience.

**Chart 7: Probation Officers (n=7)**



Responses in this category were 100% positive. Restorative Resources Staff strongly encourage probation officers to attend conferences.

**Chart 8: Law Enforcement Officers (n=68)**



Law enforcement officers involved in citing or arresting the young person have two roles in conferences. The first role is formal, and consists of beginning the proceedings by reading the charges and the section of the arrest report that describes what happened. This puts to rest any need to argue over what happened, an essential condition for moving ahead with exploring impacts and how to make things right.

The second role of the officer is to participate in the conference and respond to the same questions as do all other participants: “How has this impacted you?”; and, “What do you think needs to be done to make things right?” Their testimony is often quite telling and touching. Experienced facilitators have observed, and a few officers have confirmed, that opportunities for officers to discuss these things are rare. They typically experience doing so as very positive.

Another positive reaction that several police officers have shared with staff is that it is very rare for them to have contact with offenders beyond the immediate arrest or citation. Thus, they aren’t typically aware of the consequences and outcomes of the work they do. This sense of disconnect can take subtle tolls on morale over time. Participation in conferences is an exception, in which they actually are able to give input into what form justice takes by contributing their ideas about the impacts of the crime and what needs to be done to make things right..

**Conclusion:**

The data indicate generally high satisfaction with the four elements of the conference process addressed. It may be worth specifically investigating why family members of victims and parents of offenders are less likely to feel satisfied than other groups. Speculation has been offered above as to why this might be so, but further investigation to confirm or disprove this speculation, and to follow other leads, may prove fruitful.

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