

VORP NEWS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Victim Offender Recon-

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“IS ‘PRISON JUSTICE,’ JUSTICE?”

by Jay Griffith and Doug Noll, Peacemaker

California is “tough” on crime:

“3 Strikes”,
“PROP 21”,
“Use A Gun and You’re Done”,
“Megan’s Law”,
More police on our streets,
More prisons constructed.

What is going on here?

According to Doug Noll, a seasoned attorney, and lead Restorative Justice advocate & “Peacemaker” with Lang Richert & Patch in Fresno, “This has all been working together to create a crisis for our criminal justice system: we have more people funneling into the system than we can effectively handle.”

He continues, “Unfortunately, decisions by our State legislature have not created any new judicial offices in Fresno County since 1983 and our population has doubled.

Mr. Noll offers a snapshot of what’s been happening:

WE’VE ADDED MORE POLICE & MADE TOUGHER LAWS
(Millions Spent)

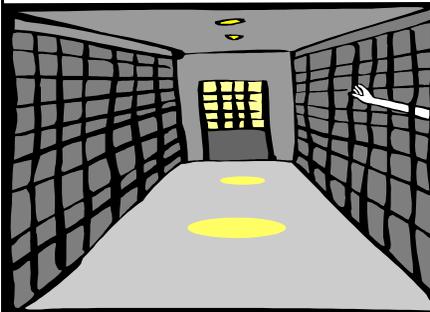
COURTROOM JUSTICE
“Funnel Crisis”

Consequently, too many offenders are funneling into our judicial system. With less time to discern offender issues and needs, or provide for their victim’s welfare, and with the need to monitor more offenders, the next logical step is to institute ...

PRISON JUSTICE
Prison Population (+++)
(Billions of Dollars)

With no new judicial offices in Fresno County, and ever increasing population trends for our County, you can begin to understand the pressure our judges, and other justice officials, are under to ensure justice for our local community.

But where does all this lead?



Prison Justice!

Essentially, if you cram all these adults and youth through an over-worked court, and insufficiently funded system to monitor them, then you have to convict more and send more to prison. There, at least, they can be watched, for a time.

Is our Governor, and are our State Legislators, really looking out for our best interest? Or are they more consistently promoting more police, tougher laws, and more prisons to seem “tough” on crime, but not giving us the resources to do more than just imprison, but restore people back to life in our community?

Is this really the best policy and practice for fighting crime in our County (not to mention State)?

According to Peter Slevin, a writer for the Washington Post,

adult and youth incarceration facilities cost the U.S. and its taxpayers \$25 billion dollars annually. This equates to an annual cost of \$20,000 per inmate bed (“The High Cost of Life After Prison,” reprint in Modesto Bee, April 30th, 2000).

He relates that, “U.S. Justice Department figures reveal that 62% of state inmates arrested will be back in on new charges within three years, nearly 50% will be convicted, and 41% will land themselves back in jail.”

Interestingly, even though crime rates have reportedly decreased in the last few years, the number of offenders re-offending and going back to jail has actually increased 54% since 1990.

So while experts are saying state and national crime rates are decreasing, we’re imprisoning more, and being tougher on existing criminals, and actually putting more into prison than we ever have. Are such “corrective” policies and practices really working for us?

According to Mr. Noll, “Where we are being led is down a path that will morally and fiscally bankrupt us in the future.”

As Mr. Noll shared with me, “Even if we could add more judges, we will simply be reinforcing the false idea that punishment (hurt for hurt) makes things right for the victim, changes the offender, and keeps these kind of things from happening again in the future.”

Please see “Prison Justice”, back

Save These Dates!

**VORP will be holding it's
Summer Volunteer Mediator**

Training on:

June 13, 16 & 17

**Tuesday & Friday: 6:30 PM—
9:30PM**

Saturday: 8:30 AM—11:30AM

**Call VORP at 559.291.1120 to
register today!**

"Prison Justice", continued

There is another way. It's called 'Restorative Justice'. A Restorative Justice system would seek to broaden the funnel. The net effect would be to lessen the pressure on our judges, courtroom officers, and our probation and parole officers who attempt to manage and serve all these offenders. How? By diverting offenders out of the traditional justice pathways.

What Mr. Noll is suggesting that, "Before matters have to come before the court, church and community-based mediation services could receive referrals through neighborhood justice sites, school sites, police referrals, along with existing probation and criminal justice system referrals."

As always, if these mediations yield un-kept agreements, parties would continue to move through more traditional court and probation services. Fewer offenders would have to be

managed by the system, victims would be involved earlier in the justice process, and community agencies and services could be invited, and even funded to support these parties throughout the entire justice process.

This is a total reorientation in the way we think and do justice. And it would save our taxpayers, and our government, billions of dollars by not punishing people with prisons. With the community's support and involvement, 'justice' that restores can strengthen our existing criminal justice system.

Let's make our priority restoring people, not imprisoning them. This is doing justice!

What might this look like?

SUFFICIENT POLICE FIRM BUT FAIR LAWS

Add Judicial Offices and Increase
Funding and Referrals to Supportive
Church & Community-Based Programs

COURTROOM JUSTICE "Broaden the Funnel"

Divert Earmarked Prison Building Funds into
Church, Community & Social Service Programs

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS & SERVICES

The goal is to invite community members, and victims and offenders of crime in our community, to have an opportunity to make things right between themselves, before further justice system intervention is deemed absolutely necessary

Volunteers, Staff Support & Staff

* Our VORP Volunteer Community Mediators

* Oasis (Older Adult Social Services) —
Newsletter Preparation

* Karen Giese — Newsletter Publishing/Editing

* John Wiens — Finance/Reparations Manager

* Corine Ross, Karen Giese, Theresa Lovelace, Chad Pinther and Kimberly Stauble —
Staff & Office Support

VORP serves victims, offenders of juvenile crime, and their community, by providing non-fee mediation services. We are supported largely by churches and private individuals, and by a grant with the County.

We service largely property related offenses, and non-life threatening assaults. We receive referrals at many points throughout the criminal justice system (informal, formal, pre-sentencing and post-incarceration referrals).

Victims receive our mediation services, and referrals to other supportive programs, as needed. 1st and 2nd time offenders receive a way to move up and eventually out of the justice system, instead of a way down into the prison system. It starts with taking responsibility for their offense.

Participation is always voluntary for all participants. The focus is always to provide an opportunity for the offender to make things as right as possible both for what happened and for the future, and for each the victim, the offender and our community to work on specific agreements that build peace with one another.

We find that the majority of victims and offenders who work with VORP prefer to find their own best way for dealing with crime, rather than having the court and probation make their decisions for them. Victims especially like the confidence in knowing the court is backing up these agreements.

VORP has been doing this since 1983.

Individuals, Churches & Corporations

Won't You Contribute To VORP Today?

Make a worthwhile investment in your community. Put your dollars to work "to help make things right" in our community for those hurt by crime.

The summer months are slower for us. Your contributions will see us through this summer. They will also help us to add a needed Case Manager to our Staff.

THANK YOU!

FRESNO

www.vorp.org

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A Monthly Newsletter of the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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