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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

PO Box 1775, Alamosa, CO 81101 (719) 589-5255

SUMMER/FALL

NEWSLETTER

2003

Program Philosophy

SLV Victim-Offender Reconciliation is a community based organization serving offenders and victims of youthful crime in the San Luis Valley. The VORP model brings offenders and victims together for a face-to-face meeting to discuss the personal nature of the offense and to negotiate compensation for the victim. Participation is voluntary. Trained volunteers from the community conduct the mediation after intake sessions with everyone involved. Their role is to facilitate communication, not to impose a settlement. SLV-VORP works with property crimes, as well as assault/harassment cases.

SLV VORP NEWS

It has been too many months since we last published a VORP newsletter or updated our website. But who's counting? It is not that we haven't had good intentions or things to write about! To the contrary, we've had an incredibly busy and rewarding past year. The scramble to keep our budget afloat in hard times has not dampened our spirits. As public funds & services dry up, we see even more acutely the importance of sustaining volunteer-based community services for youth and families.

In order to prioritize staff time and save costs, we have decided to cut back our newsletter from four to two issues a year. Smaller special mailings will be used in between, for more timely announcements of upcoming trainings and events. To bridge the communication gap, here are some highlights from recent months:

- March '03 – 4th Annual Teen Mediator Summit at Adams State College. The theme was "Journey to a Hate-Free Millennium." The morning of skill-building activities and the afternoon keynote speakers emphasized that this journey begins with each of us, from childhood on, in our everyday settings. (see related reflection by our college intern)
- Spring and Fall refresher trainings for peer mediation programs at area schools. This has included 7 high schools and 3 middle schools since June.
- On-going training and consultation with Alamosa School District on restorative discipline principles and models.

- Over 40 victim-offender mediation referrals from various points in the juvenile justice system, as well as from schools and other community partners. This included our first juvenile parole case, involving re-entry of a young man to the community after serving a two-year felony sentence.
- Assistance with collecting restitution contracts for victims in an amount over \$30,000.
- Sponsorship of three well-attended community workshops: "Gender-Specific Treatment for At-Risk Adolescent Girls" (June); "Circle Processes for Dialogue and Problem-solving" (Sept.); and "Engaging Faith Communities in Restorative Justice Initiatives" (Oct.).

As of September '03, we have also launched our newest program, Parent-Teen Mediation. Initially, this will be a one-year pilot project, with agency-to-agency referrals only. Referral protocol have gone out to community partners such as school counselors, churches, and other family - and youth-serving organizations. We are pleased to have Carrie Heltzel, an experienced Parent-Teen mediator, coordinate and help evaluate the first year of this new endeavor. She will be assisted by a dedicated core of volunteer mediators, who have received advanced training for this new role. Our target goal was to mediate with at least 12 families during the year, to assist with the normal range of "bumps in the road" related to adolescent development. One month out, we already have 5 open referrals!

-Alice Price, Executive Director



Reflections on the Teen Mediator Summit



In March '03, I was fortunate enough to participate in the Teen Mediator Summit. As a college intern with VORP, I visited with and observed the 70 or so high school mediators throughout the day. They represented the following high school mediation teams: Alamosa, Antonito, Centauri, Centennial, Center, Monte Vista, and Sargent. Afterwards, I also summarized their written comments about the atmosphere at their schools and on the event itself.



I appreciated the students' honesty and straightforward responses regarding the theme - stereotyping, intolerance and hatred. There was not one school that did not report barriers of some type that tend to separate or segregate students. Race, ethnicity, and religion were all mentioned. Language was also reported to be a barrier, especially in the areas where migrant families reside. In some smaller towns, new students are treated as "outsiders," which may extend from a cool welcome to outright harassment. In many instances, the students identified these barriers or targets for harassment may involve things that people cannot change, for example, race or gender.



No place is without conflict, including schools. The good news is that students who serve Valley high schools as peer mediators and counselors are getting their names out there and are making a difference in day-to-day relationships. Over time, this impacts the overall atmosphere of acceptance in their schools and communities. As a former high school mediator myself and a college Resident Assistant, I know how important it is to support youth who volunteer their time to help bring about healthier peer relationships and break down the barriers separating teens. I hope that VORP can continue to educate and support students on the many positive ways of dealing with conflict. And to the teen mediators, I say, "KEEP IT UP!"



