



News

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From the Administrator

Victim offender dialogue is becoming more common all the time. Australia's Capital Territory, similar to our District of Columbia, has just adopted legislation referring significantly more cases to victim offender dialogue. In phase one they will expand its use with juveniles, and in phase two adult offenders will have the opportunity to meet with their victims. The explanatory piece accompanying the law defines restorative justice as "a methodological tool which aims to address unresolved issues and emotions experienced by victims, offenders, and their families which cannot be addressed by the court because of the nature of the court's role."

Poland is also beginning to use victim offender dialogue in more cases. First permitting the use of mediation in criminal cases in 1998, in 2003 nearly 2,000 cases were handled by a process similar to VORP. The European Forum for Victim-Offender Mediation and Restorative Justice estimates that 20,000 victim offender mediation cases are handled in Germany each year. Moldova's criminal code was changed to allow VOM in 2003. The acceptance of victim offender dialogue as an important component of criminal justice seems to have spread everywhere.

Those of us who have been advocating for VOM and demonstrating its effectiveness for decades are gratified to see this growing acceptance of something we know to be valuable. Locally there are a number of new initiatives aimed at significantly expanding the availability of VOM. Criminal justice officials are meeting with restorative justice advocates to work out the necessary processes. This week one of our Fresno juvenile court judges estimated that there are 11,000 juvenile cases in Fresno County each year, of which 3,000 end up going through the court process. Very few of these cases, the most serious ones, are not suitable for VOM. Can you visualize 10,000 Fresno County juveniles being offered the opportunity to meet with their victims to make things as right as possible? It could happen here.

VORP relies almost completely on donations from readers of this newsletter to keep our small staff going. Money is tight for us right now. Please consider doing a bit more than usual for us, so that we can keep offering people the opportunity to make things right.

Duane Ruth-Hefflbower

2005 Volunteer Mediator Training

January 14-15 February 11-12
March 11-12 June 10-11

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

Call our office to reserve dates: 455-9803

★
★ **CALLING ALL MEDIATORS:** ★
★ VORP needs your help! ★
★ The dam at the Probation Department ★
★ has broken, and VORP has received a ★
★ flood of cases that need mediators! ★
★ Please call VORP at 455-9803, or email ★
★ vorp@fresno.edu if you'd like to take a ★
★ case. It doesn't matter if you haven't me- ★
★ dated in a while, we'll make sure you ★
★ know what you're doing. ★
★
★*****

A Success Story

May 2000—Sean and Billy (not their real names), both 16 years old, decide to mess around and see what damage they can do to the, what seems to them, vacant house in their neighborhood. They end up in quite a mess. Later, two other boys are caught vandalizing the house, but tell the police Sean and Billy are responsible for most of the damage. When the police ask them to come in for questioning, they confess.

The story gets interesting when the boys are offered the opportunity to participate in VORP. They tell their story to the mediator and agree to meet. At the mediation, the victim says he sold the house for \$22,000 less than he would have been able to otherwise. Sean and Billy agree to each pay half.

Making the agreement wasn't too hard, but keeping it proved to be more difficult. Billy worked on fulfilling the agreement, but couldn't manage to stick with it. Sean paid in fits and starts. He remembers that he would make payments when he had a job, but most of the time wasn't motivated enough to pay. It would take receiving a letter from VORP's Agreement Manager, Johnny, saying that he'd have to go back to court, before he'd come in with a payment of \$50 or \$100.

Now fast forward to 2004 - four years and about \$10,000 later, Sean made his final restitution payment. He says he's grown up; he wants to put this behind him and finally get off probation. His probation status was the only thing standing in the way of him applying to culinary school. He had been living in Orange County working at a bakery, until he came home to help his mom as she was recovering from surgery. Soon, he plans to go back down south for school.

When asked what advice he would give to kids, Sean said "Don't vandalize, you're gonna get

The Victim's Perspective

Sean, and the owner of the house, Mr. Lusk, came together for one final meeting, and while Mr. Lusk was at the VORP office, he graciously agreed to share his thoughts about this experience with us. When asked about the offense and the mediation, he says he remembers it like it was yesterday. He initially felt very angry, and had to really "dig down" to gain self-control. When he first heard about VORP, he thought the idea of mediation seemed ridiculous. And, even after the mediation, he was skeptical that the boys would be able to follow through on their agreements.

Four years later, Mr. Lusk is convinced that VORP is an "awesome program." He realizes that if it

hadn't been for VORP, he would not have received any restitution. He credits VORP's success in this case to Agreement Manager Johnny Phouthachack's hard work. Mr. Lusk says these days it's hard to find someone as dependable and reliable as Johnny.

When it comes to Sean, Mr. Lusk hopes this situation has helped him learn important lessons about life and about how to do good for himself in the future. He said receiving the restitution doesn't wash out the effects of the offense 100%, but it does feel good to see Sean keeping his promises.

When asked what advice Mr. Lusk would give to someone in a similar situation, he said, "If you're doing VORP, be patient, it may take time." It's a good idea to "go with the flow" and "stay positive" because you have "nothing to lose."

The parties ended this final follow-up meeting with a handshake and a smile. It was obvious that a big burden had been lifted from Sean's shoulders. Mr. Lusk said it was a pretty good payoff for him to see that VORP helped them both. *VORP would like to congratulate both gentlemen and wish them all the best in the future!*

Fundraising Update

PLEASE CALL VORP AT 455-9803 IF:

- You have a project at home that you could use a little help with: housekeeping, cleaning out the garage, yard work, washing the car, or anything else you can think of.
- You would like to have VORP kids pick up your recyclables on a regular basis
- You would like to buy discount coupon books, cookbooks or Gottshalks coupons.
- You have fundraising experience and would be willing to share any ideas with us
- You have time to volunteer helping coordinate projects and supervising kids while they work

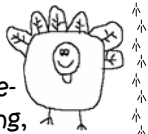
VORP Board Members

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

So, there was this turkey farmer who was always experimenting with breeding to get the perfect turkey. His family was especially fond of turkey legs on Thanksgiving, and there were never enough for everyone. After many frustrating attempts, the farmer was relating the results of his efforts to his farmer friends "Well I finally did it, I bred a turkey that has 6 legs!" They all asked the farmer how it tasted. "I don't know," said the farmer, "I never could catch the darn thing."

Why did they let the turkey join the band?
Because he had the drumsticks!

"If we meet someone who owes us thanks, we right away remember that. But how often do we meet someone to whom we owe thanks without remembering that?"
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



Thanksgiving Thought

By Rodney Pearson

As the holiday season approaches many of us will be taking time out of our busy schedules to spend time with our loved ones and give thanks for all our blessings. For many, this holiday serves as a yearly reminder to cherish the things that are so easily taken for granted. With our busy schedules and hectic deadlines, it becomes far too easy to let the routine of modern life infiltrate our lives and disillusion us from the things that truly matter. Fortunately, we have the holiday season to remind us that despite all the difficulties we are faced with in life, that we must never forget to take time to be thankful for the blessings we have. When the holiday season passes, and our lives return to their quickening pace, remember to take the time to cherish our blessings and continue to give thanks throughout the year. Happy Holidays and God Bless.

VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	Administrator
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Megan Thompson	Mediation Manager
Fred Risard	Mediation Manager
Barry Guenther	Finance Manager
Rodney Pearson	Intern
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