



News

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the
Central Valley, Inc.

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SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

From the Administrator

The VORP staff is all moved in to our new home in the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. Thanks to everyone who had a hand in that transition, and particularly to Board Chair Michael Blue and his brother Monty who rented a truck and physically moved most of our equipment. The office was really cramped for a while, but a newly enclosed porch gave us the room we need to spread out a bit. Cases are coming in and going out in a timely fashion.

Our February 7-8 training added 22 new mediators to Fresno, and nine of them began cases immediately. Doug Noll was the first night trainer, I handled Saturday morning, and the VORP staff led by Rebecca Kliewer gave the afternoon portion. Our next training is scheduled for March 7-8. Call soon if you want to join us. There will be no training in April.

2002 income for VORP was the lowest in several years, \$62,547. Our transition meant you didn't receive your newsletter regularly, and a variety of other factors worked against us. Thanks to over \$8,000 in donations received at the end of the year, and being able to cut expenses we are in good shape right now. We will need to build up our regular individual and church donations, and invite you to be part

of that process. Thanks to all who have helped to keep VORP solvent these twenty years. - Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

Case story from Sheri Wiedenhofer

I received a VORP case involving two young offenders and two victims, a motorist and her child. The offenders dropped rocks from an overpass onto moving cars after school one day. The motorist was traveling under the bridge with her son and her car was hit by one of the rocks. She called the police on her cell phone and the boys were arrested at the site.

It took some creative coordination to get all of our schedules together for the actual mediation. During the mediation each boy told his experiences and Lisa was able to not only summarize their words, but offer her own experience as well. "It's more than rocks and cars, its people," she said. The victim was able to express her fear and anger about the damage to her car and the risk her son was exposed to. Both of the boys apologized, took responsibility for their action, and worked out individual plans for "making things as right as possible" with additional goals for the future that would make sure that this would not happen again.

My favorite moment was toward the end of the mediation session. I asked the

boys if they had anything to say to each other, knowing that they had not seen each other since that fateful day. They eagerly jumped at the opportunity. J began: "I'm sorry C. I'm older and I should have known better. I'm really sorry." C responded: "I'm really sorry too. I knew better all along and I didn't have to do it if I didn't want to. I could have kept us both from getting into trouble, so I'm sorry too."

There are some moments in life when you feel the heavens smile, when you know that an invisible chain of darkness has been broken and things will forever be different. It was that kind of moment for those boys, a moment of restoration and healing, and it was a moment like that for me. My prayers continue with all of these three families, and I am grateful for this small door of opportunity for seeds of true justice and reconciliation to grow.

VORP Board begins long range planning

When the VORP board asked the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies to work with them there were two parts to the request. There was an immediate need to provide oversight for the program due to Jay Griffith's resignation as Executive Director. There was also a desire to begin a long-range planning process to take a close look at VORP's role in the community after 20 years of service. What will VORP become?

Ron Claassen was asked to lead that process while Duane Ruth-Heffelbower managed the daily operation. This process is an important one, and our supporters are invited to give input.

The current board members are Michael Blue, Jose Chaparro, David Purvis, Eleanor Richards and Arthur Wint. Let them know what you think directly, or send your comments to VORP.

New Intern

Nancy Lopez, our CSUF intern is finishing up her time with us. Kristie Rogers, from the CSUF victimology program, attended the February training and has begun working in the office as well. Welcome Kristie! She joins Johnny Phouthachak, Helmine Bigler, Rebecca Klierer and Kartika Suwandi on the staff.

VORP Staff wedding

After working with VORP for 2 months, I flew to my home country to prepare our wedding. December 23rd was the big day. My husband (Daniel Bigler) is from California, my family is German-speaking but living in Paraguay, so our pastor did the ceremony in English, Spanish and German! It was a wonderful experience. In January we gathered in Fresno with friends and family to re-live this special day with our loved ones who couldn't make it to Paraguay. - Helmine



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