

VORP News

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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

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From the Administrator

This past month the American Society of Victimology had its symposium in Fresno. I presented research on refusals of the VORP process and wound up being elected to the board. VORP volunteer Jill Schellenberg also presented, in her case on community attitudes toward restorative justice. You can check out both papers on the Center for Peacemaking web site <http://peace.fresno.edu/docs>.

One of VORP's historic problems has been the perception of victim groups that we are soft on crime. Those of you who have handled VORP cases know that is not true, but the perception persists. One of the reasons for becoming involved with the ASV is to help dispel that misperception. Last year I was the only presenter on restorative justice. This year there were three such presentations, so we are making some headway.

The field of Victimology is multidisciplinary, with people coming at the topic from many different perspectives. It is good to have the restorative lens represented.

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower



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* **Volunteer Mediator Training** *
* *
* June 10 & 11* October 14 & 15 *
* September 9 & 10 November 11 & 12 *
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* Friday 6:30 pm - 9:30 pm *
* Saturday 8:30 am - 3:30 pm *
* *
* *Call our office to reserve a spot: 455-9803.* *
* *
* *A free refresher training will be held on Saturday June 11 *
* (8:30 am-3:30 pm) for anyone who has been trained in the *
* past and would consider taking cases again. *
* *
* Please consider becoming a volunteer mediator. We have *
* A LOT OF CASES and we need people to mediate them! *
* *

A Success Story

by Hien Vu

My first-hand experiences of facilitating a VORP (Victim Offender Reconciliation Program) case mediation confirmed my interest in pursuing my study in peacemaking and conflict studies at Peacemaking Center, Fresno Pacific University.

The case was referred to VORP by the Fresno county Juvenile court. A teenager was convicted of taking property from somebody's house. The offender was invited to the victim's house for a party by a house sitter while the victims were out of town on vacation. Once coming back home from vacation, the victims discovered several items missing.

When I had the individual meeting with the offender and his parents, at their house, his parents were cooperative. However, the offender did not want to meet with the victims. He just wanted to know how much the victim wanted him to pay for the stolen item. He said he did not want to meet with the victims because he felt they would look down on him. I called the offender again after a few days and talked with his mother. I told her that it was important for her son to meet with the victim for mediation, to show his accountability for what he had done and to work out an agreement. The offender and his parents agreed to attend the mediation.

Next I had an individual meeting with the victims. The couple was still angry with the offender and worried that the offenders will keep coming to their house to steal again or do something harmful to them. Even so, they were willing to meet with the offender. The wife seemed ready to question and give the offender a hard time. I was worried that her anger would escalate when she met with the offender.

In the mediation, a surprising event occurred: there was a moment of expressed anger, and raised voices. ("It is a natural part of a mediation," Johnny Phouthachack, the VORP Agreement Manager, who was my co-mediator in this case told me after the meeting!). Quickly however, the tension was soon replaced by better anger management, apologies, understanding and sympathy. After the victims showed their forgiveness and constructive intention for the offender's future, the atmosphere was switched from tense to emotional. The offender expressed his remorse and committed to pay the victim for the lost items and to participate in a

Continued on page 2

community service project recommended by the victim (the wife): mentoring youth in the VORP program. The offender's goal will be to change another youth's life by mentoring and sharing his own experiences. The offender and his father admitted that youth counseling failed him in the past. But mediation worked because they had the opportunity to listen to each other and together they find the best solution to their conflict. The offender said to the victim "no counselor is as good as this lady here!" It was an emotional moment of hugs between the offender and the victims and between the offender's parents and the victims. The offender's parents' shed tears when they saw the turning point in their son's life. The victim shed tears when she heard the offender promise to be a better person in

Upcoming VORP Benefit

Wallace Prowell, a VORP supporter, all the way from Oregon, has offered to present a biblical character monologue program to benefit VORP. He will be at Mennonite Community Church (Willow and Olive in Fresno) for the 10:45 am service on Sunday, May 29. An offering will be taken for VORP. Please join us!

the future and she said "I believe that God has a purpose when he let you come to my life." I felt touched and tried hard to hold back my tears of joy (mediator does not cry in the mediation meeting!) Here came the beauty of mediation, the fruits of those who chose the right way to restore peace and justice for themselves and for the community.

I am grateful to those who make VORP and the Center for Peacemaking available. With this mediation experience, I am encouraged as I explore more about peacemaking and conflict studies.

Hien Vu is a graduate student at the Fresno Pacific University Center for Peacemaking and Conflict studies, from Vietnam.

Lamps of Love

*O Lord, take my ears and hear through them,
take my hands and use them,
take my lips and speak through them,
take my eyes and smile through them,
take my heart and mind and will,
and use them as lamps of love,
by which your light may shine in all
the darkness of this suffering world.*

-Anonymous

CALLING ALL MEDIATORS: WE HAVE CASES COMING OUT OUR EARS, BUT NOT ENOUGH MEDIATORS TO TAKE THEM. PLEASE STOP BY THE OFFICE TO PICK UP A CASE OR SIGN UP FOR THE REFRESHER TRAINING JUNE 11, 8:30-3:30.

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