



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP NEWS - June/July 1986

SUMMER HAPPENINGS - Three conferences are taking us away for some time but hopefully giving us input that will enhance VORP in the Valley.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PEACEMAKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION - In early June Greg and I attended a National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution in Denver. About 1500 people were expected and the variety of seminars and workshops offered varied from interpersonal disputes to international disputes; from private mediators to community mediation to court annexed mediation. Some are involved because of a faith motivation and others just see mediation as a good alternative to present forms of dispute resolution. Some emphasized the volunteer nature of mediation and others see mediation working in forced settings. Some mediate in homes and churches and other mediate in settings with armed guards in the waiting rooms. Some think mediation will die if it is paid for by the government and becomes more institutionalized; others think it will die unless it becomes more institutionalized. The exposure was good and some of the methods presented will be helpful. The tensions were stimulating.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE WORKSHOP - June 24 to 26 I will be attending a Transfer of Knowledge Workshop sponsored by the California Youth Authority. The focus is on the religious community and victims of violence. The mission is to increase the involvement of the religious community in addressing the needs of victims of violence and the prevention of violence. Three specific objectives are to share examples of existing models in which the religious community is involved with victims, to identify issues and challenges that the religious community faces in ministering to victims, and third to develop recommendations for further study and involvement of the religious community in meeting the needs of victims of violence. Thirty persons from the religious community and from the criminal justice community were invited and I was invited as the director of the Fresno County VORP Program to be one of those thirty. The good news of VORP is spreading and those of you who support VORP with your prayers, time, and/or finances are making this possible.

VORP GATHERING - In mid July Christine, Roxanne, and I will be attending the VORP Conference in Valparaiso, Indiana. This is an annual event bringing people working with VORPs throughout the United States and Canada together to discuss vision and methods and to share stories of successes and failures. This is a time to test ideas to gain new insights, to renew inspiration.

STUDENT INTERN - In addition to the conference comings and goings there will be vacations and Greg is getting married (congratulations Greg and Geenia). During this time we are fortunate to have John Hudson working with us. He is a student intern from Fresno State University. John is studying in the area of conflict management and mediation and so is gaining some practical experience while providing an invaluable service to us at VORP.

FINANCES - It looks like we will finish the first six months of this year with enough income to meet all expenses. Thank you for joining in with our Board of Directors as they assume financial responsibility for VORP. They have recently set some priorities. In addition to a high quality program and increased referrals in the Juvenile area in Fresno County they are: 1) help Tulare County VORP get started 2) respond to requests for help from other counties, and 3) prepare to accept adult referrals in Fresno County.

Please don't forget about your contribution to VORP in the midst of your other summer plans.

VORP CASE STORY - Case work is the most important part of VORP. Gary Barber has prepared a story to share. Names and a few details have been changed to protect identities.

Manuel and the Dog
The words on the information sheet in my manila folder jumped up at me: "offender shot victim's dog in the eye." That seemed to be a particularly nasty thing to do and, being as I like animals, I felt some apprehension about working on this case. In addition, Manuel (the offender), was in Juvenile Hall.

Despite my anxieties I called the phone number listed by Manuel's name and found myself talking to his mother who seemed rather pleasant, albeit nervous. I explained about VORP and that I needed to meet with Manuel with her present. She agreed but not without telling me how difficult it would be to find a babysitter and transportation. At the appointed time Manuel's mother and I met in the lobby at Juvenile Hall. Manuel's mother brought him personal articles. I began to realize that staying at Juvenile Hall is not like summer camp. We were escorted to a small room with metal doors. There was nothing soft in the room so sounds bounced around and the walls were painted institution gray. Manuel seemed like a nice kid. He explained that he had been showing his cousin how to shoot a BB gun when he accidentally shot the neighbor's dog. He wanted to know why he had to go through the VORP process when it was just an accident. After I explained VORP to Manuel, he agreed to meet the victim. He also stated very clearly that he wanted to pay back the restitution on his own.

After a few days I was able to meet the victim. Her name was Betty. Betty lived in a little house that had virtually no furnishings. Betty explained how her dog had been only slightly injured and had recovered fine but that the vet bills were \$100.00. After I explained VORP, Betty agreed to meet Manuel.

About a week later, Betty, myself, Betty's mother and my wife (an observer) entered the main lobby of Juvenile Hall where we left all valuables. Manuel's mom did not attend, but gave permission for us to meet with Manuel in her absence. We were escorted deep into the building along many corridors. Finally, we arrived in a large day room. We were shown to a corner while a guard went looking for Manuel. Finally the guard returned and left. The first thing Manuel said was, "Where is my mom?" I told Manuel why his mother couldn't come and assured him I would look out for his best interest. Both parties shared stories and explained their actions. The problem arose when the issue of restitution came up. Manuel would be getting out of Juvenile Hall in a few weeks but he had no job waiting. Betty insisted that she be repaid. Eventually Manuel agreed to make monthly payments of \$10.00 and Betty agreed to wait three months for the first payment so Manuel could find work. Everyone seemed pleased with the arrangement. As we left, Betty said, "You know, I feel bad because he seemed like such a nice kid." She went on to explain how she realized he wanted to be responsible but couldn't pay right now. I felt good because I felt that two individuals were able to see that there was more involved than their personal lives. I felt that Betty and Manuel were able to see each other as people and, perhaps, begin the process of forgiveness.

Thank you, Gary, for taking the time to share one of your experiences on paper. Volunteers give many hours to help bring about healing in many different kinds of situations.

Ron Claassen, Program Director

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