



News

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
of the Central Valley, Inc.

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Administrator's Corner

In our last issue I described what we are learning about the citation cases we have been receiving in abundance this past year. These are cases assigned to us rather than to a probation officer. All the offender and parents in these low level cases hear from the Probation Department is a bill for \$50 to pay for entering the case into the data system.

We received 815 of these cases in 2006. 656 of these cases had missing or incorrect contact information for the offender, and despite our best efforts we were unable to make contact with the offender. While we occasionally have difficulty finding the offender in cases assigned by a Probation Officer, the PO is usually able to get good information for us. These cases have no PO assigned. In 19 of the cases where we could locate the offender, we could not locate the victim, so a total of 675 of the 815 cases, nearly 83%, had no opportunity for victim offender dialogue even though they used significant VORP staff and mediator resources.

By the end of the year we had 140 cases that could be worked using the usual VORP process or our new shoplifting class where parent-teen mediation is the focus. Fifty-five of these were in progress as the year ended, and eleven were waiting to be assigned to a mediator. In six cases the parties agreed that they had already resolved the matter, leaving 74 cases that had been worked and come to a conclusion in 2006. In 16 of them the offender refused to participate, and in four of them the victim refused to participate for a 27% refusal rate, half the refusal rate of our typical cases referred by an individual Probation Officer. This is a surprising finding.

Forty-eight of the seventy-four cases have had a victim offender dialogue process, 14% higher than our historical average, and all but one of them resulted in an agreement, which is usual for us.

Boiling this all down, citation cases result in massive effort for relatively few workable cases, but the cases with good information have a higher percentage of good results than our traditional cases. Finding a way to more efficiently screen cases with bad information has been a focus for the last several months, and the effort is bearing fruit. We want to avoid assigning cases with bad information to mediators, since they are frustrating for volunteers. Our full-time case manager and interns have been able to develop useful screening methods that have made things easier for mediators. Getting better information in the first place would be nice, but is a matter for law enforcement agencies to work on. We take what we get.

We continue to receive cases from Probation Officers and the courts. We will let you know how they went next time. Thanks for your support.



Mediation & Me

Lynne Jennings
Volunteer Mediator

Upon reflecting as to what brought me to mediation as well as what it means to me, I'd like to begin by sharing a little background information.

Although my background is in law, I started my college education as a psychology major with an eye on becoming a clinical psychologist, but went on to earn a law degree instead. However, I never lost my interest in counseling and recently began exploring various options. In this regard, I enrolled in some classes at SJCL including a Family Law Mediation Class. At that time, Sally Perrin, the dean thereof, suggested that I might be interested in some volunteer work with either CASA or VORP, both of which I looked into. However, as soon as I read about VORP, I felt that it was for me, being as it would enable me to combine my love of the law with my first love of counseling, I found myself enrolled in mediation training soon after.

After observing a case, I soon found myself involved with my first case which turned out to be challenging, as it not only involved two offenders and two victims, but one victim who could not be located initially, as well as one offender who was initially ruled out of the process due to his seeming unsuitability. However, I persevered and in the end was able to reach a satisfactory agreement with all parties. As a result, I met some interesting people along with way, e.g., one victim, an amateur hand woodcarver who never went anywhere without his supplies and tools and who even brought his photo book of carvings to share with one of the juvenile offenders! At the same time he presented fatherly mentor type persona thereto as well. I was also startled one day when I ran into the "hostile" offender out in the community who proceeded to give me a big hug! Finally, the other victim, who was quite angry at the outset, walked away from the joint meeting proclaiming that VORP works, and that she was a believer therein!

My second case involved another angry victim who told me at the outset that he was not interested in making the offender a better person, as that was the parent's job, but after another talk with him, I decided to proceed with the joint meeting during which he told the offender of his anger. After the meeting with the offender, the victim said that he could see that it took a lot of courage for the offender to sit there and own up to his misdeeds as well as to apologize, and that he was feeling positive about the VORP process as well.

In conclusion, I would have to say that in both cases, I found myself leaving the joint meetings with a case of the "warm fuzzies" and the feeling that the VORP process really does work, as well as strong sense that in the end, mediation means reconciliation to me.

Volunteer Mediator Training

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!

