

VORP News

Volume 25, Issue 6, June 2007



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program
of the Central Valley, Inc.

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Shoplifting Class Experience

Karen Wood

I was sitting at the conference table by myself, and in walked a teenager. She was mad, with her arms tightly crossed. As her mother followed her in the room, the girl looked for a seat as far away as she could. But that would put her close to me, so she slumped into a chair in the middle of the room. Her attitude earned reproachful comments from her mother, which were all met with *the glare*.

My journey to the table had been round about. After attending a seminar at Fresno Pacific last fall on Restorative Justice, I knew it would be the general topic for my master's thesis in social work at Fresno State. While narrowing down the topic, I spoke with Ron Claassen, who introduced me to Duane Ruth-Heffelbower. He told me about the shoplifting class, and introduced me to Ed Barton.

Ed taught the shoplifting class I was sitting in with the angry teenager. The class was created in mid 2006 to accommodate the surge of citation cases being referred to VORP by the probation department, with over half of them being shoplifting cases. The primary victim (the store owner) usually would not participate, so the group mediation format was created to acknowledge the parent as the secondary victim. Thus, the girl and her mom in the meeting.

The class is designated to facilitate the discussion between the parent and the youth, to talk about the pain and the trust lost during and after the offense. During the class Ed directs the families in the class through what happened in the case, how each person in the family felt, and how to train the brain to make better decisions in the future. It was very interesting to watch him direct the conversations between the three very frustrated parents, and their kids in the room.

One of them was the angry girl who only displayed more mood and mouth. But then, when talking about why she decided to do the shoplifting, and how not to do it again, she began to change. The relief was visible on her face as she learned how to make pictures in her mind of how her actions and choices might turn out. She seemed very relieved that she could communicate with her mother, and make better decisions in the future. She was the last to leave the room as she was enjoying talking and laughing with others in the room.

The store owners weren't there, but the mediation allowed the offender and the secondary victim (their parents) to address the harm done in the shoplifting and take responsibility for their actions.

Karen Wood is a trained VORP volunteer mediator and recently graduated with her MA in social work.

An Offender's Story of Success

We received this letter of one offender's story of his experience.

"I am a student and last spring I committed a crime. I painted a trailer and was arrested later that night. I am going to tell you about my experience.

I was coming home after I tagged a trailer at a business and a police officer arrested me and called my parents, it was 1:30AM and my parents had no idea I had snuck out. They were extremely upset. The officer told me I'll be getting a letter in the mail telling me when my court date was. It took over 3 months to get my letter, I went to court, and I waited in a little room downtown with other people for my case to be called. I was called and went in the court room for about one minute and then we left, I was told that was just my arraignment. I was given another court date two weeks later. I went back again and waited in that same room and missed that morning of school. This time when I was called into court I was asked to speak and the judge asked me some questions about what happened. They told me about a program called VORP. I was told that it was a way to make things right between me and the person I affected. I asked the judge if I could participate and he said yes, a couple of months later I met with a VORP representative. We went over what happened that night and what I thought I could do to make things right. Later I had a meeting with the company and its owners. I got to see how my actions affected the people who worked there. It made me really sorry for what I did. I was told that they had to pay workers overtime to go out to this trailer and paint it. They missed their families because they were painting a trailer that I messed up. This trailer had been tagged many times before the one time I had done it. It made me realize that there is always a person behind the thing I graffiti. I agreed to work 16 hours for the company I had graffitied. It affects their life negatively and makes work for them that they wouldn't have to do otherwise... I wish I could go back in time and stay home, it was the dumbest decision I have ever made. It wasn't worth it."

VORP Founder Honored



Ron Claassen was awarded the third annual Carl and Esther Robinson Award for the Outstanding Advocate for the Common Good.

