

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. News
October 1988

Three months ago several local pastors attended a VORP meeting at the Juvenile Probation Offices. Joe Walden, Chief of Juvenile Probation, challenged the pastors to help increase the number of volunteer mediators so that referrals could be increased from last years 404 to closer to 2,000 which would be all appropriate juvenile cases.

The good news is that several large churches who hadn't been involved with VORP responded enthusiastically. People's Church has their first training starting on October 11. 70 people at St. Anthony's Catholic Church indicated an interest in being trained. Training will happen in three groups with the first starting on October 13. On Sept. 17 the San Joaquin Presbytery focused their worship service on reconciliation. The story from our last newsletter was shared in person by a forgiven, reconciled, and responsible person who first learned about VORP as an offender.

We are offering a training in your own church if there are 15 or more interested in training. If your church is interested please call me at 291-1120. We also have an open volunteer mediator training every two or three months for anyone interested. Our next session will be on Nov. 1 and 8 from 6:00pm to 10:00pm each evening. If you are interested please call Shannon or Gretchen to register. There is no charge to the churches or individuals for the training. All are expected to consider seriously working with up to one case per month which takes from 5-8 hours.

Sharon Martin is a volunteer mediator from Seventh Day Adventist Church. She has agreed to share a VORP experience with us this month. The names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

I first met David at Juvenile Hall. He was very pleasant and talkative. Just under 18 yrs. old, David had been found guilty of auto theft. David claimed he had not actually stolen the car, but admitted he had been driving it when the car had been damaged in an accident. He had rear-ended another car, and since he knew the car was stolen and he didn't have a drivers license, he fled the scene of the accident. The driver of the car David rear-ended followed David and continued to chase him until David drove into a parking lot with only one exit. David and his four companions jumped from the car and ran. One of the boys was caught trying to climb a fence, and this boy identified David as the one who had stolen the car. David said he felt responsible for the damages to the stolen car (the other car was undamaged) and thought he should pay to have it fixed. He agreed to participate in the VORP process.

John, the owner of the stolen car, and David were not acquainted with each other although they lived quite near each other. John said he was under the impression that another boy, Bill, had stolen his car. I explained to him that David had been charged with the theft and he, David, would be responsible for the damages. John agreed to participate in the VORP process and a time was set for the joint meeting. John was also pleasant and anxious to have the situation resolved.

We met at a small conference room in Juvenile Hall. David and John shook hands as we sat down at a small table. David began by relating the circumstances surrounding John's car being damaged, including the chase and running over some curbs. David admitted this was not the first time he had been charged for auto theft.

John told of reporting the car stolen and being without a car for over a week. Fortunately he was able to use a company car to get back and forth to work. Two days after the car was recovered John was notified that it had been towed to a storage area and he had to pay the towing fee of \$80.00. Besides the damage to the front end of the car, two stereo speakers and a camera had been taken. John (30) said he was a working man with a daughter to support and that he didn't have insurance to cover this damage. John had an estimate of \$1,200 to repair the damage but had also found that by buying the parts himself and getting some help he could get it repaired for \$800. It was this amount that he wanted David to pay.

David expressed how he didn't think it was fair for him to have to cover the whole cost since he hadn't been the one to steal the car and since he was not alone in the "joy ride". There was considerable discussion at this point about responsibility and about damages and the cost to repair them. Although David still said he did not actually steal the car, he did say that he was driving the car at the time of the damage and that he did know it was stolen. He accepted responsibility for the accident and agreed to pay the \$800.

He reported that after leaving Juvenile Hall he would be applying for a job through Manpower. John was very supportive of David at this point and said that he wanted to make it as easy as possible for David to repay the money. They agreed he would pay \$50 per month until paid in full.

John was firm but fair in the discussion and I think David respected this. David said he was learning a great deal about responsibility, especially for his own actions.

Thanks Sharon!!

The good news is that we have had a great response to the call to increase our number of volunteers. As you all know the expenses will also increase as more volunteers are trained and more cases are accepted. Regular monthly contributions of \$10 or \$20 provide a solid foundation and are not a big burden on most people. Larger quarterly or annual contributions fit some peoples' incomes and giving patterns better. Please consider making a contribution this month. Our financial statements are available on request. Our annual budget is less than it would cost to incarcerate two juveniles for one year.

If your church is working on its budget please consider making VORP part of your regular budget.

Staff: Our staff volunteers are all recent college graduates and could be out there earning a comfortable lifestyle and accumulating financial wealth. Instead, they are living on a subsistence allowance, making it possible for VORP be a high quality and credible program. On behalf of volunteers, victims, offenders, financial contributors, and criminal justice system officials; we thank you Gretchen, Shannon, Mark and Todd for your effort and major financial contribution. He was a volunteer with Mennonite Voluntary Service and worked with us almost a year. Thanks Todd. In late August we welcomed Shannon Jost. She comes to us from Aurora, Nebraska. She is working with case work, case management and coordination, and bookkeeping. We also welcomed Mark Allen last month. Mark is from Vancouver, BC and will be working part-time with his primary focus on restitution follow-up. Shannon and Mark have both come through the Mennonite Brethren Christian Service Program. Please pray that a volunteer will be found to take Gretchen's place. She has extended her stay because she did not want to leave until a replacement had been found. I thank her for that and she knows that she would be welcome as long as she wanted to stay.

November 16 Howard Zehr will be the guest speaker at the first gathering of California VORP's. Anyone interested in VORP is invited. The program will focus on the State of VORP in the US, Canada, and England, the Vision of Restorative Justice, and the Role of the Church. For further information please call me at 291-1120.

Shalom
Ron Claassen, Program Director