

Victims are not central players in our current criminal justice system because the focus is on the violation of law which makes the state the "victim" and hides the real meaning of crime.

While some laws have been changed in recognition that victims have been left out, the primary focus has not changed and therefore the real victims are still on the side and often left out.

Even if included, victims have needs that cannot all be met in an adversarial setting. While it is not possible to predict all of the needs of any particular victim, there are some needs that are very commonly expressed. Following is a partial listing adapted from Howard Zehr's booklet, "Who Is My Neighbor." Victims Need:

1. Recognition of the right to grieve. In most crimes, something of value has been lost—property, security, etc.
2. Assurance that what happened to them was wrong, unfair, and undeserved.
3. Both the freedom and opportunity to express their anger and pain and to have that recognized, preferably by the one who caused it.
4. Empowerment. Victims need to be informed and given opportunities for meaningful involvement.
5. Answers. Why did this happen? Will it happen again? What could I have done to prevent it? Victims often rate this need higher even than restitution.
6. Repayment for losses. To some extent this is always symbolic because what the victim really wants is "that the offense didn't happen in the first place."
7. Reassurance. They need acceptance and to know that what happened is not a negative reflection on them. They need assurance that this will not cause them to be abandoned by God or their friends.
8. For victims who value their relationship with God, they need an understanding of God that recognizes the existence of suffering and evil without blaming God. God is a God who suffers with us, who helps us through suffering.
9. An experience of forgiveness and/or letting go. It cannot be forced. For some victims it is a process where there is a clear recognition of the experienced injustice, and agreements are made to restore equity and clarify future intentions.

VORP is concerned about the needs of both victim and offender.

VORP Helps Reduce Fear and Hostility in Our World

Ellie Bluestein, a VORP Volunteer Mediator, agreed to share a recent experience with us. Some details have been changed to protect identities.

I've been doing VORP work for more than a year but had never dealt with an assault case before and was a bit apprehensive. The offender was a high school boy

The offender was a high school boy who had beat up another boy causing several stitches to his nose.

who had beat up another boy causing several stitches to his nose. In my preliminary individual meetings the offender seemed not too eager to meet the victim, but his mother was concerned that things be made right. The offender shared his fear of retaliation from the victim's "gang." We finally decided this was a good reason to get it resolved. The victim's mother was really

angry and described the suffering and pain her son had endured. We discussed how important it was for the offender to hear this. All agreed to a meeting.

We met in a neutral place. The offender told his story, admitting that the victim was not really at fault in any way but was with a group by whom the offender felt challenged. The victim corroborated that story. The victim's mother described in great detail the condition in which he arrived, all covered with blood, clothes a mess; the pain he suffered for over a week; and the loss of school. Both the offender and his mother apologized very sincerely and wanted to make restitution. The emergency room and other medical bills were already covered for them. The offender's mother at least wanted the clothes to be paid for but after discussion they decided that no restitution would be paid. The victim and his mother seemed satisfied knowing that the offender and his mother understood the pain he had caused. The offender sincerely promised that he would never do it again. The victim promised there would be no revenge. After we signed our agreement the boys got up and shook hands. The offender said, "I shouldn't have done it."

I learned much from this episode. The offender and victim were from different ethnic groups. The offender walked past a group of boys and girls, heard a remark
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that he interpreted as being hostile, and lashed out.

I began to understand the tremendous fear and hostility which high school students feel surrounded by much of the time. Being surrounded by such an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion must be a severe handicap to learning. There is a desperate need to bring trust and understanding to our children in their schools.

Thanks Ellie!! Your efforts helped reduce the fear and hostility in our world!

VORP relies entirely on your financial contributions!

Each contribution helps reduce the hostility and violence in our world. If you haven't given before, this month would be a great time to start. Any amount is fine and as financial support increases VORP Mediators will serve more victims and offenders. VORP works with about 300 cases for approximately what it costs to incarcerate one juvenile per year. Financial statements are available on request.

The next VORP Mediator Training is November 12 and 19. Envision with me Fresno County, a place where all crime events end with a constructive agreement. Envision the reduction in fear and hostility and the increase in peace as a result of right relationships. You're right, not all will agree to participate. But many will if they are invited. Bring a friend, get trained and "VORP" together.

Shalom

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