



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
January 1987

March 26, 1987 you are invited to the ANNUAL VORP GATHERING. The purpose of this gathering is to bring together those people who have contributed through financial contributions, volunteering, or in some other way expressed interest in VORP. Our guest speaker this year is Daniel W. Van Ness. Dan is president of Justice Fellowship and author of the book Crime and Its Victims published by InterVarsity Press. In 1983 Prison Fellowship, Chuck Colson's ministry, created an affiliate organization, Justice Fellowship, to support a growing interest and activity in criminal justice reform. In the forward of the book Chuck Colson says, "Dan and I have worked closely together for the past five years. We have walked prison cell-blocks; we've met with political leaders at every level of government; we've studied and wrestled with the complex problems of criminal justice reform. Thus the contents of the pages which follow flow not only from thoughtful research, but from our experiences over the history of our ministry. Dan's book is a unique blend of these experiences, the keen insights of a finely trained legal mind--and the compassion of a committed Christian heart." I met Dan last summer at the National VORP Conference in Valparaiso, IN. In doing research for his book and other work he noticed the value of VORP and wanted to learn more and be supportive of the effort.

Consistent with our participatory program we are planning to eat a potluck meal together. Next month we will announce details.

In order to help us plan we will be using tickets. They are free and can be requested by calling Greg Stobbe in our office. If you wish to invite a guest to introduce them to VORP they would be welcome.

1986 REVIEW

SERVICES OFFERED: We offer training to volunteers in conflict management, mediation skills, and the VORP process. Trained volunteers work with victims and offenders in cases that have been referred to us where, because of some criminal act, the victim has experienced a loss that could be repaid. First the volunteer meets with the offender to invite them to accept responsibility for what happened and to "make it right" with the victim. If the offender is willing, the volunteer meets with the victim to invite them to participate in the process by meeting with the offender (who has agreed to accept responsibility) and sharing their experienced injustice to help the offender understand the impact of their acts. Victims have the chance to get answers to their questions and to decide if they have to worry about it happening again. If both agree to meet, the volunteer arranges and chairs a meeting. One frequent outcome is a written contract for repayment of the loss. Our goal is that this process will facilitate restoration for both the victim and the offender. Forgiveness and reconciliation often happen as movement from hostility toward caring is experienced by both. The process invites all of us to consider peace and reconciliation as a possibility in all of our relationships: with God, self, family, friends, community, and the world. We see it happening with victims and offenders and know it is an alternative we could choose in other relationships.

SERVICES OFFERED TO: Fresno County case referrals have come from the Police Probation Teams as part of an informal sentence for first and second time offenders. More frequent offenders or more serious offenses have come from Probation (acting for the Court) where it has been determined that restitution is part of their sentence. Some cases have come through a recommendation by the Alternative Sentencing Program. We ask that the VORP process be an alternative to some part or all of the sentence and not be something simply added.

Service Statistics:	Number of case referrals:
	1983 - 89
	1984 - 206
	1985 - 315
	1986 - 309

The most frequent offenses included vandalism, burglary, petty theft, battery, and throwing objects at vehicles. Other offenses referred included forgery, auto theft, strong arm robbery and hit and run. Of the 309 cases referred to us in 1986, in almost all cases at least one party was contacted. Both parties were contacted and met with at least once in at least 58% of the referrals and most of these had joint meetings; 53% had joint meetings and a contract was completed for restitution repayment; 2% completed a contract without a joint meeting, and 3% had a meeting without a contract. Of those that were terminated, 16% were terminated because either the victim or offender were unwilling; 15% were terminated because it was determined that no restitution was due; and 11% were terminated for other no-fault reasons.

The contracts amounted to \$13,394.09 in monetary restitution and 343 work hours for the victim. Of the contracts negotiated, 66% are completed, 18% are not yet due, 10% are over due, and 6% were considered bad debts.

SERVICES DELIVERED BY: We have a goal that at least 70% of the cases will be handled by volunteers. We came close with 64% of the cases being handled by volunteers. The volunteers who handled cases in 1987 were Steve Hendsch, Jane Stokes, Buddy Klassen, Kevin Enns-Rempel, Connie Enns-Rempel, Lisa Noel, Hood, James Wenger, Ron Toews, Al Dueck, Rudy Neufeld, Phyllis Neufeld, Mark Siemens, Lori Warkentin, Al Smith, Gary Barber, John Hudson, Sue Ewert, Larry Schmidt, Jonathan Neufeld, Frances Ewy, Allen Guenther, Dalton Reimer, Ken Janzen, John Bergey, John Wall, Karen Hubert, Peter Hudson, Byron Burkholder, Jim VanWagenen, Theron Esau, Ed Barton, Mark Suddjian, Kathy Quenzer, Lisa Manning, Kevin Friesen, and Lois Ratzlaff.

Greg Stobbe started the year serving with us through the Christian Service Voluntary Service Program, completed that assignment in August and continued with us in a salaried position. His responsibilities have included almost all areas at times and during the last quarter gave priority to assisting Board Members in fundraising. Christine Slonetsky came in January through the Mennonite Voluntary Service program. Her primary responsibilities have been case management and case work. John Hudson worked with us during the summer as a student intern with primary responsibilities in the areas of restitution follow-up and case work. Roxanne Claassen has worked as secretary and bookkeeper part-time. She has provided a valuable service in her work and also as an encourager when I or other have been discouraged. We will be missing her this next year as she returns to her college studies in pursuit of an elementary teaching credential. I have continued working as program director, case worker, trainer, and resource person to persons of other counties interested in VORP.

