

## Victim Offender Reconciliation

Program of the Central Valley, Inc.

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### *Laughter and Mediation— Morgan Crawford & Pamela Cline*

Recently I was speaking with Pam Cline, one of our mediators, about a case she had been working on diligently since February. As in any VORP case there were concerns and questions and as I told Pam I am always willing and able to try to do my best to help all of our mediators complete their cases, and grow in the process. Pam and I decided it would be helpful to have a second mediator on the case. So I sat in on the joint meeting to offer support to Pam who really needed none, because she did such a great job. It was helpful though, as we conducted almost two separate mediations one for the adults and the other for the girls. The offense itself was an assault between two girls who at one time were really close friends. Both families knew the other well and were long time friends.

The mediation did not start the smoothest as the two mothers were not letting the girls share much, and the girls fed off of their mothers' cautiousness and were not too forthcoming in the process. We decided to split the mothers and the daughters up; Pam took the young women and spoke with them about the offense, while I dealt with the monetary aspect of things with the mothers. This was a tremendous help as the mothers quickly figured out a payment plan, and really began to speak with

one another using more positive dialogue, as well as they became more productive in figuring out a solution to the offense. As they spoke a small amount of trust started to grow, and you could see bits and pieces of what their friendship had looked like before the incident. The only real distraction came when we heard a noise coming from the other room, the girls were getting louder, something had happened. As we listened closer it was hard for me to keep my composure as the girls were laughing hysterically through the walls. At that point both of the mothers started to laugh and we reconvened to write and sign the agreement form. I really was thankful Pam allowed me to join her in this case, and I asked her to share in the newsletter as well. The proceeding paragraphs are what she had to say:

"When I was asked by the VORP staff to write about my experience as a volunteer mediator; I was more than happy to do it for them. I want people to know how well the program works and the fulfillment that you receive by helping people to reach their goal of coming to an agreement.

I think that the most fulfilling part of being a VORP volunteer mediator comes when I see that I have helped guide the offender and the victim to come up with their own ideas on how to resolve the problem

at hand. It is my job to throw out ideas and suggestions that they may not be aware of or may not be thinking of to help them in their process of coming to an agreement that everyone can be happy about; being part of this process is very gratifying and rewarding.

I like knowing that through the VORP process, I am helping a juvenile to make better choices for themselves next time around and getting them to take responsibility for their actions. I am helping them stay out of the criminal justice system by showing them that there are really people out there that care about them and their future.

This program not only helps the victim and offender but it is also designed to help better the community. VORP is designed to get our youth to see alternatives to their offense and how it affects not only their life and family; the victim and their family, but also how it affects the community as well. This part is important to all of us to understand and realize the importance that VORP brings to all of us."



### *RJ Conference brings Illumination & Hope - Noelle Daoudian*

The Restorative Justice Conference was a great success, with 150 people in attendance. I had the privilege of presenting two break-out sessions: one on VORP and the other on victims and restorative justice. Howard Zehr, who originally started the first VORP in the US spoke. A few things that he mentioned were that trauma that is unaddressed, keeps coming out in different ways. Thus to have a process in which this trauma can be talked about and dealt with in a healthy way allows for healing and growth for those involved. Also, the idea of shame and not being able to deal with shame associated with crime can affect a person's entire life. Restorative Justice provides a way to manage and remove shame,

and it also provides for a sense of empathy. Some people may say that in order to have Restorative Justice one must have a strong community for it to work, but in reality Restorative Justice creates a strong community as people are reconciled and those who reach out to help are part of that creation of a strong and restorative community.

During the lunch on Friday, we had the honor of hearing a story of reconciliation between a drunk-driver, Joe, and the brother, Derek, of the girl, Amy, who was killed by the drunk-driver. They participated in a mediation process lead by Ron Claassen. The story of Amy who was an active high-school cheerleader was tragically

killed one night by a man with an alcohol addiction. Joe said he did not remember what happened but pleaded no contest and was sentenced to 7 years in prison. While there he committed his life to Christ and heard about VORP. Joe made contact with Ron Claassen and expressed that he would like to meet with Amy's family. Ron met with him and after he was paroled Ron's wife Roxanne and Joe's wife joined for those meetings. Ron made contact with Amy's family and expressed that her offender wanted to meet with them. They resisted the offer until one night the father heard the offender speak on the radio against drunk driving.

(Continued on back)



# New Interns

## Conference Continued

After much deliberation Derek decided that he would like to meet with the offender . He said that he always thought of the offender as a monster, but realized that he was human when they met together. Through this dialogue the two were able to begin the healing process and actually experience the giving and receiving of forgiveness. They now embrace when they see each other and their lives have been radically altered as a result of the meeting. The whole presentation was recorded and will be available for sale. All proceeds will go to drunk driving awareness.

This story is incredible, moving, and full of hope for the future. I believe it beautifully illustrates the power of restorative justice as well as the emotional pain and messiness that sometimes comes with such an encounter. I know I was moved by Derek, Joe and Amy's story and thankful for Joe and Derek's courage to be open and honest with the conference attendees.

\*\*If you would like the DVD of this story told by the victim's brother and the offender recorded during the conference, you can contact the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at (559) 453-3418. Available Soon!

### Gina Falcon

My name is Gina Falcon and I am an intern here at VORP. I am currently attending CSU Fresno and will obtain a degree in victimology. I am in my final semester and cannot wait to begin my career in helping victims. I am working on my first mediation, witnessing the remorse of the offender and the satisfaction of the victim at the end of the mediation was extremely rewarding. I believe in restorative justice and the principles VORP stands for.

### Dan Landa

Hey everyone! My name is Dan Landa and I am one of the interns at the VORP office this 2009 spring semester. I am originally from Santa Rosa, California located an hour north of San Francisco and I am a senior graduating from Fresno State this May with a Bachelors Degree in Criminology with a Victimology option. I have been gaining a lot of useful skills and knowledge while interning here at the VORP office. I know that all these skills will help me strive and be better prepared for a career in the victim services field. The mediations that I have participated in and have sat in on have been a huge help to see how to deal with peoples differences and find a common ground to create a peaceful solution to the problem. I am also a member of the Fresno State Triathlon Club and have been training and competing through the spring semester in local triathlons for Fresno State. The final championship Olympic distance race, "The Wildflower Triathlon" is on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009 at Lake San Antonio near Paso Robles, CA. So wish me luck! Thanks!

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