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Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program

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Restorative Justice brings victims, offenders and the community together to search for solutions and reconciliation. SLV- VORP offers the opportunity for young offenders and their victims to meet with trained, volunteer mediators from the community to discuss the offense and "make things right." VORP also assists schools in developing conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, and other restorative alternatives to suspension.

WINTER

NEWSLETTER

2002

TALES FROM THE TABLE

VORP was recently involved in the mediation of an arson case. It represents the largest restitution claim with which we have been involved so far. Loss to both the building and the contents was extensive – in the many thousands - and not recoverable under insurance. Because of the young age of the youth involved and the tremendous damage incurred by the building owner, the court referred the case to VORP in the hopes that some agreeable and realistic plan could be found to bring closure to the case. The goal was to find a framework that represented sufficient accountability to the victims for the wrong-doing, yet did not totally overwhelm the youth and their families financially.

As the dialogue proceeded over a period of several weeks, both the families and the victims expressed the desire that the youth themselves earn at least some responsible percentage of the share of damages that each family agreed to pay. A fairly long pay-out period was set, to encourage this direct participation by the offenders – and not just their parents. As various options were explored, everyone at the table became aware of our common dilemma: there are virtually no opportunities for employment for youth in our Valley, especially those under 16. Unless a young person has skills to use in a family-owned business, the choices even for an enterprising young teen are sorely limited. The occasional yard care or babysitting is simply not sufficient for youth facing restitution orders in the juvenile court.

This reality represents a barrier for youth who have made a mistake and sincerely want to "make right" the wrong they have committed. Clearly, it also represents a loss for victims who must wait – often with little or no result – to have their damages repaid. One of the strengths of the VORP process is that restitution agreements can be made directly between victims and offenders. National research has consistently shown that restitution agreed in this fashion is much more likely to be paid and paid on time, than damages set and ordered by a court. But especially for the growing number of younger teens involved in juvenile court, intent is not enough. We must continue to search together for ways to structure meaningful work for youth, so that they can earn a second chance to become productive members of our communities. And so their victims can be made as whole as possible.

"If crime is a wound, justice should be about healing."

–Dan Van Ness, Justice Fellowship

"Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

VORP CALENDAR

- TRAINING FOR NEW VOLUNTEER MEDIATORS—
FEBRUARY 15 & 16, 2002
(see registration form included)
 - 3rd Annual Valley Teen Mediator Summit –1st week in March

SLV VORP SUPPORTERS

- Please add me to the mailing list for the next mediator training
- I am enclosing a tax deductible contribution for \$ _____
- I am enclosing the name & phone # of a church or civic organization that may be interested in a presentation about VORP

SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund



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VIDEO CREW VISITS VORP

In early December, VORP had the unexpected opportunity to host a national video crew from Georgia for a day. The crew was producing a video for youth on restorative justice. They were looking for examples of projects underway in local communities that involve youth and demonstrate the practical use of restorative principles to improve lives. Through the “somebody who knows somebody who heard something” grapevine, the San Luis Valley was chosen as one of just three film sites around the country. A snowy, but fun day was spent driving the crew around to visit a few of VORP’s many school program contacts. Included in the filming were the Ortega Expelled Student Program, Centennial High School peer leadership team and mariachi musicians, Centauri peer helpers, and --of course -- the VORP office! Since the video project is sponsored by the national Methodist denomination, we also spent time with pastor Brenda Lear and lay leader Theresa Rudder from the Alamosa Methodist church – one of many local churches who have supported our work and hosted our trainings over the years. For more information on the video, which will be released in February, contact our office at 719-589-5255.

UPDATES

- VORP held a volunteer mediator get-together in late November. Following a soup and salad supper prepared by Milagros, advanced training was held on tips for writing good mediation agreements. End-of-the-year gifts were also given to recognize the work of these volunteers.
- On Jan. 17, VORP held its Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition dinner. As usual, the board provided a scrumptious spread for our mediators. The program included a preview of a new video documentary, “Journey to Forgiveness.” The video includes several stories of persons recovering from traumatic loss, including some who have been involved in face-to-face reconciliation processes similar to VORP. The video is available for loan through the VORP office. Long-time board members Janet Wagner and Ben Gibbons were recognized for their service, as their terms end. Welcomed to the board were new members Theresa Rudder, Savannah Spillers, and Darlene Powell. The Mediator –of-the-Year award was given to Otto Espinoza, Jr.



San Luis Valley Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program Mediation Training

SLV-VORP is pleased to offer another training for volunteer mediators. This "hands on" training will cover the basic tenets of victim-offender mediation and explore personal skills when dealing with conflict. Role playing and demonstrations will be used. Space is limited and registrations are taken on a first-come, first-serve basis. Persons 16 and older from throughout the Valley are invited (bi-lingual skills are a plus). Participants asked to consider further involvement with the VORP program as a volunteer. For more information, call Paula at (719) 589-5255.

Dates/Times:

Friday, February 15, 2002

2 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Sat., February 16, 2002

9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

(we ask that you attend the entire training)

Location:

Fireplace room at Sacred Heart Church,
Alamosa (across from Courthouse on 4th St.)

Cost:

\$35 Registration Fee (this includes
3 light meals and training manual).

Scholarships available.

Trainers:

Alice Price and Paula Medina

***Special Thanks to Sacred Heart Church
for their facilities***

Program philosophy: SLV Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program is a community-based organization serving offenders and victims of youthful crime in the Valley. The VORP model brings offenders and victims together to search for solutions and reconciliation. SLV-VORP offers the opportunity for young offenders and their victims to meet with trained, volunteer mediators from the community to discuss the offense and "make things right." VORP also assists schools in developing conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, and other restorative alternatives to suspension.

REGISTRATION FORM

_____ Please register me for the training on February 15 & 16, 2002.

_____ I have enclosed my registration fee of \$35.00.

_____ I will not be able to attend this training but am interested in future trainings.

Name: _____ Phone #: (Day) _____ (Eve.) _____

Address: _____

RETURN TO SLV-VORP, P.O. BOX 1775, ALAMOSA, CO 81101.

Call (719) 589-5255 in advance for child care, continuing education information