

Cooperative Decision/Resolution Process Has Many Benefits

The VORP Peacemaking Model is a process to help promote COOPERATIVE DECISIONS/RESOLUTIONS in the conflict between victims and offenders. In this issue of the newsletter, I will focus on defining a COOPERATIVE DECISION/RESOLUTION. In the April issue I will focus on the values which make a cooperative resolution possible. In May I will suggest that there are three ways we resolve conflicts or make decisions (of which a Cooperative Decision/Resolution is one) and I will describe each and their interrelationship as a step to introducing a model for reducing the costs of conflict, both emotional and financial, in any system (family, church, school, criminal justice, etc.)

To be consistent with the COOPERATIVE DECISION/RESOLUTION process that VORP invites victims and offenders to work on, the VORP Board of Directors makes all decisions by consensus, meaning that we work on all Board decisions/problems until we have a cooperative decision/resolution.

We say we have a COOPERATIVE DECISION/RESOLUTION (Consensus) when all members of the Board have had an opportunity to participate freely in the process and voluntarily decided to go along with the decision and support it.

It doesn't necessarily mean that it was the preference of all members. It might even mean that one or a few of the decision-makers had some misgivings about the decision but decided that since most in the group preferred it, they would go along with the group.

It would not be a cooperative decision/resolution if one or more members had serious concerns and the group was not willing to listen to them and seriously consider their concerns.

It would not be a cooperative decision/resolution if one or more disagreed with the decision and decided not to support it, maybe even work against it, but decided not to say anything.

Sometimes consensus is confused with "group think" in which the group is caught up in one way of thinking about a matter and overlooks other important options. Some think that to arrive at a cooperative decision/resolution requires people to not raise issues that are important to them in order to preserve the relationship. In a cooperative decision/resolution process, just the opposite is true. In fact, we believe that we cannot find a good decision/resolution until we hear the ideas and concerns of everyone.

In a cooperative decision/resolution process, all decision-making parties have an obligation to participate by sharing their interests (hopes, dreams, concerns, and fears; the reasons why one would take a position for and/or against) related to the decision. The group and leader have a responsibility to make sure that all decision-makers have an opportunity and feel safe enough to share their interests and resistances.

Since our Board of Directors are all members of Christian Churches, we also have common interest in being sure that our decisions are consistent with biblical teaching. It is our goal to be able to say at the end of our decision-making process that, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."

While I have defined a cooperative decision/resolution using the context of our Board of Directors, these same ideas apply to any cooperative resolution, whether between siblings, spouses, parent and child, boss and employee, or victim and offender.

VORP Volunteer Turns Teen's Arrest Into Positive Experience

Our VORP story this month is a good example of a cooperative resolution. Our story comes to us from Stan Isaac who has been working with VORP in Tulare County for at least 5 years now. VORP of the Central Valley, Inc. started with Fresno County but now also has a semi-autonomous program in Tulare County and the beginnings of programs in Madera and Kings Counties. Stan is a member of the Dinuba Mennonite Brethren Church.

Mary had been arrested for passing counterfeit money at a local market. When I first talked to her over the phone she said that she would be willing to hear what VORP was all about. When I first met Mary my impression of her was that she was a tough rebellious teenager.

At the first meeting with Mary and her mother I explained how VORP worked and how this process could help her to acknowledge what she had done and offer an opportunity to make things as right as possible between herself and the victim. I explained that she would have an opportunity to sit down with the merchant that she stole from and to explain to him why she cheated him out of the money which came close to \$100.00.

Mary's mother wanted her to participate. She thought this process might help Mary to turn her life around and help her to realize that she was
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WE NEED YOUR HELP!

VORP relies on your contributions (not to be misunderstood as taxes)!!! As more individuals express interest, there is an increased need for training, which increases the number of cases which increases the need for coordination. This is a great problem. But it means there is an urgent need for increasing contributions. Thank you to those who are already faithfully participating in VORP through your contributions. VORP needs new contributors so that the needs can be met while not placing a heavy burden on anyone. A regular contribution of \$20 per month is a very significant contribution. VORP needs 20 new contributors at \$20 per month to bring our income up to match our recent increase in volunteers needing training and case management/liaison. VORP will grow as you decide to help it grow!!

responsible for her own actions. Mary also indicated that she was ready to do her part in making things as right as possible.

Mary then told me what happened, the reason why she had done it, and how she felt at the time. She also told me how she felt now, expressing remorse for what she had done. Mary said that she was willing to pay back the money she had taken even though she had given over half of it away to the person that had given her the bogus money. However, she expressed concern as to how she could repay the money since she was only 14 and did not have a job. Mary's mother also indicated that she did not have the money and it was Mary's responsibility to come up with the money. Mary said that she would try to find odd jobs and pay a monthly amount for a five or six month period if the merchant would agree.

I thanked Mary and her mother for their willingness to meet with the merchant and to make things right. I told them I would get back to them after I met with the merchant.

When I first talked to Mr. Martinez, the merchant, he said he really did not want to meet with Mary but just want her to pay back the money that she had stolen. But after I explained the possible benefits of a face to face meeting for both the offender and for himself as a victim, he quickly agreed to the meeting. Although he was not sure if he would ever get any money back, he figured that he had nothing to lose.

Next came the joint meeting. Everyone was a little tense, but I went over some ground rules, and

once we began it went smoothly. Mary explained what she had done and why, and she expressed her remorse to Mr. Martinez. He responded by expressing his feelings of hurt and his desire to be repaid.

We then discussed future intentions and Mary assured Mr. Martinez that he would not have to worry about her stealing from him again. We then discussed pay back of stolen money. Mary had done some baby sitting so she had come to the meeting with \$15.00 to make the first payment in good faith. All parties signed a contract where Mary promised to pay back the balance in five monthly payments. The meeting ended with everyone shaking hands and feeling good about what had taken place.

I was able to assist Mary in finding odd jobs to help her earn money to repay Mr. Martinez. Mary was faithful in showing up to her jobs on time and according to her employers she was a hard worker. In a month and a half she was able to earn enough money to repay Mr. Martinez, and to fulfill her end of the contract that she had signed with him. He was so excited about receiving his money back he gave me a call at work to tell me thanks.

My impression of Mary has changed since my first meeting with her. She is a teenager that made a mistake but has learned to be responsible for her action. When given an opportunity she did something positive. Stan Isaac

Thanks Stan!!!

Victims and offenders need your help. The case above would not have had a cooperative resolution if Stan hadn't taken the initiative to invite and lead them in the cooperative resolution method we call the VORP Peacemaking Model. Special thanks to ESA/LOVE Inc who sent (to this point, not yet completed) 70 names of people who indicated in their Harvest of Hope survey an interest in becoming a VORP Mediator. The next VORP Mediator training is scheduled for April 12, 19, & 26. Each session is three hours from 6:30 to 9:30. The only fee for those planning to work with VORP cases is the \$10 materials fee. For others the fee is \$75. All are welcome. Call Barbara or Linda at 291-1120 for details.

Shalom,
Ron Classen



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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program