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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.

**NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER 2000**

**“May the Circle Be Unbroken....”**

This familiar refrain stirred quietly in my head as I drove home after a workshop on peacemaking in rural communities. Our staff hosted the workshop as part of the annual CreNet conference in Albuquerque in September. CreNet is the Conflict Resolution in Education Network, representing education and mediation professionals from around North America and beyond. Seven high school mediators from San Luis joined us at the conference and co-presented the workshop with us.

The two days we spent together at the conference, prior to our workshop, had been mixed. For rural folks, meetings in large conference centers, with 1500+ attendees, are not our daily fare. It was sometimes hard to know what presenters - mostly adults, or youth from Eastern urban settings – meant by their lingo, and how their experiences applied to our own setting. Rooms were overcrowded, presenters spoke from stages or behind a table or podium. Lots of time was spent in self-congratulatory reviews of speakers’ credentials. Our Valley contingent felt overwhelmed and alienated at points.

So we arrived at our own session with a growing commitment to offer something meaningful to both us and our audience. The teens, in their wisdom, set the ground rules: 1) no more than 25 people; 2) start with a fun game; 3) no podium or speakers’ table; 4) an open circle of chairs, with presenters and audience inter-mixed; 5) no credentials; 6) “just trust us.” (cont. on Page 3)

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- ★ Updates & Events:**
- **The Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition Dinner** will be Thursday evening, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, in the Fireplace Room at Sacred Heart Church.
  - The next **introductory training for volunteer community mediators** will be Feb. 9-10, 2001 in Alamosa. This training is open to those who are exploring volunteer work with VORP, as well as those who simply wish to gain personal skills for use in other settings. See enclosed flyer for details, or call Paula Medina at 719-589-5255.
  - **Pat Herrera**, our board treasurer, was recently honored as an outstanding volunteer in the non-profit community. The award was made at the StarShine Festival, following his nomination by the VORP staff. Congratulations, Pat.
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Moffat & Alamosa High School Peer Mediators demonstrate their incredible teamwork!



**SLV—VORP’s school Initiative has trained student mediators from Moffat, Centennial, Alamosa, Center and Centauri High Schools so far this Fall/Winter. VORP has also worked on healthy conflict skills with families in the Adelante Transitional Housing Program and with “Building Bridges”, a group of 10-12 year old girls at the Monte Vista Boys & Girls Club. Stay**

**Centennial High School  
Peer Mediators & trainees  
pictured here (from top of  
stairs to bottom): Gilbert  
Apodaca, Mariano  
Maldonado, Santiago  
Sandoval, Dennis Uledena,  
Matthew Martinez, Jerry  
Vigil, Joe Green, Aaron  
Cordova, Erica Martinez,  
Marilyn Wilbur (sponsor),  
Vanessa Capestany and  
Cris Ruybal.**

**(Circle be Unbroken) Cont. from page 1**

With these ground rules in place, the “magic” of good process could begin. The teens did an awesome job of representing their community and our Valley with from –the-heart stories. And the adult audience not only had fun, but also learned the nitty-gritty of day-to-day opportunities and challenges of peacemaking initiatives in rural schools, from on-the ground “experts.”

Two images are embodied in this experience for me: 1) passing the torch, and 2) practicing what we preach, images which underlie that of the “unbroken circle.”

Passing the Torch : Unanticipated by me, the workshop circle in Albuquerque included two trainers who taught my first mediation class almost 20 years ago. One of them is also mother to Ryan Golten, our School Program coordinator and a gifted young trainer herself. As Ryan and I benefit each day from our mutual mentoring relationship, this serendipitous tie we share with her mother-mentor adds a rich foundation. Witnessing the moving presentation of the young teens whom Ryan and I, in turn, trained last year at Centennial was a living reminder of the power of passing the torch. We are constantly called to mentor the rising generation of peacemakers, to keep the circle open and growing.

**(Circle Unbroken cont.)**

Practicing What We Preach: The ground rules set by the teens were powerful antidotes to what we had witnessed the prior two days. Their sense of good process was both profound and obvious. They knew intuitively (and perhaps from some of what we have modeled with them?) what all good facilitators know about what people need and deserve in order to tell their stories. And they took it upon themselves to insist to the conference-assigned room host, translator, and even us, that the format was the bottom–line: no ground rules, no youth presentation. It took a bit for some of us “old hands” to really get it – and more importantly, to trust and go with it. It was a great reminder to practice what we preach. Thanks, Centennial mediators. And welcome to the circle....—Alice Price

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Center Peer Mediators demonstrate a mock mediation (from right to left: Robert Casados, Noah Vargas, Kelly Robinson, Brad Myers)

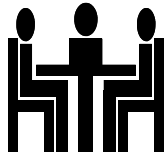


# HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

VORP staff and board will host a holiday open house on Thursday, Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>, from 3:30 – 5:30 p.m. The food and festivities will be at the VORP office, located in the southeast corner of the Sacred Heart Church gym building in Alamosa. **All are invited.**

SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund

San Luis Valley



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