



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
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Restitution can be externally ordered, imposed as punishment and paid as a fine (view #1). Restitution can be an internal decision and paid to the victim as part of a restoration and reconciliation process (view #2). Actually, these views become more helpful when seen as opposite ends of a spectrum.

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view #1 view #2

I think that we can all agree that when an offender views restitution as the end of the spectrum represented by view #2, both the victim and the offender will benefit. The victim will receive compensation for losses and this will most likely be accompanied by a clear recognition of the injustice and an assurance of not doing it again. The offender will gain self esteem and a new starting point.

View #2 is a goal of VORP. VORP volunteers invite offenders to consider this view and encourage them to move as far as possible to the view #2 end of the spectrum.

This month Gretchen Schmidt is sharing a case with us. Gretchen is a volunteer who came to VORP through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program. Gretchen works full-time with VORP (paid only a subsistence allowance). In addition to case work responsibility Gretchen shares the office responsibilities with Todd. Gretchen takes primary responsibility for our case management and bookkeeping. She is making a tremendous contribution to our community.

The names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

The offender was Mitch, a 13 year old teenager. He had run away from home and needed money. Mitch had read that the emblems on BMWs were worth money so seeing a BMW car, he pried one off.

When I received the referral from probation, I called Garth, the victim with the BMW to check for damages. He indicated that the paint had been scratched and the trunk lid had been damaged because a tool had been used to pry off the emblem. I set up a time to meet with him after I had met with Mitch to discuss the possibility of participating in the VORP process.

I met with Mitch and his parents to discuss the incident. Mitch told me about the night he ran away. He wanted to meet with Garth and explain why he did what he did and to pay for the damages he'd caused.

Garth wasn't interested in meeting with Mitch. He'd just as soon hang the guy. Garth had been victimized several times already and was tired of it happening. Restitution interested him but he saw no benefit in meeting with Mitch. His attitude was "What is he going to do, apologize? What good would that do?" I asked him to get an estimate and then after I explained what I thought the benefits of meeting would be, I agreed I would carry a contract between the two of them.

After several weeks and several phone calls we finally received the estimate. It was just over \$400. I knew \$400 would be a fortune to Mitch. Mitch was from a low income family and if he was going to pay the damages himself, which he wanted to do, even \$100 would be a struggle. After explaining this to Garth, he agreed. Garth is head of a corporation and is very well off financially. Garth was primarily concerned with the principle of the matter.

I went to visit Mitch and his family again to discuss the estimate and how he intended to pay restitution. Mitch wouldn't even hear of only paying \$100. He felt it was only right to pay the full \$400 even if it took him years. Mitch again expressed the desire to meet with Garth to make things right with him verbally and personally.

I encouraged Garth once more to meet with Mitch. He said, "What will it hurt."

The day of the meeting, I picked Mitch and his father up and drove to Garth's office. We went into a conference room with a table in it the size of a '71 Delta 88 Oldsmobile. Needless to say, I was apprehensive about bringing them together because of Garth's previous attitude. But the meeting went very well. Mitch apologized for his actions even though he knew it wouldn't fix the car. He also shared the struggles he'd been having leading up to the incident which had caused him to run away from home and to get into this trouble. He also shared that he and his father had had some serious talks and had gotten things straightened out between them since then and things were going much better.

Garth almost took a fatherly role in the meeting. Garth has a son also and could relate to some of Mitch's struggles with his father.

Learning from the incident and future intentions were also discussed. It was a good experience for all involved. I believe Garth regained a little faith in kids Mitch's age and especially in the ethnic group Mitch was from. Mitch and Garth decided to wait until Garth actually got the car fixed and Mitch would pay the actual cost. Both hoped that would be less than the estimate.

Thanks Gretchen.

VORP needs more volunteer mediators. The next training is scheduled for May 10 and 17. Each evening the training is from 6:00pm to 10:00pm. There is no cost to the volunteer but pre-registration is necessary. Call Todd or Gretchen at 291-1120.

Expenses have exceeded income for the last two months and our small reserve is just about depleted. If you've been waiting to give, this would be a good month to do that. If you haven't thought about making a contribution, this would be a good time to consider it and hopefully decide now would be a good time to make a donation. We appreciate regular monthly contributions because they provide stability and we also appreciate occasional contributions when that fits your giving pattern better. It is only because of your generous support that VORP exists.

In the first quarter this year VORP in Fresno County received 120 cases. To be able to keep up this rate will require both more volunteers and more financial support. Please consider your part.

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director

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