

VORP News

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

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Administrator's Corner

The first week of July is a time for the celebration of freedom in both Canada and the United States, and that makes it a good time to think about what freedom really is. This morning the sermon at my church was taken from Micah 4, the well know passage that includes "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid;" (NRSV)

This description of freedom is found in the Hebrew word shalom, which is a central understanding of what restorative justice is about. Living life without want or fear, as Micah describes it, is a good definition of freedom. VORP has been showing the way to freedom for 25 years. One of victims' central needs is an answer to the question: "will they be back to hurt me again?" That fear is one of the big reasons crime victims find healing so elusive. The only person who can put their mind at rest is the offender. The criminal justice system has no way to facilitate that dialogue, and that is where VORP comes in.

Offenders are also fearful. "What will happen to me? Will the victim make unreasonable demands for restitution? How will I be punished?" Those fears are also put to rest through victim offender dialogue.

VORP is in the freedom business by helping to restore shalom to peoples lives.

Persistence in the Face of Frustration

Bill Simon

The first time I heard the name 'VORP' was in 1991 when we moved into our present home. The man we bought the house from continued to get mail at our address for a few years, including a monthly mailing from VORP. I thought that was a strange name but noticed that it stood for Victim Offender Reconciliation Program. That sounded intriguing. Over the years I read a couple articles about VORP in the Fresno Bee and thought it would be a good program to get involved in - some day. Last summer Tony Redfern came to my church seeking volunteers for the VORP program so I said I was 'interested', very non-committal. Next thing I know, I've signed up for training in September but had to cancel. So I signed up for a training session in November but VORP had to cancel. Finally, this past January I got my training and received my first case.

(Continued in next column)

It was a simple case, just some minor graffiti. The only unique thing was that the offenders got caught. Well, two got caught and one got away. And three different businesses were the victims. I met with the first offender, and I was really impressed by his sincerity and resolve to improve his life. The second offender was nowhere to be found. Apparently he continued to get in trouble and moved 'far way'.

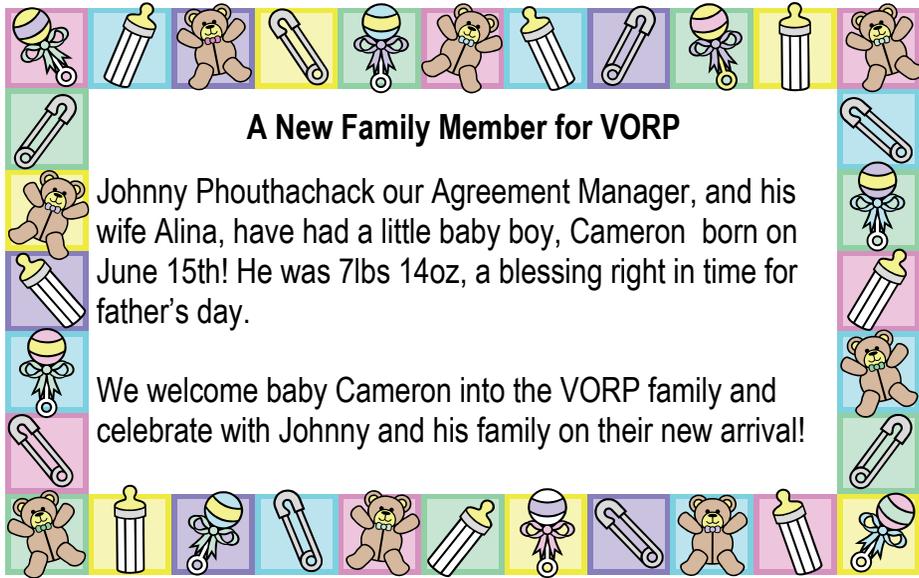
I next moved on to the victims. The first victim was very interested and willing to do whatever would help a juvenile improve his life. The second victim was a little hesitant because he was so busy and was hit by graffiti monthly. But he agreed to meet with the other victims and the offender if he could help a young man reform his life. The third victim was so suspicious that the police department hadn't even managed to get the victim's phone number. I could never hook up with victim three so we moved on to the Victim-Offender Meeting with one of three offenders and two of three victims.

