

# VORP

## News

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### Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

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### *From the Administrator*

Summertime is a change from the regular routine for VORP as well as for most of you. Over the past few years we have begun receiving an increasing number of cases which come from situations in schools. With the number of students in school lower this time of the year, there is a change in our case flow.

Summer has also traditionally been a time of staff transition. Kartika Suwandi is spending the summer in the Bay Area, returning occasionally to keep our books up to date. Our Fresno State interns have completed their work and are off to other things. A new staff member will be joining us in August when Mennonite Voluntary Service worker Megan Thompson arrives. It has been a while since we had a VS worker, and we welcome a renewal of that relationship. Megan can tell you about herself in a later edition of the newsletter.

I have been on the road a good bit, just returning from Mennonite Church USA biennial sessions in Atlanta, and resourcing a group of churches in the Philippines.

We greatly appreciate the regular support of our friends and thank you for continuing to make VORP possible in Fresno.

*Duane Ruth-Heffellbower*



### *A Mediation Story*

*By Renee Soto*

Having the opportunity to bring people together in the mediation process is perhaps one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. This particular story begins with three juveniles playing on a school campus on a Sunday afternoon. Time on their hands eventually led to the breaking of a gymnasium window and theft of some equipment. The police came to the scene and the boys were caught. The court will often choose to send juvenile offenders to the VORP program as an alternative to the normal court process. The mediation process is


voluntary, therefore it is necessary that both the offender and victim be willing to meet.

After visiting with all individuals involved, as well as family members, our joint meeting was set up at the school. Two of the juveniles, their grandmother, the school principal, custodian and myself were present at the mediation. I had each boy share with the group what happened. The principal and everybody else present at the mediation had the opportunity to share how this offense impacted them. After all present had had an opportunity to talk about what happened, I then asked the principal to give her ideas about how the boys could make things right. She suggested 30 hours of community service over the summer in a nearby community center. Both boys felt good about this, and eventually, after working through some of the details, an agreement was signed. A very touching part of the mediation came when the victim turned to the boys and said,

“I think you owe your grandmother an apology.” Each boy one at a time looked at their grandmother and apologized for putting her through so much heartache. We were all very touched and it was difficult to keep from crying.

Although this seems like a very simple process, I would like to reflect on a few key impressions I had during the mediation that I believe will

have lasting impact on all involved. As we sat around the table and each began to share I believe the offenders began to realize that the offense was not just about a broken window. It was about broken relationships and broken trust. These young boys also saw the opportunity to repair the trust that they had broken. This way was through talking about what happened, talking about how to make things right and talking about their plans for the future. As each boy began to share, I could see the weight begin to lift from his shoulders, his face begin to look up and the atmosphere in the room begin to grow brighter. (continued)



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The mediation ended with two boys smiling and celebrating a new beginning. VORP had made this possible. As the mediation drew to a close, I shared with each boy my own personal feelings and thoughts. I wanted them to understand that their decision to be a part of the mediation process took moral courage and their confession was the beginning of recovery. I encouraged them to remember this day and use the tools they learned from this experience. To talk about what happened, talk about how to make things as right as possible, and also to talk about how to keep it from happening again. VORP rebuilds broken relationships and broken trust. Day by day, case by case, we rebuild a broken world.



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### Fall 2003 Volunteer Mediator Trainings

- **September 12-13**
- **October 10—11**
- **November 7—8**

Friday: 6:30pm - 9:30pm    Saturday: 8:30am - 3:30pm

Cost \$25.00, includes nine hours of training and up to eight hours of field experience as you serve your first case. If you prefer to attend the training without taking a case, the cost is \$50.00. Call our office today to reserve dates: 455-9803.

## *Mediator Interview with Rick Gaston*

*By Rebecca Kliwer*

In 1992, Ron Claassen visited West Side Church of God where Rick Gaston and his wife Anne attend. Claassen gave a brief description and appeal of restorative justice, which highlighted the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. Rick's sister-in-law encouraged him to attend the next VORP training, and Rick has never looked back.

Rick is one of our longest continuing mediators. Looking back, Rick reflects how excited he gets when he sees families gathering around to assist the offender in "making things as right as possible". In the last mediation he facilitated, Rick invited anyone who wanted to support the offender to come. No only the mother of the offender showed up, but also the grandmother and her sister who had much to say.

Rick stays busy. He works full time for the County of Fresno and the Foster Care Program. This spring he graduated with a Business major from Fresno Pacific University. He did his final project on his experience with VORP. This Fall, Rick plans to start the Masters Program in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at Fresno Pacific University.

Rick, we appreciate your volunteer service to the community. Thank you!

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