

VORP

News

Volume 24, Issue 6, June 2006

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>

From The Administrator

VORP has had many challenges since its inception in 1982, but none like what we are now experiencing. Two really big things are happening. One is that all the first offense juvenile vandalism, graffiti, shoplifting and petty theft cases the Probation Department receives are being referred to us. That means an over 400% increase in cases for 2006. The other is a faithful VORP supporter giving us a \$100,000 challenge grant that must be matched by new contributions in 2006. For those of you who have never given money to VORP, every dollar you give is matched. For those of you who have faithfully supported us all these years, this is the time to increase your giving to receive matching funds. It is a wonderful opportunity and we are very grateful to the anonymous donor who makes it possible. One of our regular supporters just sent \$1,000 over their usual support. That is the kind of response we need to match this generous gift. Thanks to everyone who is able to participate. No gift is too small to help. VORP is the leanest nonprofit organization I have ever encountered. If everyone receiving this newsletter sent in \$132 above their usual giving, the match would be complete.

But we also need people. How, exactly, does a volunteer organization suddenly increase its work 400%? The simple answer is that people who have not been active step up and volunteer. Last night I was talking with one of our more heroic mediators. He is finishing up a case where four young offenders damaged the property of two different people. Because two insurance companies are also involved, the result is sixteen agreements to make things right and set the youngsters on a better course in life. How can it get any better than that? VORP allows healing opportunities for both victims and offenders that are simply not available in the traditional criminal justice system. You can make a difference. Call us to pick a time for your training, and start making a difference in Fresno County. If you were trained a long time ago, sign up for a refresher and get busy. You can make a difference.

The other new thing is the rise in church-based VORPs in Fresno County. The Reedley Peace Center was first to step up. Now Peoples Church in Fresno and College Community MB church have created their own VORP branch. Many other churches are working toward this marvelous opportunity to lead people to reconciliation. Other faith groups are welcome to work with us. Our mission is to allow every victim to meet with their offender to make things right. It doesn't get any better than that. While VORP's primary focus is on juvenile property crimes, we will help in any case where the victim and offender want to meet. Lately our people have been working on a vehicular manslaughter case. Our only rule for choosing a case is that both victim and offender are committed to being constructive. Our mission is to help people find reconciliation. It happens a lot, and it is beautiful every time. If you care about people, and don't mind watching them cry and hug, there is no better opportunity. Join us.

Volunteer Mediator Training

September 15-16, 2006

October 6-7, 2006

Friday 6:30pm - 9:30pm

Saturday 8:30am - 3:30pm

Success Story

"... thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." Psalm 86:15.

My name is Christine Patzkowsky-Smith and I am a recent (2006) graduate of the social work program at FPU. Part of the requirements for graduation is the completion of a focus series of specialized studies. My choice was conflict mediation and peacemaking. I was not raised in the Mennonite tradition of conflict resolution; however I was brought up in a home that did not resort to physical punishment to right a wrong. I was very pleased when I discovered that I could take courses where I would actually learn specific skills to facilitate the peaceful resolution of a wrong, and have the chance to practice these skills in a real situation.

I received a case of an incident of tagging in Sanger. My first contact was with the victim who was a local business owner. He told me his story about the situation. He stated that he was tagged regularly and he was tired of having to have his building painted over and over again. He said that he kept a gallon of paint in his back room just in case he needed to "erase" any nocturnal writing. He was very pleased that VORP was involved in the case – he stated that he was concerned about the community and the youngsters who might turn to gang activity. He told me that he has a young teenager and that it is not easy to keep him occupied and on the straight and narrow. I explained to him that we would be meeting with the offender, and this would provide both of them with the chance to discuss what had happened and their feelings about the incident. He was quite enthused.

Later that same day I spoke with the offender's mother. She was also pleased to know that this was going to proceed as mediation was part of her son's probation requirements. She stated that she was a single mother and was very busy with her children and caring for her invalid mother.