At that point, I discovered that my sincere, resolute offender was a con artist who would say whatever he thought you wanted to hear but was unlikely to follow through. One hour before the meeting I called him to make sure he was coming. He had several reasons why he couldn't come. I made a quick call to Johnny at the VORP office and he made a quick call to the probation department and the offender was the first one to arrive at the meeting! The hesitant victim called and said he was so mad that he didn't want to come. Seems someone had really hit his business hard a day earlier, doing \$2000 worth of damage. Finally, he decided to come in hopes that he could help one kid. The moral is: never give up.

The meeting was highly successful. The tagging at the businesses was minor and the victims didn't feel the need of restitution so I couldn't imagine what agreement we could reach. The victims both agreed that all they wanted was the assurance that the offender was straightening out his life. The offender offered to send a copy of his grades and a letter detailing his progress to the victims once a month via the VORP office.

Now I have started my second case and discovered that a con artist isn't so bad. At least the con artist thinks about what is acceptable behavior, and there is hope that he will behave acceptably in the future. The offender in my second case is much more challenging. Nothing is a big deal. There's nothing to be sorry about. The only suffering as a consequence of the crime has been to his mother's wallet, not to him. I'm getting really excited about this case. There's got to be a way to positively impact this offender, and I'll find it!

Bill Simon is married with four children. He retired last September after 27 years at PG&E. Since retirement he has kept busy as a VORP volunteer, President of Peace Fresno, Chair of Greater Fresno Area Chapter of ACLU of northern California, and spends much less time on yard work than his wife thinks is needed.

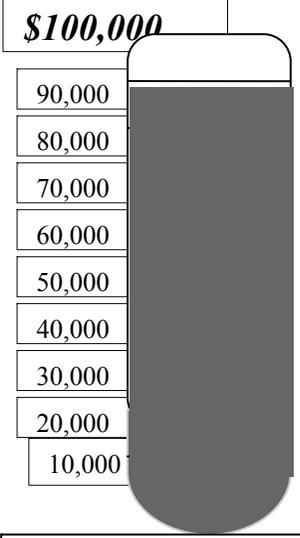


A New Family Member for VORP

Johnny Phouthachack our Agreement Manager, and his wife Alina, have had a little baby boy, Cameron born on June 15th! He was 7lbs 14oz, a blessing right in time for father's day.

We welcome baby Cameron into the VORP family and celebrate with Johnny and his family on their new arrival!

Growing VORP



\$ 88,690.00
Matching Grant
June 2007

WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

START WITH ONE LIFE.

Become a VORP Volunteer Mediator. Call our office for dates and locations for training during the summer.
 (559) 455-9803

Get to know our new intern...

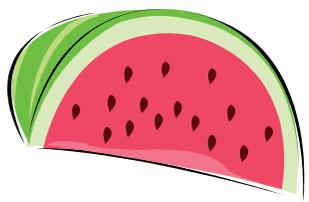
My name is Keith Page and I am a senior at California State University, Fresno. I am originally from the "City of Championships" Inglewood, California former home of the Los Angeles Lakers. I am currently attending California State University, Fresno to study Criminology with an emphasis in Victimology. Also I am of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated Gamma Xi chapter. My career goals are to become a victim service advocate and an attorney. By achieving these career goals I will be living my childhood dream of helping people in the time of need and ensure that everyone is treated equal. I currently work here at VORP as an intern. By working as an intern at VORP I believe that I am getting the opportunity to help destroy the hostility that criminal acts bring upon victims and offenders within the community. This program by far is one the best ways for offenders to show just how bad they feel about victimizing someone. VORP in my opinion will help juvenile offenders grow into more responsible and productive citizens.

VORP Staff

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Johnny Phouthachack	Agreement Manager
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