



Victim Offender Reconciliation

Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

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Mediation Reflections-by Danielle Bove

Patience and perseverance brought the snail to Jerusalem. -Old English proverb

When I took this case in September, I really didn't know what to expect. As it turns out, mediations are as varied as the people they are in service to.

As I picked up the phone to make the first call to the offender, I felt like I was jumping off a high diving board. Preparing myself for extensive persuading, imagine my deflated surprise when the person who answered the phone was not my offender's family, nor did they have any idea where my offender had gone. After calls to the probation officer, my offender's defunct Cricket numbers, and a few weeks of waiting, I finally got to meet my offender and his family. I had expected this meeting to be a hard sell, yet my offender and his family were very open to the idea of mediation.

Likewise, meeting with the victims took some flexible planning. They were college students and only had a few days in Fresno before returning to school in the southern part of the state. The offenders had again moved and their phone numbers didn't work, there seemed to be little chance of arranging a face to face mediation, so a carry agreement was used. A carry agreement is a mediation on paper. The needs, wants and responsibilities of both parties are related to one another through the mediator, and once victim and offender have decided what can be done to make things right, the agreement is signed and followed up on like any other face to face mediation.

Keeping track of where the offender was living was the most challenging thing about

this case. I developed a non-judgmental, tenacious sense of patience while working on this case. There were times I felt discouraged and ineffectual, like I was trying to catch the strings of a kite on a windy day, but I just stuck with it. A carry agreement may not seem as dramatic as a face to face mediation, but it worked for this situation. That one of the greatest lessons I've learned from mediation, that it's not about the mediator. I'm there to engender a conversation. The victim and the offender are the ones who empower and reconcile themselves. Being a mediator is sort of like working backstage at a theater. We're there to make sure that the set is properly assembled and the lighting correct. It is the actors, the victim and the offender, who are onstage making the magic happen.

This is not to say, however, that being a mediator takes no work. Far from it. I've learned that planning and organization are the cornerstones of mediation. Finding working numbers for participants, discerning the best times to call and planning out the points of a discussion are essential to a successful mediation.

One of the things that I enjoy most about mediation is the sense of balance that it gives. By the end of the case, I felt as if I had seen the relationship between these two people in a brand new, holistic light. I was privileged to witness as it dealt with injustice, expressed atonement, and finally reconciled.

Danielle Bove is the VORP Mennonite volunteer.

VORP Board Members

Arthur Wint	Chair
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VORP Staff

Noelle Daoudian	Director
Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
Morgan Crawford	Case Manager
Norma Cabrera	Bookkeeper

Center for Peacemaking

Ron Claassen	Director
Holly McFarlin	Administrator
Duane Ruth-Heffelbower	VORP Webmaster

VORP Mediation Training Date

March 20-21

All trainings are 2 days:

Friday 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm and Saturday from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm.

Trainings are held on the campus of Fresno Pacific University.

Please call (559) 455-9803 to register or for more information.

Statistics Review-Noelle Daoudian

As is the case with every year, 2008 brought some new challenges which brought about new processes as a response. This year we had a few smaller numbers from the probation department early on in the year so we met with the Director of Juvenile Probation, Phil Kader*, and we were able to change the format in which the Probation Officers made their referrals to VORP. Now when they make their plan as to what they are going to handle the case, VORP is an option and if they check the VORP box, then the VORP referral automatically opens and they can fill it out right then and send it off to us. After we had that conversation the referrals rose dramatically and we ended up receiving 126 referrals from Probation Officers, as well as 460 cited "box" cases and 7 community referral cases.

Of the cited cases we were able to work with 132 cases which is a 10% increase

over what we have done in the past. This is mostly due to the fact that we have started picking up our cases directly from the intake department at probation. Since our pickup started, we have been getting the cases closer to the offense date thus the offenders are easier to track down. In the past we have had a larger number of box cases but many of them were so far away from the offense date much of the information supplied in the police report was no longer accurate.

Of the Probation referred and box cases, our mediators were able to get 91 agreements signed in 2008, about 35% which is a little lower than in the past. We had 100% agreement rate once the victim and offender met for a mediation which is consistent with our 26 year history. Continuing into 2009 we have 80 cases still being worked on as we had many cases referred towards the end of the year.

This year our case referral has been quite consistent, thus we have many cases ready to go for mediators who are interested in taking a case. So if you are ready to take a case please call in to Morgan, our case manager, and he will be more than happy to assign one for you just call the office 455-9803!

* Phil Kader has been the Director of Juvenile Probation and has been a huge asset in VORP's relationship with the Fresno County Probation Department. He has now been promoted to Fresno County Juvenile Justice Campus Commitment Division Director. We wish him well in his new position, and look forward to working with him in the future in different capacities.

Vorp Organizing Institute

Start a VORP in Your Area!

VORP Organizing Institute

April 15-17, 2009

A unique seminar for individuals and communities interested in starting a VORP in their area. Led by Fresno VORP founder Ron Claassen and current VORP director, Noelle Daoudian along with VORP staff.

More info: <http://peace.fresno.edu/docs/VORPOrgInst.pdf>

Or call our office (559) 455-9803

Association for Conflict Resolution, Central California Chapter presents:

GET WIRED: Using Online Tools and Techniques to Resolve Disputes



2009 Annual Conference

Friday, March 20th (10am-3pm)

San Joaquin College of Law

Guest presenter: Colin Rule, Founder and Director of *Online Dispute Resolution* for Ebay and PayPal and the *Online Public Disputes Project*

\$55 for adults/ \$25 for students (includes 1 year membership)

To RSVP or Questions: Mari Henson (559) 497-4194

More info: www.mediate.com/acrcentralca

Cultural Competence Workshop

Cultural competence workshop has been designed to help VORP mediators to work within the cultural values of the client. This workshop will focus on VORP's primary clients. The cultural groups under discussion are African Americans, Hmong Americans, Latin American, and Mexican American youths.

This workshop will help you to:

- 1) Become culturally aware of self and others
- 2) Be willing to acquire information about diverse groups, (historical backgrounds, family values, cultural belief systems, practices, institutions, and policies)
- 3) Recognize that cultural differences is not synonymous with cultural inferiority
- 4) Learn about the client's culture "why is it important,"
- 5) Adapt optimal service delivery to an acceptable cultural framework (skill development).

Fresno Pacific University, Sattler 101

April 18, 2009 (9am- 2pm)

\$20 (includes lunch or \$10 with no meal)

CEU's Offered

If you would like to reserve a spot or have a question please call Joe Montanez at 455-9803

WE NEED INTERPRETERS!!

If you speak any other language in addition to English, we need your help. We are building a strong database of interpreters and are in special need of Hmong, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. Without interpreters, these cases become very difficult to coordinate and mediate. Thank you for your help.

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