On the way to the meeting, my two co-mediators and I spoke about the ministry of VORP, and we prayed for a successful mediation. We arrived and were greeted by the business and two of his staff. They stated how pleased they were that such a thing as VORP existed, and I took the opportunity to visit with the Dr. before the offender and his mother arrived. He was calm and very pleasant; he stated that while he wanted the tagging to cease, he was concerned about the gang recruiters in the area and the very young age of those they were influencing. The other parties arrived on time. The young man was very well groomed and polite, and did not appear sullen or coerced into being at the meeting. He was very well groomed and polite, and did not appear sullen or coerced into being at the meeting. We introduced ourselves and opened with the prayer by St. Francis of Assisi. The victim explained to the young offender the difficulty his tagging had presented – the time, effort, and cost as well as the fact that it was disrespectful to him, his clients, and the community. He explained that he is tagged on a regular basis, and does not know why the kids are picking his building as a target. The young man responded by stating that it was nothing personal – it was a

Continued on Page 2

“tag war”. He said that gangs have new prospects “one-up” rivals by tagging instead of physically fighting (I did not know this). He stated that he and two other boys went up on the roofs along that building under the cover of night. He said that the other boys ran away and had to be sought out by the authorities. He voluntarily turned himself in. He served four months in the Fresno Juvenile facility, and is on probation now for a year. He has to attend special classes and receive counseling. The offender stated that he was very sorry and he would assume full responsibility for the wrong, even if the other boys would not. His mother explained that she did not want her son to be the target of gang members and was trying to do all that she could to keep him safe and to encourage him to make good decisions about his friends.

All of those present praised the young man for assuming responsibility for his actions. The Doctor asked the young man what he liked to do. He stated that he loved baseball and is playing in the Babe Ruth League. He also stated that he loves to draw and paint, and he has a real interest in math. As restitution, the Doctor requested that the offender paint the trim on his building, and the young man eagerly replied “I’ll start tomorrow.” Our meeting ended with victim and offender shaking hands, and the young boy hugged me and my companions. His mother had some tears in her eyes and thanked us with a hug.

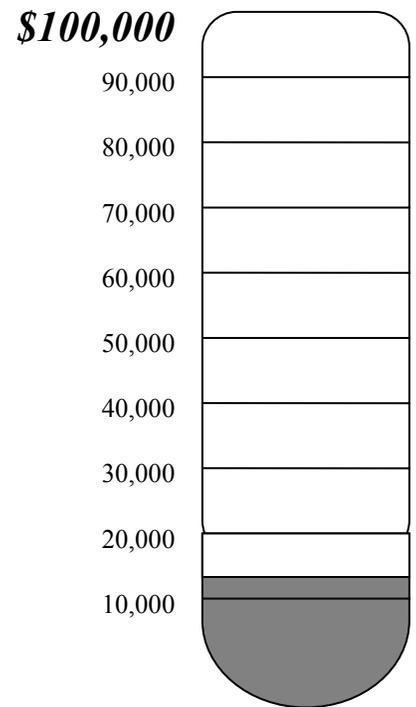
I praise God for this experience. I felt compassionate toward both parties; the Doctor treated the offender with firmness, respect and courtesy, and for such a young man, the offender had a good sense of ego and expressed himself in a genuine manner. His mother was concerned yet allowed him to speak for himself. I believe she was anxious at first; she may have thought that we were going to be judgmental but after we began, she soon relaxed and felt at ease. My support comrades were wonderful; both good spiritual warriors and totally engaged in listening and commenting at just the right times. I learned how close we all are and how similar are our desires and hopes for our children and ourselves. I have mediated in my capacity as Social Services Director, most often between residents, families and staff; the type of mediation that VORP engages in is similar in practice, but different in content. *(Continued on next column)*

I felt honored to have been able to serve Christ in this way. I appreciated the presence of my two companions; I felt that they added to the sincerity of the process and they were attentive and compassionate. Their kindness and Christian concern radiated to all present. VORP is a wonderful ministry and testimony to peace, and had I never been led by the Lord to attend Fresno Pacific University, I may have never had the opportunity to experience this very practical application of the Beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

-Christine Patzkowsky-Smith

New Summer Intern at VORP

Hello Everyone!
My name is Katherine Palomino (Kat). I spent the majority of my life (about 13 years) in Peru and Paraguay as a Missionary Kid. I am going to be graduating next year from Greenville College in Illinois with a Social Work/ Spanish major. I enjoy playing soccer (I played for my college the past two years), but my true love is spending time with people. I am doing an internship here at VORP for the summer, so I will be in the office with Jenna.



\$100,000 Matching Grant

VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	Administrator
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Jenna Preheim	Mediation Manager
Barry Guenther	Finance Manager
Katherine Palomino	Intern

VORP Board Members

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

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
PAID
Clovis, CA 93612
Permit # 376