

VORP News

Volume 22, Issue 3, April 2004

From the Administrator

The VORP staff attended Phil Erdman's retirement luncheon March 26. Phil retired as a Probation Officer IV after 34 years with the Fresno County Probation Department. Back in 1996 when the Probation Department decided to become more involved with Restorative Justice, Phil was appointed as the person responsible for working with the Restorative Justice Project and VORP. It was during Phil's time that the Community Justice Conference process was created and implemented with his active participation. Phil has always been interested in advancing the cause of Restorative Justice in Fresno County, and we congratulate him on his retirement. As much as we hate to lose a friend at the Probation Department, it's great to gain a new VORP mediator. Right, Phil?

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

Mediation Story

The full version of this article was written from an interview of Megan Thompson for Mennonite Mission Network, and can be found at www.MennoniteMission.net.

By Bethany Keener

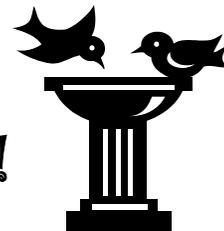
A few months before high-school graduation, a teenager in Fresno found out that a can or two of spray paint emptied artistically onto fast-food restaurants, a car dealership and a City of Fresno garbage can is enough to get a person arrested.

But instead of being sent to a detention center, he found himself in his living room with his grandmother, meeting with two mediators from the Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc. Mennonite Voluntary Service worker Megan Thompson and her co-worker Helmine Bigler had come to set up a time when they could meet together with a woman representing the city of Fresno to find a way for the teenager to pay the city back for the damage he had done.

Not long afterward, the group gathered to talk about the teenager's offense. He promised to compensate the city by working for his grandfather's lawn-care business. And instead of being angry, the woman

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

4882 E. Townsend Ave., Fresno, CA 93727
Phone: (559) 455-9803; Fax: (559) 252-4800
Email: vorp@fresno.edu | <http://vorp.org>



Spring is Here!

representing the city encouraged him to finish out the school year so he could get his diploma.

"I have responded to God extending grace to me in my life. Shouldn't I assume that it's possible for other people to receive grace?" said Thompson. Administered by the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies of Fresno Pacific University, the program is a nonprofit, community-based organization that provides juvenile offenders an opportunity to make things as right as possible with their victims.

VORP takes cases that are sent from the Fresno juvenile probation department and assigns them to volunteer mediators. VORP staff also work as mediators between juveniles who commit both property damage and battery and assault, and their victims. Community members who are trained as mediators help victims and offenders meet together to discuss the offense, express their feelings and explore a way that the victim can be given restitution.

A detailed report is written and sent back to the probation office following the meeting. Then Johnny Phouthachack, VORP's Agreement Manager, makes sure the offender carries through with the restitution agreed upon. He also helps offenders find jobs to pay victims for damaged property, which is paid in installments over a number of months, and community-service opportunities that are restorative and related to the offense.

"The victim-offender reconciliation process helps people handle injustices restoratively," said Thompson. "Compared to the state's system, its a better option because it offers grace to both parties."

2004 Volunteer Mediator Training

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.

Thompson also emphasized how important it is that the offenders “understand that there is someone who thinks they’re worthwhile. Most of them believe what our society is telling them, which is that they’re no good.”

“If I believe in a loving God, it's not possible for me to think that inequality and violence are acceptable,” Thompson said. “Peacemaking makes sense to me because my family has done an excellent job of demonstrating God's grace to me throughout my entire life.”

WANTED :Upgraded Computers

Currently VORP is running its office on barely functioning Windows 98 computers. If you would donate a computer running Windows 2000 or XP, or any other accessories, please contact our office at 455-9803 or email us at vorp_fresno@juno.com. *Thank you for your concern and help.*



Friends of VORP

You are invited to a Mediator, Donor
and Staff Appreciation Dinner.

Friday, April 30th, 2004
at 6:30 pm

At the Menonite Brethren
Biblical Seminary
(on the corner of Butler and Chestnut)

Please RSVP by April 19
Call 455-9803 or email vorp_fresno@juno.com



VORP Board Members

Michael Blue, Chair	Dave Purvis, Secretary/Treasurer
Eleanor Richards	Arthur Wint
Faith Young	Jose Chaparro

VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, Administrator
 Johnny Phouthachack, Agreement Manager
 Helmine Bigler, Mediation Manager
 Megan Thompson, Mediation Manager
 Barry Guenther, Finance Manager
 Kartika Suwandi, Assistant Finance Manager

YARD SALE SATURDAY!!!

Come support students who are working to earn money so they can repay the people they’ve offended. These students are selling their own personal belongings, as well as any donated items, to raise the funds they need.

First Sale: April 17 from 7am - 4pm
Location: 2052 E. Webster Avenue, Fresno, CA 93701 (just south of Olive and west of Fresno St.)

Items to be sold include sofas, coffee tables, love seats, and kitchen appliances. Come check it out!

Your participation would be very helpful! If you have **anything** you’d like to donate to the sale, contact Johnny at the VORP office (455-9803) before April 12, and arrangements will be made to gather your items.

More on fundraisers to come! Thank you for your support, and we hope to see you April 17.

4882 E. Townsend Ave
 Fresno, CA 93727
 (559) 455-9803
<http://vorp.org>



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
 of the Central Valley, Inc.

Non-Profit Org
 U.S. Postage
 P A I D
 Clovis, CA 93612
 Permit # 376