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## Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News  
January 1988

### 1987 REVIEW

**SERVICES OFFERED:** VORP volunteers are advocates for both victims and offenders. Good solutions and resolutions, to a conflict we have defined as a "crime," are found when willing victims and offenders are valued and encouraged to work on the problem together. The volunteer mediator helps them to recognize the injustice (discuss the offense and violation; both facts and feelings), to restore the equity between them (to agree on what payment can be made or work done or other symbolic gesture completed to indicate a sincere attempt to make up for the disruption and loss), and to agree on the future (assurance the victim does not need to worry about it happening again). VORP trains volunteers in conflict management and mediation skills and the VORP process. First the volunteer meets with the offender (parents of juveniles are included) 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. If both agree to meet, the volunteer arranges and leads a meeting. 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 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. This year a few came directly from victims or offenders who had heard of the process and wanted to participate. In cases referred by the Criminal Justice System we ask that the VORP process be an alternative to some part or all of the sentence and not something simply added.

Service Statistics: Number of case referrals:

1983	- 89
1984	- 206
1985	- 315
1986	- 309
1987	- 404

The most frequent offenses included: vandalism, burglary, petty theft, and battery. In all of the 404 referrals we had some contact with at least one of the parties. Both parties were contacted and cases were completed in 79% of the referrals: 56% had joint meetings and signed a restitution contract, 10% did not meet but signed a contract for restitution, 3% had a joint meeting but did not sign a restitution contract, and 10% did not meet because there was no restitution due. Of those that were terminated, 14% were terminated because either the victim or offender were unwilling, 5% were terminated because either the victim or offender were unavailable, and 2% were terminated for other no-fault reasons.

The contracts amounted to \$35,394 in monetary restitution and 547 work hours for victims. Of the contracts, 71.5% are completed, 11% are not yet due, 11% are over due (but active), and 6.5% were considered bad debts. Since our beginning our collection rate has run between 90% and 94%.

**SERVICES DELIVERED BY:** We have a goal that at least 70% of the cases will be handled by volunteers. When we set that goal in 1985 our actual statistic was approximately 30% handled by volunteers. Last year we came close with 64% and this year 74% of the cases were handled by volunteers. The volunteers who handled cases in 1987 were: Dalton Reimer, Allen Guenther, Kathy Quenzer, Jim Van Wegenen, Kevin Friesen, Byron

Burkholder, Sue Ewert, Alvina Gossman, Peter Hudson, Gerre Brenneman, Ed Barton, Mark Sudjian, Susan Vasquez, Ron Toews, Mark Hill, John Unger, Phil Born, Lois Hepburn, Gary Barber, Viktor Reiser, Dave Kleschold, Peter Koehn, Lorenzo DeLeon, Jack Swartzendruber, Theron Esau, Bryan Born, John Bergey, Ray Wiens, Lorne Willms, Mark Siemens, Rod Zook, Franz Rathwair, Robert Thiessen, Frances Ewy, Todd Blum, Phonzie Golston, Lois Ratzlaff, Steve Hendsch, Russell Templeton, Allen Guenther, Galen Quenzer, Abe Ediger, Roxanne Claassen, Richard Stone, Wanda Kopp, Herb Wiebe, Linda Wiebe, Jeff Prather, Terri Prather, Jon Isaak, Mary Ann Isaak, Norman Gustafson, Scott Rink, Galen Wiest, Wald Pauls, Joy Pauls, Tim Schellenberg, Hubert Alvarez, Dina Gonzalez, Luis Medel, Jonathan Villalobos, and Barbara Scopec.

**A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS. VOLUNTEERS MAKE VORP POSSIBLE.**

Our staff is also primarily made up of persons who are serving through voluntary service programs related to their church. They each bring a special vitality and dedication that is very beneficial to VORP. They make it possible for VORP to have a high quality staff while not having the financial resources to hire such qualified people. By volunteering to work on a small cost of living stipend they are each making a significant financial contribution. Currently our staff includes Gretchen Schmidt, through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program; and Todd Hofer, through the Mennonite Voluntary Service Program. They work full time. I am employed one day per week for the Fresno County Program and one day per week with our efforts to help other programs begin in other counties.

Due to our reliance on volunteers, transition is part of our lives. Greg Stobbe worked with VORP as staff person first through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program and later employed by VORP. He moved on to other interests in October. Other volunteer staff persons this year were Christine Slonetsky, Dan Federau, Larry Willms, and Vicki Penner. Sue Ewert worked with our bookkeeping part-time. It is a great honor for me to work with these vital and dedicated people.

**SERVICES GUIDED BY:** VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. is a non-profit, public benefit corporation. Our Board of Directors represent many different churches and occupations. 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 member deserves a great deal of credit for their dedication and voluntary involvement in making VORP a possibility in Fresno County. Our Board of Directors in 1987 was Richard Unruh, President; Deborah Ohanesian, Secretary/Treasurer; Steve Nilmeier, past president; Rudy Neufeld; Russell Templeton; Margaret Hudson; Mark Hill; DH Mapson; and Ross Becker, representing Tulare County VORP. Our advisory committee includes Dave Purvis, Ken Quenzer, Buck Levis and Doug Lanier. In addition to these people there are many in both the church community and the criminal justice system who opened their doors and storehouse of experience and information to me to seek advice throughout the year. Judge Caeton, Presiding Juvenile Judge; Don Hogner, Chief Probation Officer; and Joe Walden, Juvenile Probation Division Chief are just a few who have very open and helpful.