Advanced Training Series for Mediators of Civil Cases Involving Business Contracts

Sponsored by: Better Business Bureau, Fresno Pacific University, San Joaquin College of Law and the Fresno County Superior Court.

This training is particularly designed for mediators who desire to be on the Superior Court civil mediation panel. Details are available at http://peace.fresno.edu/docs/Advanced_Training.pdf or by contacting Mark Roy at the BBB Mediation Center: 559-256-6325. Qualified persons receive the training at no cost.

VORP at Your Church!

We have several churches in the Central Valley set up to be an extension of VORP. We would like to include more churches in that network, no prior training required! We will come to the church and provide the information, resources, and training, and then the church simply provides the people who want to make a difference in the community and live out the gospel of reconciliation!

If you think your church would benefit from participation in VORP, please give us a call, 455-9803 and we can set your church up with our VORP church coordinator, Tony Redfern.

We would love to have another church involved in our VORP family!

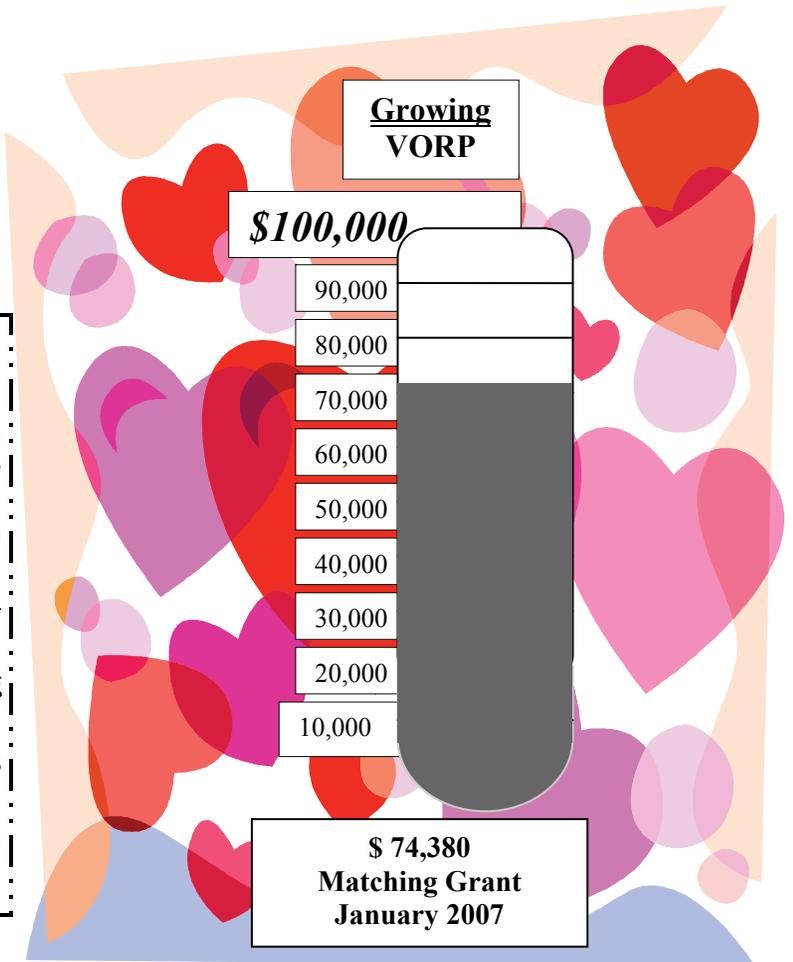
We look forward to the time when the Power of Love will replace the Love of Power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace.

William E. Gladstone

VORP Fundraising & Support

PLEASE CALL VORP AT 455-9803 IF:

- You would like to donate money for our VORP youth and have them help you with any projects around the house such as: 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 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.
- You can speak any other language besides English such as: Spanish, Hmong, Cambodian, or Vietnamese.

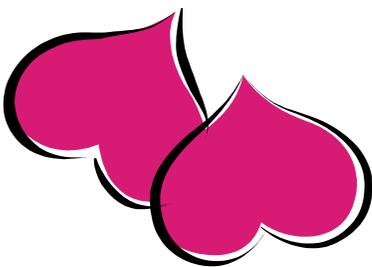


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Barry Guenther	Finance Manager

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