

# VORP News

Volume 22, Issue 2, March 2004

## *From the Administrator*

Spring is definitely coming to the VORP office. The way we can tell is by the way staff and student volunteer mediators are making plans to leave us. Two of our regular staff members, Helmine Bigler and Kartika Suwandi, plan to move on at the end of the semester, which runs through April. We have trained over 60 FPU students as mediators during this school year, and many of them will also be moving on. Please plan to join us April 30 for a hail and farewell event honoring our mediators and saying goodbye to those who will be leaving us.

Statistics showing how victims and offenders evaluate their VORP experience are available on our website at long last. Visit <http://vorp.org/stats.shtml> to see these very gratifying charts. That page also shows a chart of our case referrals from 1983-2003. That news is not so good, showing a steady decline over the last several years. We are hopeful that initiatives now under way with the Probation Department and District Attorney will change that trend. The comparison of high victim and offender satisfaction with low numbers of case referrals is striking. Help us spread the word about VORP!

*Duane Ruth-Heffelbower*

## **Focus Groups on VORP and Restorative Justice**

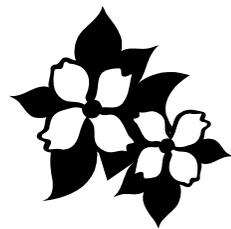
*By Jack Dison*

Since October 2003, the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at Fresno Pacific University has been inviting persons from Fresno County to participate in focus groups designed to solicit opinions, comments, and criticisms of current and future applications of restorative justice in the county's criminal justice system. Participants in the focus groups were asked what they thought of VORP and what suggestions they might have for improving it. Among those who knew of VORP the responses were consistently positive. One young man who had just completed the VORP program as an offender commented "VORP is one of the best things that could have happened to me. Without it I would probably be locked up somewhere. Instead I am staying out of trouble. I am working on a temporary job now and I have leads for a permanent job." One victim pointed out that "VORP gave me a chance to become

## **Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.**

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Spring is Coming!



involved in making decisions and expressing how this whole matter had an impact on my life. We reached an agreement that everyone could live with, and more importantly, they (offenders) did what they agreed to do... I felt that I had a part in making a difference in person's lives rather than just be another victim statistic." Another person commented that VORP and restorative justice are great ideas, but they need to become more widely known and practiced. "This needs to be sold. I think if more people knew about it they would support it (VORP) and it could become more of a mainstream part of the system. We need to get the word out."

Several participants noted that VORP provides a much needed alternative to the current system. One woman pointed out that punishing persons by incarcerating them is not only expensive, but it rarely helps anyone. "Often they come back even worse. They come back broken and bitter persons who have little reason to move away from criminal activity."

One focus group participant knew nothing of VORP or restorative justice before he came to the focus group meeting. His very positive response is reflected in his comments: "Programs like these are very much needed to get past harms and to get to closure. Often there are gaping wounds that need healing. Persons involved in criminal events have to live with a massive rock on their shoulders... How could anyone not support a program like this? It makes so much sense!"

A few suggestions were offered for improving VORP. One was that it could be improved by having more staff and resources, particularly for following up on agreements. Several persons mentioned how important it was in cases they were aware of to have monitoring, support, and follow up on agreements.

Some suggested that it would be better to have more cases sent to VORP. Others suggested that it might be better to expand mediation sessions to include more family, community members, and support people,

### **2004 Volunteer Mediator Training**

**March 5-6**

**April 16-17**

**June 4-5**

**September 10-11**

**October 8-9**

**November 12-13**

**Friday 6:30pm -9:30pm Saturday 8:30am -3:30pm**

***Call our office to reserve dates: 455-9803.***

particularly those with close bonds to offenders. Some suggested that it would be good to use VORP for more adult cases.

Focus groups are continuing through the spring of 2004. Persons interested in participating in a focus group are urged to contact Jack Dison at Fresno Pacific University's Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, email: jed2@fpu.edu, phone: 559-455-5842.

## Introducing our Interns

By Megan Thompson

VORP would like to welcome our new interns – Jessica Fritsch and Joe Montanez. Jessica is a senior communications major at Fresno State, but ended up at VORP because she's completing a certificate in Peace and Conflict Studies, under the direction of VORP board member Dr. Arthur Wint. Jessica divides her time between school, working at VORP and serving as a High School and College Ministry intern at Fresno First Baptist Church. While at VORP, she hopes to learn how to provide support to youth as they deal with conflict in their lives.

Joe is a senior at Fresno Pacific University in the social work department. After graduation, Joe plans

to either attend law school or get his masters degree in social work; with the long-term goal of opening adult halfway houses. VORP is helping Joe gain experience working with people who are making their way through the legal system. Joe sees the need to address societal causes of crime, and not solely focus on offenders. Joe is conducting a telephone survey of VORP mediators, in an effort to discover why some offenders and victims choose not to participate with VORP. So, mediators, you should be expecting a call from Joe in the near future.

We are very glad to have both Jessica and Joe serving with VORP. They add an extra dose of humor and inspiration to our office.

### MEDIATORS AND DONORS

YOU ARE INVITED TO A MEDIATOR, DONOR  
AND STAFF APPRECIATION DINNER.

FRIDAY, APRIL 30TH, 2004 AT 6:30 PM

AT MENNONITE BROTHERS BIBLICAL SEMINARY  
(ON THE CORNER OF BUTLER AND CHESTNUT)

PLEASE R.S.V.P. BY APRIL 19

CALL 455-9803 OR EMAIL

VORP\_FRESNO@JUNO.COM

#### VORP Board Members

Michael Blue, Chair    Dave Purvis, Secretary/Treasurer  
Eleanor Richards    Arthur Wint  
Faith Young    Jose Chaparro

#### VORP Staff

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, Administrator  
Johnny Phouthachack, Agreement Manager  
Helmene Bigler, Mediation Manager  
Megan Thompson, Mediation Manager  
Barry Guenther, Finance Manager  
Kartika Suwandi, Assistant Finance Manager

### WANTED: Upgraded Computers

Currently VORP is running its office on barely functioning Windows 98 computers. If you could donate a computer running Windows 2000 or XP, or any other accessories, please contact our office at 455-9803 or email us at vorp\_fresno@juno.com.



Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
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Clovis, CA 93612  
Permit # 376

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