

# Achieving Transformation by Alfonso Padron

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During my studies at Fresno Pacific University in the degree completion program, Restorative Justice and Victimology were only abstract ideas. As we learned about this method of dealing with conflict it became apparent that utilizing the skills obtained would be more difficult to implement than digesting the information. In essence Restorative Justice provides a concrete way of utilizing the theory in conflict transformation and peacemaking.

Two cases were assigned to me and the initial effort was beginning to take root. In this particular case, I made contact with the offender, briefly explained the program and made an appointment to meet. That was the easy part. The actual meeting, which I explained why it would be beneficial to mediate rather than not, would be an avenue in which the offender would make amends for the wrong, instead of the usual method of continued distress over the incident. In this case of vandalism of the school district, reparations were to be made and some sort of reconciliation would take place. The offender and the parent agreed to be part in the mediation process.

I made contact with the victim, briefly explained the mediation process and made an appointment to meet. Upon meeting the victim it became apparent that the victim felt emotionally offended as was described very succinctly in the literature. The victim's needs were examined during the interview and were as follows: Safety, information, answers, truth telling, empowerment, vindication and possible restitution. All of these ideas including removing shame and humiliation and replacing it with honor,

respect and dignity. This effort drove the direct and symbolic willingness to participate in recovering the humanness affected by the wrong.

The stage was set and a time and date were chosen for the offender with his family for support and the victim with personal support to meet. As the day approached my confidence level increased by the realization that the event would literally transform all those involved, including me.

### The conflict transformed

Ground rules were given in an effort to be fair and so that the process would have the positive outcome intended. First the offender spoke and apologized by reading a letter that had been prepared. The victim was asked to paraphrase and the offender agreed that the paraphrase was consistent and accurate as stated.

The victim had a turn to address the offender and asked why the damage was done and stated that it caused undo harm and fear in the lives of many. The offender was asked to paraphrase, and the victim agreed that the paraphrase was accurate as stated.

After the initial interactions the victim and support staff provided the mother of the offender some key pictures taken during the incident. The mother, not knowing the facts of the event, was surprised and showed grief and astonishment. Then the school district staff and victim addressed the offender asking why he was motivated to make amends after all the grief he caused including to his mother, who genuinely showed him love.

The offender took the opportunity to describe how he felt and indicated that his

thought process was influenced by emotional distance during that period of insecurity and a false sense of rejection. The offender again asked for forgiveness and said that he now took responsibility for his actions. At this time I asked how he would handle such a situation in the future. He exclaimed that he now has addressed his insecurity and has grown into a more rounded individual with actual goals.

At this time I introduced the idea of finalizing an agreement that would benefit both sides, the school district agreed that they only wanted the offender to apologize and be able to find additional educational resources in order to improve his future. The offender gave his gratitude and reiterated that this was his past. When the idea of deleting all the negative information on his MySpace site was addressed, the offender agreed to the request and both parties signed the agreement, including the support staff and parent. I thanked all parties for agreeing to meet and allowing me to mediate, and in closing I said **when agreements are made and kept trust grows.**

In my evaluation of the outcome of the mediation, I came away with the comfort that as we addressed the harm, the causes were also evident. By using a cooperative process involving all the stakeholders, focusing on the harms and the needs of the victims and offender, this process achieved justice-healing and transformation.

Alfonso Padron is a student in Fresno Pacific University's degree completion program in criminology and restorative justice studies as well as a VORP mediator.

## Trainings and Materials

### **VORP Mediators Needed for Pilot Project!**

Our pilot project with the juvenile court has begun and we have received many referrals for cases. We are looking for trained VORP mediators who have mediated a couple cases. If you have mediated VORP cases you may be interested in completing advanced mediator training in order to become part of the Community Justice Conference pilot project with the Restorative Justice Initiative. If so please contact our office 455-9803 and we will let you know of our next training date.

### **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.

**Fresno Pacific University, Sattler 101**

**July 17,18,20**

**August 7,8,10**

**October 2,3,5**

**Cost : \$113**

**\*CEU's Included in the price\***

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

### **The Amy Wall Story is now available on DVD.**

Joe Avila and Derek Wall shared their powerful story during the Restorative Justice Conference this past February here at Fresno Pacific University.

Their lives intersected because on the evening of September 18, 1992, Joe, driving while intoxicated, hit the back of a car driven by Amy Wall, causing it to leave the road. Amy (age 17) died early Saturday morning on the 19th. Derek (age 15) was Amy's younger brother. At this conference, Joe and Derek talked about life before this event, what happened, initial responses and court proceeding, the next fifteen years, preparation and meeting, and after the meeting. This conference was the second time they met.

With their consent we filmed their conversation. If you are interested in a DVD we are asking for a *donation of \$20.00*. The proceeds will be used to bring awareness to drunk driving and to continue the fight against drunk driving.

**If you are interested in receiving a DVD please contact Holly McFarlin the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at**

**(559) 453-3418 or [pacs@fresno.edu](mailto:pacs@fresno.edu)**

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