-Nicole Speechley, VORP Intern



HOLIDAY ALERT: If you live or work in the vicinity, please join us for our annual holiday open house in December.
(Details on back page)

HOW YOU CAN HELP

_____ I AM ENCLOSING A TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTION FOR \$_____.

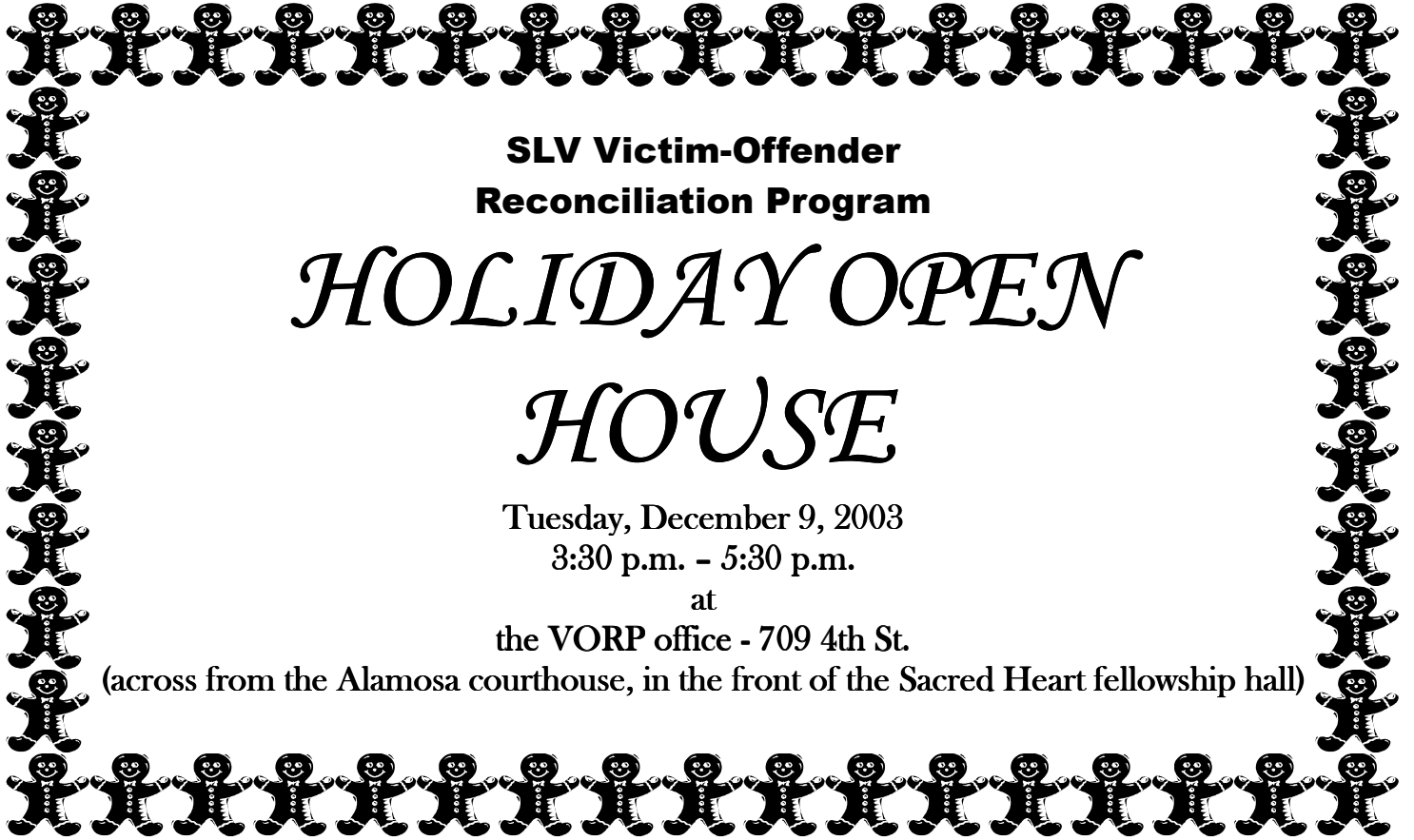
_____ I AM ENCLOSING THE NAME & PHONE # OF A CHURCH OR CIVIC ORGANIZATION THAT MAY BE INTERESTED IN A PRESENTATION ABOUT VORP PROGRAMS.

_____ IF YOU WORK FOR A STATE OFFICE, PARTICIPATE IN THE COLORADO COMBINED CAMPAIGN, FOR WHICH VORP IS A RECOGNIZED CHARITY.

_____ IF YOU HAVE AN ACCOUNT AT SLV FEDERAL, STOP BY AFTER THANKSGIVING AND SELECT "SLV VORP" AS A "CUSTOMER'S CHOICE" CHARITY.

“If in our daily life we can smile, if we can be peaceful and happy—not only we, but all the members of our families will profit from it.....The world around us will also benefit from it. That is the most basic kind of peace work.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh



**SLV Victim-Offender
Reconciliation Program**

*HOLIDAY OPEN
HOUSE*

Tuesday, December 9, 2003
3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

at
the VORP office - 709 4th St.

(across from the Alamosa courthouse, in the front of the Sacred Heart fellowship hall)

SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund



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