VORP

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP News - Fresno County - August 1985

Arrests are down in the summer. If you are like me you probably thought that with school out arrests would be up. It just isn't that way. Our Police/ Probation Team told us that arrests are higher during the school year and peak around the end of each semester. Because arrests are down, our referrals are also down from the first half of the year but are still running about double compared to this time a year ago.

Last month we had a VORP Volunteer Training. Twelve people participated in that and four are now working on cases. Training participants were Jonathan Neufeld, Terri Gerbrandt, Sue Ewert, Nancy Barber, Kevin Enns-Rempel, Patricia Tuck, Gary Barber, Allen Guenther, Edie Warkentin, Marci Winans, Buddy Klassen, and Jerry Amerando. We thank them for their time and effort and those of you who contribute financially, who make it possible to offer this service.

Summer is lean. We didn't receive enough to cover our expenses last month. This is the first time this year. We know that lots of you are on vacations. Please help us catch up this month.

A major event facing us is Gail's leaving. Gail came to us through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program and we knew that this time would come. We want to thankher publically for her service. Her work has been of superior quality and her efficiency has been great. We are going to miss her. We feel sad and a tremendous loss. We also are very happy for her. She will be leaving us for Harvard Divinity School, a long time goal of hers. We wish her the best as she continues to develop the gifts and abilities that God has given her.

I asked her if she would like to share something with you and she said she would.

> When I joined the VORP staff 1 1/2 years ago, it seemed that I would have all the time I needed to do what needed to be done. Now I find myself with just a few days left in which to wrap up cases, leave fanatically long and precise instructions for my successor, and (that which is most difficult) say my goodbyes.
>
> In comptemplating what to way in farewell to all of you, I decided to boil it down to just extending my heartfelt thanks. The fact that I leave with no regrets about my time spent at VORP is partly a testimony to the satisfaction I've experienced in knowing each of you. This is profoundly true of my friendships with Ron, Roxanne, and Greg, but since the grief of our parting is a private affair, I won't attempt to exorcise it by writing about it at length.
>
> I sit here and try to think of the best way to discuss my thoughts about my VORP experience and find that it is a struggle to articulate them. I have tried writing about my experience from a philosophical angle, by telling

2529 Willow Avenue • Clovis, California 93612 • (209) 291-1120

a VORP story, by talking about the motivations of love and hope. I've thrown all of these out. While they are all pieces of why I've worked here and how it has been for me, no one piece could capture my feeling about the whole of my experience. I think I will have to let it suffice to say that VORP work has taught me about mercy, patience, hope and love. I have learned better how to both give and receive these. I have received them from my fellow workers, from victims and offenders and from God in periods of frustration over a case, grief over my own shortcomings, or happiness about something working out. And, I believe that at times I was able to show them to others, thereby offering a testimony to both light and life. Thus, I have accomplished all I could hope for here -- the receiving and giving of grace in the daily circumstances of my life and the lives of those I have met.

Thanks for sharing that, Gail.

Greg Stobbe is our other full time volunteer who came to us through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program. He has entered into VORP with alot of vigor. He is working primarily on case work and case follow-up at this time. This fall he will be turning some of his effort to making contacts for us with local churches. He will be helping spread the VORP news.

Following is a summary of a case he worked on recently.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity of mediating a battery case involving two 15 year old boys. The conflict in dispute occured while both boys were in school beginning, as most fights do, with name calling. And before the fight was stopped, one boy had a messy nose and a bruised ego.

Upon meeting with each boy individually, I found that both desired to clear up the animosities between them. Their anxiousness to be free of the fear of additional viloence was apparent and they became excited when they learned of the others' willingness to meet. Interestingly though, both boys did not want their parents participating in the meeting, and in light of their maturity level, I permitted their request.

The atmosphere at the outset of the final meeting was tense as the boys crossed their arms and legs--tapping nervously. It was only after I gave general instructions and introductions, that they eased a little and seemed ready to talk.

The offender began with his story which included how he and friends had picked a fight earlier with the victim. He had no ill feelings toward the victim but only that the victim was a "chichen" and a runt. The offender confessed going after the victim and that he had no reason for hitting him. He went on to say that he should have ignored his friends urging and walked away.

The victim responded by telling the offender that he had called him some names and had helped fuel the fire. He said that he was sorry for that and had learned a lesson. Additionally, he said that both of them could have stopped at any time but that they had reacted with emotion rather than responsibility. He hoped that the offender had learned a lesson too.

Upon hearing the confession of the victim, the offender sincerely said that he felt terrible for hitting him and agreed that his friends had influenced him. He needed to be careful of listening to bad advice.

The meeting ended with both boys promising to work out any future conflicts without violence, talking it out. They also acknowledged how their friends had pushed them into the conflict. They agreed to take a greater awareness of how friends influence them. At the end of the meeting, they shook hands and said, "See you in school."

In this case, reconciliation only happened when one party was willing to accept his role in the conflict which in turn freed the other to accept his role. I marveled at the way these two boys confronted one another head-on. They were willing to take responsibility for what happened and settled their differences in a mature way. They left the meeting agreeing that no restitution was due.

Thanks, Greg. The spirit of love and reconciliation that Greg and other volunteers share in their meetings with victims and offenders influences their responses with each other.

Thanks again, volunteers, financial contributors, and referral sources for your positive peacemaking efforts.

Shalom,

Ron Claassen