Jonathan Neufeld began a term of voluntary service with the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program this fall and accepted the assignment of program manager of the Tulare County VORP. I work with him in Visalia one day per week.

SERVICES GUIDED BY: Our Board of Directors assume both policy and financial responsibility. Each member assumes responsibility to raise a portion of the budget. This is a major commitment and each deserves a great deal of credit for their dedication and voluntary involvement in making VORP a possibility in Fresno County. The same group has given direction to the initial development of the program in Tulare County and our service as a resource to others. Our current Board Members are Steve Nilmeier, President; Richard Unruh, Secretary/Treasurer; Deborah Ohanesian; Rudy Neufeld; D H Mapson; Margaret Hudson; Ron Claassen; and Ross Becker, representing Tulare County. Duane Hefelbower served until he left in September, leaving his law career, to pursue seminary studies. Our advisory committee includes Dave Purvis, Ken Quenzer, Buck Levi's, and Doug Lanier. Mary Stegall served until she moved away from the area. In Tulare County a board is now forming that will assume primary responsibility for the program and finances. Currently the members are Ross Becker, chairman; Stan Isaac, and James Line.

SERVICES PAID FOR BY: The training of volunteers, staff support, and administration have been offered as a "free gift" from the "church". It has been paid for by individuals, churches, businesses, service clubs, and church agencies that share the VORP vision. The number of contributors increased in 1986 by 45%.

Total cash income in 1986 (excluding the Kingsview Grant for Tulare County and for Central Function resourcing) was \$29,503 compared to \$28,479 in 1985, \$22,078 in 1984, \$16,874 in 1983, and \$2,000 in 1982. The good news this year is that all of the income was local and as mentioned came from a broader base. While I won't list all contributors I would like to thank them for giving so freely to help promote peace and reconciliation in our community.

In addition to cash contributions there have been many 'in kind' gifts. College Community Mennonite Brethren Church donated office space, utilities, cleaning; Pacific Printing donated brochures, business cards, stationery, etc. Mark Hill donated at least 50 hours of computer programming time; and as mentioned before many volunteers donated an average of 5 hours per case of time in addition to telephone calls and transportation expense and board members donated time etc in addition to cash contributions.

In Tulare County the Neighborhood Church is donating office space, utilities and cleaning.

From Kings View Corporation we received an additional \$12,000 which was divided into \$6,000 for start-up funds for Tulare County VORP and \$6,000 for Central Function resourcing, helping to spread the VORP vision.

SERVICE EXPANSION: The primary expansion effort was to help establish VORP in Tulare County. Arrangements were completed with probation for referrals, with Neighborhood Church for office space, and with Christian Service Voluntary service program for a program manager. In the late summer Jonathan Neufeld trained with the VORP staff in Enesno and in the fall moved to Visalia and set up the office, prepared the case management system, received the first referrals, began inviting involvement from more churches, and arranged for the first volunteer training. The Tulare County Board of Directors began meeting and assuming program and financial responsibility.

In Fresno County many new people heard about VORP through numerous presentations to churches, service clubs, classes, and other public forums. I was interviewed on radio several times and there was one television interview. Several articles were written and appeared in various publications. The number of volunteer and donor participants increased substantially.

In addition I responded to inquiries from Marin, Oakland, Santa Clara, San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, and Ventura counties. Several VORP programs in these counties are likely to emerge in the next year. The program in San Luis Obispo County is being given direction by Carl Hansen who is supported by a five county diocese of the Episcopal Church. He is exploring interest in local churches and together we met with a probation official.

The California Youth Authority invited me to present VORP at another Transfer of Knowledge workshop. Information from these workshops is printed in booklets and is sent to probation offices throughout the state. I was invited by Anne and Dave Deleplane, who organized a section focusing on the religious community and victims, to present VORP at the National Organization for Victims Assistance Annual Convention and at the National Association of Evangelicals Annual Convention.

I was also invited to participate in a Task Force on Restorative Justice to look into the possibility of mediation in serious cases because of my involvement in mediating a serious case here in Fresno.

VORP mediators have through brief interventions had a significant impact on the lives of many victims and offenders. I believe that the impact is much greater than the amount of time spent with each person would seem to warrant. The invitation to consider resolution and restoration as an alternative to continued bitterness and engreater punishment which is unrelated to the incident or victim is generally welcomed by both victim and offender.

LOOKING AHEAD

Don Hogner, Fresno County Chief Probation Officer, said recently, "As VORP's capability grows, we in Probation are anxious to refer more juveniles and to eventually begin referring adults." The invitation is open if we can develop both the volunteer and organizational capability.

Perhaps the time will come when the first response with offenders will be to find out if they will respond to the extremely difficult task of accepting responsibility for their offense, "making it right" with the victim, and resolving to do things different in the future.

Thanks again for your prayers and support. Let's continue to invite accepting responsibility, good communication efforts, restoration and reconciliation in all of our relationships.

Shalom, Ron Claassen

P.S. Thanks. Due to your generous contributions in December, our deficit was cleared! Your continued support is needed and appreciated.