

# Touching Lives

## An Unexpected Friendship— Noelle Daoudian

VICTIM OFFENDER RECONCILIATION PROGRAM OF THE CENTRAL VALLEY, INC.

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I was recently at a community service fair passing out information about VORP and speaking with potential volunteers. I always enjoy meeting new people and letting them know that something wonderful like VORP is going on in their community. Every other fair I attend I usually end up meeting someone who has gone through our program whether it be a victim or offender. This particular day I met a victim who had gone through the VORP process. I asked her how her experience was and waited for the best. She smiled and said, "Well it was a very interesting experience. It was great but I

don't know if I would want to do it again." I asked her what had happened. She told me, "Well it's a great program, but a weird thing happened, after going through the mediation, I ended up liking the kid! I was definitely not expecting that and I still am not sure what happened. We just met and talked and it still seems strange to me that I ended up liking him." So I asked if she would recommend it to another victim of a similar crime and she quickly said, "O yeah," with a big grin and said, "but I'd warn them that they may end up making an unexpectedly strange friendship!" She then signed up to take the volunteer mediator

training and expressed that she would like to be a volunteer for the program.

It is always so neat to see people who have benefitted from our program excited enough to want to give back to others in the same way. I believe it speaks volumes to the work that all of you, our volunteers, are doing in changing people's lives and bringing reconciliation to the community! Thank you for all of your support, time, and energy, it does make a difference and allows us to reach as many people as possible. If you would like to become a volunteer mediator, call our office today!

## Reconciliation: Not Limited by Language— Daniella Bove

I became involved with this case at the latest of moments. As my luck would have it, the judge decreed that this case of vehicular vandalism would be resolved by a certain date, and that certain date was three days away when the mediator assigned to the case was suddenly unable to keep working on it. To complicate things even more, there was supposedly bad blood between the offender and the victim in the community, the victim was described to me as "difficult" and everyone's primary language was Spanish. It was a slightly stressful situation, to say the least. After cursing my decision to study French in high school, I had the interpreter set up a meeting with the victim at our office and prepared for a challenging meeting.

Language is at once the most frivolous and yet necessary of humanity's evolutionary accomplishments. The sounds formed in our throats and shaped by our mouths can mean so much and so little. I had to explain to this understandably angry victim the value of mediation and convey a sense of empathy with her

situation all through the use of an interpreter. Interpreting another's thoughts and words into another language is more difficult than we can imagine. What means one thing in English can mean something completely different in Spanish. There aren't words in any language to convey my gratitude to our interpreters.

There had been confrontation between the children of the two families before the incident and the victim was telling me how this made her feel as a mother. I may not have been able to understand the words but I could sense their meaning by the tone of her voice, the look on her face. I was able to understand how upset she had felt. I told her that even though I wasn't a mother I could understand how she felt and might have reacted the same way. I let my own emotion shine through my words and at that moment I knew I had made a connection with this victim that no amount of interpreting could create.

Our victim met us on a Friday, agreed to participate and the mediation was held that Sunday at our office. This case had plodded along like a

tortoise only to rush toward the finish line like a hare! When the two families met the atmosphere was civil yet cool. During the mediation everyone was given a chance to speak but we kept the focus on the young offender, the victim and the incident between them. The offender apologized for vandalizing the victim's car and his family recompensed the victim \$200 for damages. The offender would do farm work with his father to repay the \$200 to the family. Although the larger issues between the families were not focused on exclusively, the offender promised the victim he would respect her property and the victim told the family that they had nothing to fear from her. Both families agreed that if problems arose between the children (and both said there would not be), the parents would be notified first. At the end of the meeting everyone was laughing and joking in Spanish! Mediation was the portal to forgiveness and reconciliation for these families. As everyone was leaving, the victim hugged me and I knew I had helped repair and create a connection built not of words but of love.

## Trainings and Materials

### **VORP Mediators Needed for Pilot Project!**

Our pilot project with the juvenile court has begun and we have received many referrals for cases. We are looking for trained VORP mediators who have mediated 2 or more cases. If you have mediated VORP cases you may be interested in completing advanced mediator training in order to become part of the Community Justice Conference pilot project with the Restorative Justice Initiative. If so please contact our office 455-9803 and we will let you know of our next training date.

### **Cultural Competence Workshop**

Cultural competence workshop has been designed to help VORP mediators to work within the cultural values of the client. This workshop will focus on VORP'S primary clients. The cultural groups under discussion are African Americans, Hmong Americans, Latin American, and Mexican American youths.

**Fresno Pacific University, Sattler 101**

**October 2,3,5**

**December 4,5,7**

**Cost : \$113**

**\*CEU's Included in the price\***

If you would like to reserve a spot or have a question please call Joe Montanez at 455-9803

### **Upcoming VORP Training**

If you would like to become a VORP volunteer mediator, we offer a 10 hour training in which you will receive all the skills you need to become a successful volunteer mediator and a certificate. Please call our office 455-9803 to make your reservation.

**October 23 & 24**

**November 6 & 7**

All trainings are held at Fresno Pacific University in Marpeck Center. The cost is \$30 for those who plan on working with 3 cases or \$55 if you would just like to take the training.

### **VORP Organizing Institute**

**Learn how to start a VORP in your area!**

**November 18-20**

This is a unique seminar for individuals and communities interested in starting a VORP in their area. Ron Claassen, founder of the Fresno VORP and Noelle Daoudian, VORP director, along with VORP staff will lead seminar participants through the challenging steps of launching a successful victim offender reconciliation program from concept to first case. Call our office for more information: 455-9803



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