

VORP IS NOT SOFT ON CRIME!

VORP focuses on responsibility and accountability. The first step in recovery from any problem is to recognize the problem. For a VORP case to proceed, the offender must admit that s/he has committed an offense. One of the great things about a restorative approach is that it encourages an offender to assume responsibility for the offense.

One problem of focusing on the offense as a violation of law is that it hides the real impact of the offense – the impact on the victim. Through VORP, the offender hears and summarizes the impact that the offense had on the victim until the victim says: "I think s/he understands."

For example, an offender summarizes: "You said that since the burglary, your children have trouble sleeping every night. They cry, wondering if someone will get into your home again..."

This understanding of the impact and injustice makes it possible for the offender to take a significant step toward recovery.

Money is not easily available for most offenders, and agreeing to pay restitution is not easy. Working to pay off the restitution directly or working to earn money for restitution is even harder. It's hard to assume responsibility and become accountable, but it is the right thing to do and there is great satisfaction in doing the right thing.

The clear message with VORP is that violating people and their property is wrong. VORP also says that this need not be the incident that labels a person for life. It is possi-

ble for a person to be accountable for a wrong, do what is necessary to make things as right as possible, and assume responsibility for not doing it again. When an offense is committed, society wants the offender to: assume responsibility; to make agreements for making things right and for not doing it in the future; and then to keep those agreements.

VORP is not appropriate for all offenders because not all offenders are willing to accept responsibility or become accountable. For those who won't, there must be backup processes. However, we will never know if an offender will accept responsibility and become accountable unless they are asked.

I believe that the number one reason why more offenders do not accept re-

sponsibility and become productive and cooperative is because they are not invited. That's why it is important for VORP to increase its capacity. You can help. There are several options. Some ways you can contribute are:

- Become a volunteer mediator.
- Contribute financially to train and provide support and technical assistance to the volunteer mediators.
- Prayer.
- Encourage your church to become (or continue or increase support) a Sustaining Friend. (Call Elaine Enns for details.)
- If you work with a jail or prison ministry, talk with offenders about making things right with their victim(s); refer them to VORP if they are interested.
- Care for victims, tell them about VORP and, if they are interested, make a referral.
- If you are a criminal justice official, make referrals.

Graffiti vandalism case resolved through VORP

Our story this month is from Florine (Frances) Cash, a trained volunteer VORP mediator and a member of Sacred Heart Catholic Church. VORP staff member Trevor Siemens joined Frances as co-mediator. Some names and details have been changed to protect the identities of victim and offender.

It was a sunny October afternoon when Peter, Paul, and Thomas finished their soccer practice and decided to go into the school for a drink of water. When they entered the boys' bathroom, they discovered that some painters had left their spray paint in the bathroom. There were no teachers in sight, so the boys decided to try using the spray paint. They painted all over the walls and bathroom stalls, including vulgar words. Just as they were finishing their paint job, the school custodian walked in.

The school and the boys' parents both requested that the probation officer refer the case to VORP. After receiving the case, the case was assigned to Frances and Trevor who proceeded to contact the boys by phone. In attempting to reach Thomas, Frances found that his mother did not speak English, so a Spanish speaking mediator was asked to join us in meeting with Thomas and his family. An appointment was made to see Peter and his mother. Since Paul had no phone, we decided to stop at his house after our meeting with Peter.

At each individual meeting, the boys described what they had done and agreed that they would be willing meet with the school principal. They also informed us that they had completed six days of community service in the graffiti program. This program entails painting and cleaning graffiti sites. The boys stated that this was very hard work. They had not realized that cleaning and painting over graffiti took so long! Each of the boys recognized that they had done something wrong and wanted to make it right. The boys' parents were supportive of their sons and of the process, recognizing that their sons were responsible for the damage.

(See School, page 2.)

REGISTER NOW FOR VORP TRAINING

If you haven't yet participated in a VORP training session, we encourage you to call our office to register. Working in pairs, our VORP mediators help work constructively at our continuing crime problem. The scheduled training sessions are:

- June 2 & 3
- September 22 & 23
- October 19, 26 & November 2
- November 17 & 18

Call Jesse or Trevor at the VORP office to register.

School vandalism case ends in reconciliation

(Continued from page 1.)

The principal had been involved with VORP in the past, and was well acquainted with the program. We informed her that the boys had completed the graffiti work program. The principal said she was in full support of the graffiti program, and if the boys had completed their hours, no further restitution would be requested at the joint meeting. At her request, and we obtained a letter from the probation department stating the number of hours the boys had completed.

We decided to have two joint meetings for two reasons: to keep the numbers smaller, and to have one meeting translated into Spanish. The first joint meeting took place at the principal's office. In attendance were Peter and his mother, Paul and his mother, the Principal, Frances and Trevor.

After introductions, Frances explained the process of the meeting. Paul was asked to go first and tell what he did. Although Paul was nervous, he described his part in the incident well. Peter then told his story. The principal restated to both Paul and Peter what they had said. The principal then asked the boys some questions about the incident. One question she asked was, "What words did you write on the wall?" The boys didn't want to answer this.

The principal then began her story of how she experienced the incident. She began by explaining that the words written on the wall were quite bad; she stated that if they did not want to repeat the words, she would assume they also knew they were wrong to write them. The principal told of her feelings of sadness, anger, and frustration about the incident.

She spoke of how she spends a lot of time at the school and wants it to look nice not only for herself but for the students and visitors of the school - like parents. She spoke of how the school belonged to the students, and how incidents like graffiti affect the student body. Repairs don't happen quickly, and the students have to look at the damage and lose their pride in the

school. The principal also detailed the amount of money spent on repairing damage from incidents of graffiti. She also spoke of the extra work these incidents create for the janitor.

Both of the boys took turns restating to the principal what she said. Each of the boys stated different aspects of what the principal said, showing that they had listened and understood.

The principal recognized that the boys had completed their community service and that no further restitution was necessary. The boys then voluntarily stated to the principal that they were sorry for the incident and that they would not do it again.

The boys also recognized and said they were sorry that the janitor had extra work because of the incident, because the janitor was also a friend. The principal acknowledged the boys' apologies. She reassured the boys that the incident would be put behind them if they kept their agreement. The agreement was written and signed, the meeting adjourned, and all parties exchanged handshakes.

After an initial delay due to a misunderstanding on times, the meeting with Thomas and his parents was rescheduled. Except for the addition of the Spanish translator, this second meeting was very similar to the first.

Throughout the process, the parents of the boys were involved in a supportive way while holding their sons responsible for their actions. The parents also thanked the principal and us as mediators for working with them on this problem.

Thanks Frances and Trevor!

"Blessed are the Peacemakers."

Shalom,
Ron Claassen

VORP Relies Entirely On Your Contributions

Cash Flow is a problem. **VORP needs your help now!** We adopted an expansion plan this year to be able to work with a higher percentage of appropriate cases. Expansion requires an increase in expenses. So far this year the income has not increased in comparison to last year.

\$20 per person this month (those receiving the newsletter) would help us catch up and provide a little breathing room for the summer when income is often lower. VORP is making a significant impact and could do more. I can assure you it is a wise investment. I think you will find it an enjoyable one also. Thanks for your consideration!

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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