



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program , of the Central Valley, Inc.

VORP News - May 1986

EXPANSION NEWS - In the fall of 1985 we received a grant from Kings View to introduce VORP in Tulare County with the objective of discerning with churches and the criminal justice system if there was sufficient interest and need in Tulare County to develop a VORP program. Our initial responses were encouraging and last week we received some letters making things very definite. We received a letter from Neighborhood Mennonite Brethren Church in Visalia saying that they will provide office space for the VORP office. The same day we recieved a letter from Mr. Jimenez, Tulare County Chief Probation Officer, confirming our agreement for initial referrals. Later in that same week Jonathan Neufeld, 1985-6 student body president at Fresno Pacific College, agreed to serve through the Christian Service Program as the VORP Program Manager for Tulare County. Several other churches in Visalia have expressed interest and our hope is to develop a Board of Directors by the end of the summer. We are planning to train our first volunteers in Tulare County in early fall and begin accepting cases immediately following that training.

VORP depends on churches for support and volunteer involvement. Earlier this month Joe Pettit (Assistant Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Fresno) and I met with the Church and Society Committee of the San Joaquin Presbytery. We were given the opportunity to present the ministry of VORP and they decided to endorse it and encourage their churches to become involved. They presented VORP to the General Council who also endorsed the program and they invited us to present it at the full Presbytery meeting last Saturday. This kind of encouragement, support and ownership is what makes it possible for VORP to serve victims and offenders in increasing numbers and in new places as representatives of God's love and spirit of reconciliation.

VOLUNTEER INSERVICE - Don Hogner, Fresno County Chief Probation Officer, joined us on May 13 in the evening to share with volunteers how he sees the criminal justice system and VORP working together. Some of his encouraging comments were: "VORP humanizes the process." "The principles that VORP is based upon are very sound and very biblical." "The testimonials are very gratifying because at the same time one person is being restored, one is being forgiven and there is healing that is taking place in that relationship. That is the best preventative for the recurrence of that kind of behavior imaginable."

Don also answered many questions and encouraged us to expand our capabilities. He emphasized the importance of the early intervention with juveniles and also encouraged us to expand our referral sources to include adults and to test the types of crime situations which are appropriate for VORP.

Along with his caring for victims and offenders, his interest in restorative justice was clear.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING - Our next volunteer training is scheduled for June 10 and 17. Each session is from 6:00 to 10:00 PM. The training sessions will be located at the College Community Mennonite Brethren Church at 2529 Willow Ave., Clovis, CA. There is no charge for the training. You are not committed to taking cases until after the training is complete at which time you may decide to accept a case, to get further training by going with an experienced volunteer, or to drop out at that point. Volunteers are encouraged to accept one case per month which takes approximately 3 to 8 hours. If you plan to attend please call our office to help us in planning for materials. If you need further information please call 291-1120.

FINANCES - Contributions are essential since this is the sole support for the ongoing program. We need more people who are willing to commit themselves to sending in a regular contribution like \$10 or \$20 per month. Many small contributions on a regular basis provide stability for the program and ensure support services for volunteers who are meeting victims and offenders and sharing the message of responsibility, restitution, restoration, and reconciliation.

STORY - Christine Slonetsky, our case manager, has written a recent experience to share with us. Names have been changed to protect the identity of the persons involved.

The fight began in the school cafeteria. John was throwing a ball against the wall and accidentally hit a girl in the face. John went over to the girl to apologize, but his apologies were not accepted. Greg, a friend of the girl, asked John to leave the girl alone. It wasn't long before the dispute turned into a physical fight. John

struck Greg in the face causing him to fall to the ground. Greg did not strike back.

The principal of the school called a meeting between the two boys and their families. Each boy had witnesses present to defend their positions. One outcome of the meeting was a decision to expel John from the school. In addition to this John was sent to the police probation team, who later referred the case to VORP.

Shortly after I received the case I made my first contact with John and his mother. I set up a time to meet with them to discuss the battery and restitution. At that meeting, John explained that he was only half responsible for the fight. He said that Greg had verbally abused him, and that he hit Greg because he thought that Greg was going to hit him first. John thought that he would beat Greg to it. In light of this, John thought that Greg should be responsible for paying some restitution also.

After speaking with John and his mother I arranged a meeting with Greg and his parents. At first Greg's parents were a little reluctant to meet with John and his mother. They had already met with them once and did not think that anything new could be accomplished in a second meeting. After talking it over, Greg and his parents thought that it would be good for them to meet once more. Greg's father was eager to get restitution from John for ambulance costs which were incurred as a consequence of the battery. He said that this had happened to his son before and he wanted to put a stop to it. He didn't want kids to think that they could get away with hitting his son just because he is small. When Greg explained his side of the story, he said that John was totally at fault for the fight. Greg's parents affirmed him by stating that regardless of what one person says to another, there is no justification for physically harming them. A joint meeting was arranged for both families to meet.

The joint meeting was held at the VORP office. John, Greg, both of their mothers, and myself met to discuss the battery and restitution. Right from the start, the atmosphere was much more relaxed than it had been during my initial contacts with each family. After introductions, John and Greg were each given a chance to explain their version of how the battery had happened. At first it didn't seem as though the discussion was going anywhere. John maintained his position that both he and Greg were responsible for the battery. Meanwhile, Greg insisted that John was fully responsible. I asked each boy to put themselves in the other boy's position. I first addressed John, asking him what he would expect the other person to pay if he was in Greg's position. After pausing for a moment John said, "I guess I would expect him to pay for the whole bill." John then offered to pay for the full amount which was \$113.50. John's mother affirmed his decision.

When I asked Greg what he thought about John's decision he said that it didn't feel quite right. He replied, "If I was John I would expect the other person to pay at least something." Greg therefore offered to pay \$30.00 of the bill. Everyone was surprised by Greg's offer because he was not expected to pay anything by the police. Rather, John was identified as the offender, and Greg as the victim. In the course of the meeting both boys came to realize that these labels were not completely fair; they recognized that it generally takes two people to create a fight. Greg's mother and John's mother both affirmed their sons for being honest and for wanting to take responsibility for their actions.

After working out the details of how the restitution will be paid, Greg turned to John saying, "I'm sorry it happened." John responded by saying, "If I see you on the street I won't treat you like a stranger." The meeting ended with laughter and handshakes.

Thanks Christine.

Shalom, Ron Claassen, Program Director

Duane & Clare Ann Heffelbower
111 K Street
Reedley, CA 93654