**SERVICES PAID FOR BY:** The service has been offered to victims and offenders as a "free gift" from the "church". The training of volunteers, staff support for volunteers, liaison work with the criminal justice system officials, and administration are paid for by board members, other individuals, churches, businesses, service clubs, and church agencies that share the VORP vision. The number of contributors increased again in 1987. Also, many have continued contributing an amount each month or one or more times this last year as they have for several years in the past. We receive no public funding.

**A SPECIAL THANKS TO FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTORS. INDIVIDUAL AND CHURCH CONTRIBUTIONS MAKE VORP POSSIBLE.**

Cash income in 1987 for our Fresno County VORP was all from local private sources and amounted to \$32,783. Since I do not have permission I am not listing names but want to sincerely thank all of you who contributed.

**SERVICE APPRECIATION:** Below is an unsolicited letter from Judge Caeton, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court in Fresno County, which was an encouragement to me and I hope will be to all of you who participate in making VORP possible.

**Juvenile Court**

COUNTY OF FRESNO

744 SOUTH TENTH STREET  
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA 93702

CHAMBERS  
OF THE  
PRESIDING JUDGE

December 30, 1987

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program  
2529 Willow Avenue  
Clovis, CA 93612

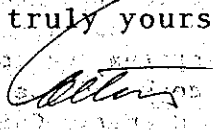
Dear Ron:

I wanted to take this occasion to wish you, your staff, the mediators and all the supporters of V.O.R.P. a joyous Christmas Season. I recognize that the dedicated and loving people who contribute this vital service to our community don't expect or require recognition. However, I also recognize that recognition can bring comfort and hope to, and a willingness to assist by community members.

I offer my services and my resources in any way you feel would be helpful in the matter of training, fund raising or anything else that you feel would be appropriate. Please do not hesitate at any time to call me for any assistance that you need.

Again, my deepest appreciations for your efforts on behalf of victims and young offenders.

Very truly yours,

  
A. DENNIS CAETON

ADC:pk  
0292Q

**TULARE COUNTY VORP:** Tulare County VORP is a program of VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. but operates with its own Board of Directors, program staff, volunteers and are responsible for providing their own funding base. The Board of Directors includes Ross Becker, President; Stan Isaac, Dale Bruder, Rod Elder, Gail Williamson, and Buzz Southard. Others who served last year were Jim Line and Robin Wilson. I also meet with the Board. Jonathan Neufeld, serving through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program, worked as program manager in developing the program in its early stages. He left in May and Linda Line was employed part time to carry on the development. We trained 15 volunteers and they, together with staff, worked with 86 case referrals. We received a \$5,000 grant from Kings View Corporation, \$1,000 from the Northern Christian Church, and \$3,224 from other churches and individuals. This fell slightly short of meeting our expenses. Due to these financial uncertainties at this point we have stopped taking cases temporarily and are expecting to resume in the Spring. Approximately \$5,400 is committed for 1988 and the board is looking for about \$3,600 more in commitments before resuming case work. Please pray for them and consider how you might help.

**SERVICE EXPANSION:** Primary effort has shifted from trying to generate interest to responding to inquiries. In the summer of 1986 I was invited to a Transfer of Knowledge Workshop sponsored by the California Youth Authority which focused on the Religious Community and Victims and highlighted six model programs of which one was VORP. As a result of that meeting a small booklet was developed and distributed in multiple copies to every probation department. As a result of this and other meetings where VORP was discussed, interest has been generated in many counties in California.

We received in 1987, \$2,000 each from Kings View Corporation and Mennonite Central Committee to respond to these inquiries. We also had some carry-over funds from Kings View Corporation from 1986. These funds and some reimbursement on expenses and/or fees for service have employed me one day per week to provide some consultation to those who are expressing interest. Both Kings View Corporation and Mennonite Central Committee have committed some funds for this purpose again in 1988.

In addition to me there are others who have worked with VORP in the past who are providing consultation to new counties expressing interest. Carl Hansen from San Luis Obispo is working with several counties on the central coast. Below is a listing of those counties where people have expressed interest and/or developed programs in California as far as I am aware. San Luis Obispo (already taking cases), Monterey (already taking cases), Orange (Board is organizing and training for volunteers is being discussed), Santa Clara (training volunteers next month), Contra Costa (volunteer training planned for spring), Santa Barbara (planning), Ventura (initial interest), San Bernardino (initial interest), Los Angeles (initial interest), Sacramento (initial interest), and Madera (initial interest).

When I am involved with other programs at their development stages I am encouraging them to develop a good working relationship with the criminal justice system and to develop the program as a community based program sponsored and guided by the churches. Our mission statement now says that we see VORP as an organization which exists to help the "churches" in their mission to serve the needs of victims and offenders. Reconciliation is a primary purpose and restitution is part of the reconciliation process. VORP needs to be voluntary and the process needs to invite offenders to participate not only because of an externally imposed punishment but because of an internal desire to "make things right" with the victim. I think that VORP needs to be responsible to the "faith community" because they are the only organized group that views reconciliation (with God, neighbor, self, the environment, and even enemies) as their primary purpose. I think that their encouragement will be needed to maintain a focus on reconciliation.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

The invitation is open to expand VORP both in terms of the numbers and range of cases within our county and to develop VORP programs in other counties. 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

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