Carl and Esther Robinson have been social advocates together for the past 40 years and established this award to honor those who have continued on in their work for social justice. They were impressed with Ron's commitment to peacemaking and action he has taken as a result of that passion resulting in the foundation of VORP, the Center for Peacemaking, and Fresno Pacific's Masters program in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, as well as implementing restorative discipline at Fresno Pacific and other schools. He has also been involved in countless efforts to implement restorative justice into our justice system and law.

Fresno Metro Ministry, the Interfaith Alliance of Central California, and the Fresno Ministerial Association sponsor this event.

“One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.”

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Case Update 2007

First off, thank you to all who have taken cases this year, we really appreciate it! So far we have celebrated 55 agreements as a result! That means that we are above our average of about 10 agreements per month.

During 2007 we have received 133 standard cases and had 18 cases from 2006 roll over to this year. Currently we are still working on 103. We have been able to meet with 45 of the offenders, all of who were willing to meet with the victim. 32 victims have been met with and only 1 of them has rejected working with VORP. We have also received 169 of the VORP Cite (box) cases, out of those we are still working on 82. As a result of the large standard caseload, we have been trying to focus mediator efforts on taking those cases instead of the cited. Thus, we have only been able to meet with 12 offenders, all of which resulted in an agreement. Many of the cited cases were older than 5 months, thus we chose not to work with them because they become hard to work with after all that time has passed.

As I said we are above average when it comes to agreements, and we would like you to help us continue in this pattern. We always have great cases ready and waiting! Please give the office a call or come by and pick one up!

-ND

VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	Administrator
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Noelle Daoudian	Mediation Manager

VORP Board Members

Michael Blue, Chair	Arthur Wint
Dave Purvis, Secretary/Treasurer	José Chaparro
Ron Blalack	

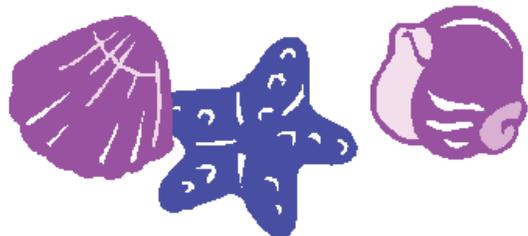
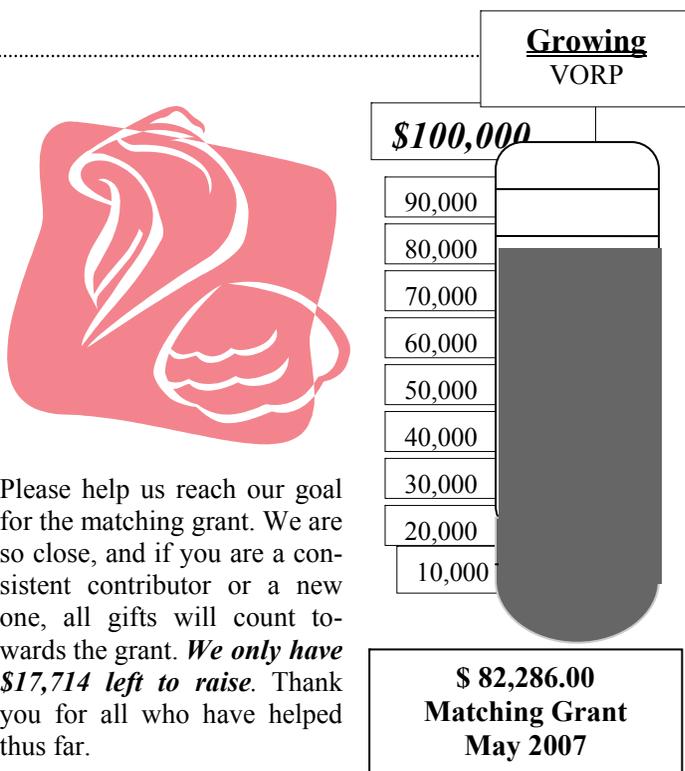
VORP AT YOUR CHURCH

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!



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