

VORP News

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Mediation Story

By Eleanor Richards, VORP Board Member

For those who support the principles of conflict mediation, reporting on a successful resolution to a conflict is always a cause for celebration. The CJC or Community Justice Case I was given this past January seemed destined for such a positive conclusion. What I did not realize was the power and eloquence that the victim's story would have upon this process.

The case was relatively straightforward. Two juveniles had vandalized the home of a student who attended the same school. Since this same home had been vandalized previously, the owners were understandably upset.

Only one of the offenders was considered a suitable candidate for CJC and so I met with him and his parents at a local coffee shop at their request. After introductions were made and I provided both written and a verbal explanation of how the mediation process unfolded, both the offender and his parents seemed eager to learn more and to participate in the VORP program. I asked the offender to explain what happened; he began his story. As he began telling his version of the story, I noticed that he would stop. I did not doubt his honesty it was just that he would only go so far into the story before he would quit. With his parent's encouragement, the offender began to add details to his story that showed both his hesitancy to offend in the first place as well as his remorse. As we said our good byes, I repeated that the next phase of the process was to contact the victim to invite him to be part of this process.

The term, victim, was actually a misnomer in this case. The name on the police report was that of the father or owner of the residence. In fact, after listening to his version of the events, his children had been victimized since they attended the same high school as the offenders. There was some question about why this house had been selected. The victim was both articulate and open to the mediation process. It is worth noting that he had suffered property loss on at least four separate occasions because of vandalism. He stated that he and his wife were trying to teach their children the need for obeying the laws and being respectful to others. He shared that the incidents had resulted in a loss of security as well as property loss. Since he saw that it was a neighbor who vandalized his property, there was a sense of unease. After learning about how VORP works and how the mediation meeting unfolds, the victim agreed to participate. One question we both shared was the need

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When agreements are
made and kept,
trust grows.



for his children to be present. We agreed to meet once again briefly before the mediation to invite his children to participate.

One week later, we met at People's Church; the church had graciously agreed to provide us with a room. Meeting with the victim and his children before the offender and his parent arrived, it became obvious that the children had some feelings about this event. They agreed to attend.

As the mediation process began, the first note of possible difficulty sounded when the offender's father wanted to know about costs. Reminding him of the process, we began again. The offender had changed his version again so I needed to clarify some points in order to ensure that there was not miscommunication. The offender's difficulty did not originate from any plan to deceive but his embarrassment in seeing his classmates at the table.

When the victims began to speak, the offender's father began to interrupt and to ask questions. Since he was tall and heavyset and the victims were petit, I stopped the mediation to review the rules. The victims needed the chance to tell how they felt. One of the young ladies spoke so eloquently, about how she felt to have vile garbage dumped on her doorstep. She described how it smelled as she cleaned up her front doorstep. This was the first time that these details had been shared. There had been more than some eggs thrown on the door and stucco of their home. She stated that their parents asked that the family follow certain rules that were stricter than other teens had to follow. She realized that this may have set her apart, but that this was no reason to throw garbage at her door. When asked by the victim if she had ever been cruel or disrespectful to him at school, he admitted that she has been one of the nice students. The victims had had the chance to ask questions and to say that they forgave. These were young women 14 and 16 years of age. I regret that I am not

2004 Volunteer Mediator Training

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.

doing them justice because they demonstrated their ability to forgive after cleaning up after a vile act was performed on their doorstep designed to humiliate them.

As the meeting moved to the final stage, the offender's father disputed the insurance information that the victim had brought. Sadly, he wanted to just pay the bill and leave. We did sign an agreement that night. The victims left stronger I hope for their ability to state what the police report failed to include. These young women refused to be victimized by either offenders or by themselves. They refused to be held

hostage by their anger and unwillingness to forgive. This is perhaps the real cause for celebration. The next generation does realize the power of forgiveness.

HOST A CAR WASH

Would your church or youth group be willing to host a car wash? VORP kids would join church youth washing cars in the church parking lot, under your supervision, during Sunday worship. The proceeds would be put toward restitution payments. Please call Johnny (455-9803) to help with this simple but important service project.

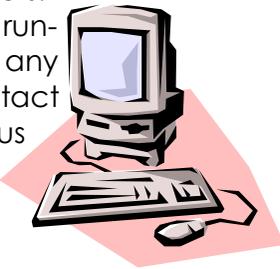


CAR WASH

Is your car dirty? Come get it washed for a good cause. Help VORP kids work to earn their restitution money. The date is Saturday, June 12. More details to follow.

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.edu. Thank you for your concern and help.



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.

Saturday May 15, 7am-4pm

3192 Stanford (near Ashlan and Stanford)

Items to be sold include sofas, coffee tables, love seats, baby clothes 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) and arrangements will be made to gather your items (for this sale and for future sales.)

More on fundraisers to come! Thank you for your support, and we hope to see you May 15.

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
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