

Administrator's Corner

The \$100,000 matching grant VORP received last year was a wonderful thing for us. Many things have become possible because of it. We have not yet completed the match, and have asked our anonymous donor to extend the time. The extension has been granted. The match applies to new money. That means giving above previous levels or giving from people who have not been giving. If you have not yet had an opportunity to participate with us in matching this grant, now is the time.

Two things come to mind as we embark on the new year. 2006 was a year of trying something new, handling citation cases which would receive no attention from the Probation Department without us. This experiment has had mixed results. By definition the offenders were not only first-time offenders, but had offended at a low level. This meant that the incentive to participate was very low for both victim and offender. We are still looking at the statistics, but it seems obvious that most offenders and their parents thought that the \$50 bill from Probation for entering the case into the system was adequate punishment. Victims were willing to participate at a much higher rate, but since we don't contact victims until offenders have agreed to participate, we had much less contact with victims. We will be in discussion with the Probation Department about this type of case. One of our big concerns is to avoid frustrating our volunteer mediators. Now that we have more staff support we are able to screen cases more closely, but it is still frustrating for volunteers to get a case that doesn't go. Balancing these concerns will be our 2007 challenge. It is wonderful when VORP helps a young person turn around and reject offending behavior. The question is how to use our volunteers wisely when the odds of a case going forward are low.

Our regular Probation Officer referred cases continue to do well, with half going to a joint meeting and nearly all of those coming to an agreement. Thank you for your support as volunteers and donors. 2007 is our 25th anniversary. We are hoping for a good year.



(Continued from previous column)

The offender moved beyond just wanting to meet his probation requirement, and the victim moved beyond just showing up. I was deeply moved by their willingness to forgive and felt truly honored to be allowed to witness their healing. *I walked away with a profound sense that the most important thing for me to do was not to facilitate the process perfectly, but just to facilitate the process with integrity.*

We had our follow-up meeting recently and everyone brought something to celebrate. We, in fact, had a party. Of course we checked in on the fulfillment of agreements, but even that had a spirit of lighthearted celebration. They had both moved beyond titles of victim and offender to a place of seeing each other as imperfect people who deserved to get another chance. They truly humble me.

And what did I learn? That I, too, am perfectly imperfect and that is more than good enough because it is all in God's hands anyway.

Alicia Hinton is a VORP volunteer mediator. She is currently involved in the Cooperative Degree Program and will earn a Juris Doctorate and Masters of Arts from San Joaquin College of Law and the Center for Peacemaking at Fresno Pacific University.

Success Story -Alicia Hinton

I finally had a VORP case that went beyond the initial offender and victim meetings. I was starting to worry that something was wrong with my skills at getting the parties to the table. It wasn't that my previous individual victim and offender meetings weren't fruitful for the parties – they got out of them what they wanted. Still, I couldn't help but compare myself to the statistics touted in the VORP training and I was falling far short. In fact, someone even joked about my needing to take a few Dale Carnegie lessons in salesmanship! Yikes – was I that bad?! Then suddenly I was facing the actual victim/offender mediation itself, and I was nervous. Would my training be sufficient? Would it all fall out of my head when we started? Would I say the wrong thing or offend someone? Or worse, would I fail to recognize an opportunity for healing and let it slip away?

But I was blessed with a case where both parties were ready and willing to talk things out, and had the full support of their families. I steadfastly walked through the steps trying not to show my nervousness and naiveté. I talked too much. I had to circle back to cover steps that I forgot. I bumbled about. And magic happened anyway, just as the VORP trainer said it would. There was that pure moment when I became invisible as the parties began to recognize each other as more than just the offense, but as someone who deserved empathy and acknowledgement. They began speaking directly to each other instead of through me. They gained compassion for the other person's pain – and of course they both had some.

(Continued in next column)

Valley Recognition -Noelle Daoudian

The Fresno Bee featured a story about VORP in the January 13th edition of the Faith & Values section. Ron Orozco reported on the process of VORP and interviewed a few people involved in the program. A few things which were highlighted were the ideas of how the program encouraged "forgiveness, mercy, reconciliation and healing" for both the victim and offender. He talked about the church nodes that we have been trying to start up around Fresno. One of our most active church nodes, Peoples Church, was interviewed to get some feedback on their experiences of mediation. The people who commented expressed that they were excited to be doing something constructive for the community and were also encouraged by the results of their mediations. They said that cases which had gone through mediation, ended with the offenders being able to take responsibility and to better understand the consequences of their actions, not only for themselves, but for the victim and their families as well.

The main case which the article focused on was a case that took place in Firebaugh. Some boys had set some brush on fire and it spread very quickly. The fire department (made up of volunteers) had to work tirelessly to contain it and put it out. The boys, their families, the city manager of Firebaugh, and representatives from the fire department went through the mediation process. They agreed that the boys would do community service and become involved in city events. All people involved reported that it was a positive experience for them to be a part of.

Overall the article was positive of the program and accurately described what we hope to accomplish in our community.



A VORP New Year's Resolution for You!

If you have ever taken our mediation training course you are qualified to TAKE A CASE!!! ***Thus we propose that you commit to yourself to take 3 cases in***

2007. We always have cases ready for a mediator, so please do not hesitate to call or come in and get one. We always really appreciate our mediators because without you our program could not exist.

Another way that you can help VORP is by serving as an interpreter. As you well know, the Central Valley is very diverse, therefore we need your help if you speak another language in addition to English. We especially need Spanish speakers as well as Hmong, Vietnamese, and Cambodian speakers. We greatly appreciate our interpreters because we do not want to leave people out of our program simply because of a language barrier.

Please help VORP be more effective in its attempt to help make the world a better place, one person at a time.

Volunteer Mediator Training

**February 9 & 10
March 9 & 10**

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

Call 455-9803 to reserve a spot.

If you have already taken the training but would like to come for a free refresher, we would love to have you!

VORP Board Members

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Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
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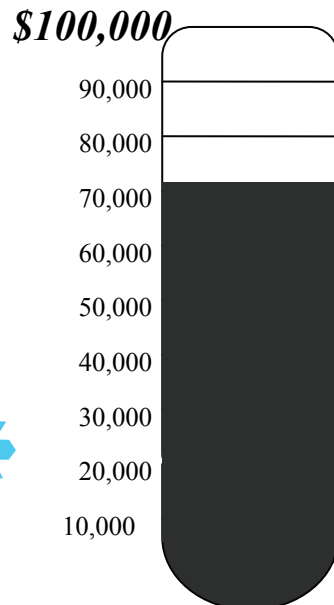
A Little Humor

A minister waited in line to have his car filled with gas just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him in front of the service station.

Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump. "Reverend," said the young man, "Sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip."

The minister chuckled, "I know what you mean. It's the same in my business."

Growing VORP



**\$ 71,834.74
Matching Grant
December 2006**



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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
of the Central Valley, Inc.



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