

# VORP

## News

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### *From the Administrator*

Three weeks ago I visited the prison cell where Nelson Mandela spent 17 years. Robben Island (the name comes from the Dutch word for seal) is in the bay outside Cape Town, South Africa. It was the place where those working against apartheid were kept under austere conditions. Our guide was a former prisoner who was able to tell us first-hand what life was like. We also had the chance to spend a day and night in Kayelitsha Township outside Cape Town, staying with a family who has lived there for many years. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission process is one of the world's most prominent examples of restorative justice. What do people think about that experience now that it is over?

Everyone I talked to in South Africa said the same thing: the process was a good thing, but it wasn't as satisfying as they had hoped it would be. The problem is that offenders were only required to tell the truth. They did not have to accept any responsibility for making things right with their victims. Victims appreciated learning the truth, but it wasn't enough. We at VORP have the opportunity to offer victims and offenders more than South Africa was able to offer in its transition to majority rule. It is not enough to acknowledge injustices. Victims then need the opportunity to work with the offender to decide what has to happen to make things as right as possible and be clear about the future. Thank you for helping to offer this service in central California.

*Duane Ruth-Heffelbower*

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

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### *A Mediation Story*

*By Don Fisher*

A juvenile offender was referred to the VORP office after an arrest because the offender egged and poured syrup over the victim's car. A claim was filed in the thousands of dollars to restore the car's status. This was a major criminal action against property and the victim wanted to make sure the property was repaired and justice was served on the offender. The office began the leg-work to set a victim offender reconciliation mediation. Who should attend? The list grew exponentially. There were the adults who owned the car, their children, the offender, his father, his mother and stepfather, a girl who was named in the police report but not charged, her mother, three more friends of the victim's children and the offenders. Then there was the probation officer, the uniformed and equipped campus police, the parents of the friends and four other boys who participated in some retaliatory beatings. Well, this egg splattered, syrupy car damage was no easy breakfast to swallow.

The conflict boiled down to a relationship amongst five high school youth who were close friends. They were four boys and a girl who schooled, socialized and played together. Then, the girl became a friend to one of the boys. This new dynamic of the group of five brewed more conflict than the adolescents could handle. The parents knew some of the story and thought they knew more of the story as events began to happen. Several severe events surfaced and the sore began to fester. One night the stage was set and the offense on the car occurred. More conflict developed, arrests were made, punishment was administered, fear was felt, retaliation and violence were acted out, and civility was out of control for this group. The parents argued and stood by their children and unknown future actions lurked in the darkness of ignorance.



The mediation engaged eleven people, five adults and six youth. It lasted three hours at the VORP office as all parties had an opportunity to tell their stories. The offender apologized. The victim expressed the main desire that violence and threats cease and some money be paid to repair the car. The offender agreed to work for his father to earn the money which also presented the opportunity for them to bond. The girl, who was the non-admitting offender, stepped forward toward the end of the mediation and admitted involvement in the offense. She apologized and offered to share in the monetary restitution. The victims accepted. All agreed to constructively address the two of the group of five who were not at the mediation. They were to be told the results of the transformed conflict and the expected future actions of the group. The parents heard and declared their true understandings and commitments in front of the adolescents. All shook hands and agreed to attempt to repair the relationships or to at least cease further offenses. A written agreement to make these things as right as possible was signed. A follow-up meeting was set, and all will contribute to this hopefully celebratory event.

## *New Staff Member*

My name is Megan Thompson and I have just begun my Mennonite Voluntary Service term here at VORP. I am from Pittsburgh, PA and I just graduated in June from Otterbein College in Westerville, OH with a degree in sociology. I am United Methodist but I have found lots of overlap between Mennonite beliefs and my own. After four years of learning about what's wrong with the world, I thought I should try to make myself useful. VORP seems like a good way to extend God's grace to other people, which is about the only goal I have right now in life. I want to say thank you to everyone in the office for making me feel so welcome here.

### **VORP Board Members**

Michael Blue, Chair  
 Dave Purvis, Secretary/Treasurer  
 Eleanor Richards  
 Arthur Wint  
 Jose Chaparro  
 Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, VORP Administrator

### **VORP Staff**

Johnny Phouthachack, Agreement Manager  
 Helmine Bigler, Mediation Manager  
 Megan Thompson, Mediation Manager  
 Barry Guenther, Finance Manager  
 Kartika Suwandi, Finance Assistant Manager

### **Fall 2003 Volunteer Mediator Trainings**

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

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

***Call our office today to reserve dates: 455-9803.***

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