



Volume 23, Issue 1 February 2005

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

Thanks to our staff, volunteer mediators and financial supporters for bringing us through 2004, one of the more confusing years we have had in a while. The financial report is easy: we had expenses of \$55,343.47 and income of \$55,333.91 for a net income of \$9.56. This result is only possible due to the in-kind donations of Fresno Pacific University and the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies which provide our space and our administration. Thank you to everyone. Our case statistics follow the standard percentages of 50% of referrals resulting in joint meetings of victim and offender. 127 cases were referred, 42 joint meetings were completed, and 23 were in progress at the end of the year. This number of cases is a record low for us. Only 1983, our first full year of operation, had so few cases. We are working at changing this situation, as you might imagine. There isn't a simple answer or quick fix. Our capacity is much greater than the flow of cases. We are hopeful that 2005 will see a great increase in case referrals. Over 100 VORP mediators were trained this year and we are helping a group in Visalia start a program there. A Reedley group is in the process of taking over all cases in their area of the county. We have lots to be thankful for.

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower

A Mediation Story *By Katie Fast*

I was asked to co-mediate a VORP case last summer involving two boys who had been caught breaking into a neighbor's home. The two boys, one 14 and the other 17, had vandalized the home, and stolen jewelry, video games, and computer equipment. The victim's insurance company estimated the vandalism and stolen property damages at approximately \$3,000. When we met with the 14-year-old boy and his grandmother we were eager to listen to his story. He admitted to us that he had indeed broken into the house, but he did not agree with the \$3,000 in estimated damages. We explained to him and his grandmother that if they participated in the mediation process, they would be given the opportunity to see the estimates that were made and even discuss them with the victim. This seemed to satisfy them and they hesitantly agreed to participate in mediation.

When we met with the 17-year-old boy he explained to us that he had indeed participated in the vandalism and burglary. This young man quickly agreed to participate in the process, sharing with us that he was truly sorry and really wanted to pay back the victim and move on with his life. He said he wanted to go to college, and that this offense on his record might make it difficult for him to do that. My partner and I were off to a good start; both offenders had agreed to participate.

When we met with the victim we immediately sensed her frustration. She had a strong desire to feel safe in her own neighborhood and really wanted to be able to replace the damaged and stolen items. Because she had little money she could not afford to fix the damages until she received restitution. This is what she was the most frustrated about. She acknowledged that this break-in was probably due to the tense relations between her son and the 14-year-old offender, which made her feel even more upset. She agreed to participate in the process and to bring her son to the mediation, if he was willing. On the day of the mediation my partner and I were eager to work at a resolution to this case. The 17-year-old offender arrived promptly, as did the victim and her son. The 14-year-old offender did not show up, and when we called to inquire about his commitment to the process, his grandmother informed us that they would not be participating because they didn't trust anyone. Through tears she informed me that she and her grandson would be moving away so that they would not have to deal with this anymore. It was a reminder that conflict is often easiest left ignored, but by ignoring it, it also remains unresolved. There was nothing that could be done, so my partner and I proceeded with the mediation.

(continued on page 2)

Toys for Tots

VORP would like to thank United Way and the Marines, who made it possible for VORP clients to both give and receive Christmas gifts this year. As a community service project, ten VORP kids wrapped and distributed gifts to 100 recipients, including both VORP clients and their families. VORP Agreement Manager, Johnny Phouthachack, directed the entire operation. He made personal deliveries to families without transportation. Johnny remembers one family in particular: nine children and their dad just lost his job. VORP was able to extend a little kindness to this family. Johnny has received many letters and calls from appreciative families. This is the first year VORP has worked with the Toys for Tots program, but Johnny and the kids are looking

Volunteer Mediator Training

February 11&12 March 11&12 June 11&12

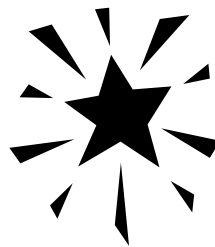
Friday 6:30pm - 9:30pm
Saturday 8:30am - 3:30pm

Call 455-9803 to reserve a spot.

(continued from page 1)

As both victim and offender entered the mediation I noticed immediately that they refused to look at each other. They stared at the floor or at my partner and me, but never at each other. As we entered the process and gave both victim and offender the opportunity to share their experiences with each other I noticed that here, in the midst of their shared experiences, the participants began to look at each other. They were both interested in what had happened on the day the incident occurred and realized that it was only here, within the safety of mediation, that they could begin to piece together the events of the day. Only they could answer the each other's questions. After each side shared their experiences we began to work at a plan to make things right. The victim agreed that each offender would only be asked to repay approximately \$700. The courts would have to worry about the unwilling offender, but the boy who agreed to mediate would make a payment plan with the victim so that she would receive his portion of the restitution. A plan was reached and everyone signed and left the mediation happy. The victim even offered to drive the offender home!

The VORP program is powerful. It reminds us that when people get together to work diligently at resolving conflict, positive things can happen. Lives can be changed, and this case proves this to me often. I have been keeping track of my offender through the VORP office and have been told that he has paid a significant portion of his restitution. He is participating in the service opportunities that VORP is offering to him, and he even got a job! His goal is to enter college next year and with his determination and desire I see no reason why he won't. VORP has given this offender an



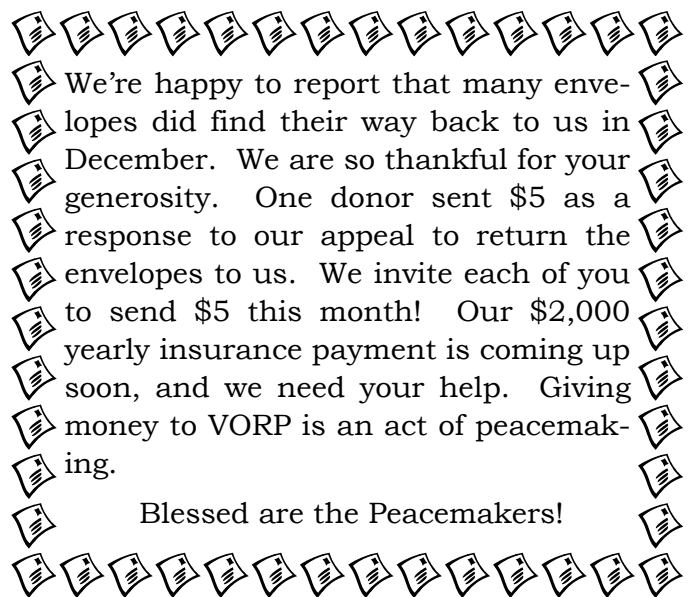
fabulous?

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented,

Actually, who are you *not* to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

 We're happy to report that many envelopes did find their way back to us in December. We are so thankful for your generosity. One donor sent \$5 as a response to our appeal to return the envelopes to us. We invite each of you to send \$5 this month! Our \$2,000 yearly insurance payment is coming up soon, and we need your help. Giving money to VORP is an act of peacemaking.
Blessed are the Peacemakers!

VORP Staff	
Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	Administrator
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Adriana Mendoza	Agreement Manager
Megan Thompson	Mediation Manager
Joe Montanez	Intern
Barry Guenther	Finance Manager

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



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