



News

Volume 22, Issue 1, February 2004

From the Administrator

As VORP enters its twenty-second year of bringing victims and offenders together we are thankful for the opportunity we have had to serve our community in this unique way. The world of restorative justice in general, and victim offender mediation in particular, is expanding rapidly.

This is being written as I sit in the San Francisco airport, headed for Peshawar, Pakistan for their first restorative justice conference. That country is looking toward a movement back to civilian government, and wants to think through what their criminal justice system might look like. Of particular interest to Pakistanis is the questions of how Islamic law and restorative justice fit together. The short answer is that they fit together very well. I will be continuing my study of Islamic law and doing more writing on the subject after the conference.



Ron Claassen is going to Bangkok to sit on Angkana Bunsit's thesis committee. Angkana is a probation officer from Thailand. She spent several months with us looking at restorative justice and how it might be used in domestic violence cases in Thailand. When Angkana came she thought that the answer to her question was that restorative justice had no relevance to domestic violence in Thailand. She has changed her mind, and will be proposing a way to use RJ in that context.

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

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Victim Offender Mediation Association is involved in a project in Romania trying to help them create a victim offender mediation system. I am collaborating with some people from Mississippi on a project in the Ukraine, trying to use the restorative justice approach with relationships between the Roma people, usually known as Gypsies, and the other people groups in the Ukraine.

In Fresno we continue to work toward the day when victim offender mediation is the normal response to offenses. At the Restorative Justice Conference we proposed legislation to make Fresno a statewide pilot project where all cases would go through the RJ filter. Ron Claassen is leading focus groups on the subject.

All this activity has to be based in something, and that something is Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley - Fresno VORP. It is our faithful service year after year that helps others to catch the vision of a day when all offenses are handled through a victim offender meeting. Without this base, none of our other work would have the legitimacy it does. We really are helping to change the world, one victim and offender at a time.

Duane Ruth-Heffebower

A Mediation Story

By Michael Blue

Month after month, year after year I have read the stories in our newsletter describing the positive outcomes in lives that have been repaired through the compassion of the VORP system. Still, when I received a call from the VORP office to do a CJC case, I had my doubts. I asked Catherine Ruff, a trained mediator, to assist me with the case. Cathy made all of the appointments and went with me to all of the meetings. Thank you Cathy.

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2004 Volunteer Mediator Training

February 6-7 March 5-6 April 16-17
June 4-5 September 10-11 October 8-9
November 12-13

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

Call our office to reserve dates: 455-9803.

Our case involved three offenders and one victim all between the ages of eight and eleven. After school one day, the boys got together and went into a neighbor's house through an unlocked door on the garage. Their parents were busy studying, working and sleeping because some work nights. Once in the house they took \$12.00 in change, video games, a play station, and a bicycle. The children made several trips from the victim's house to one of the offender's homes to stash their ill-gotten gains. Upon coming home, the victim's mother caught two of the three offenders coming out of her house with the stolen items in hand and called the police, while her son watched the two frightened offenders. The third offender managed to climb the fence in the back yard and get away.

Before we received the case, the parents had already gone to the victim's house with their sons to apologize for what their sons had done. The shame of the families and the children was very apparent, the victims and offenders were willing to have a conference.

The conference was a testimony to the VORP system and to reconciliation and restoration of people. The offenders took responsibility for their actions, apologized and promised not to take anyone's property again. The victims accepted the offenders' apologies and the restitution that the offenders offered. The victim even stated that he wanted to be friends with the offenders.

I believe the work of VORP is the work of Jesus Christ. If He were still alive I believe he would be right in the center of our activities. Let's all invite his Holy Spirit to be with us in the work we do at VORP. This year let's recommit to making all of our relationships right. Then let's help others make their relationships right too. God bless all of you.



2003 Sustaining Friends

We are grateful for the donations from the Sustaining Friends of VORP. The total amount that VORP has received this year from these churches is \$10,676. The following is a list of Sustaining Friend churches who gave to VORP during the year of 2003:

- College Community Church
- First Armenian Presbyterian Church
- First Mennonite Church
- First Presbyterian Church
- Harmony Free Will Baptist Church
- Butler Mennonite Brethren Church
- New Hope Community Church
- Northwest Baptist Church
- St. Luke's United Methodist Church
- United Japanese Christian Church

Thank you for your giving!

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