



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

VORP NEWS - April 1986

April 17 and 24 are the dates for our next volunteer training. As more volunteers are trained and working on cases we are able to accept more referrals. Last year we averaged approximately 26 cases per month. Don Hogner, Fresno County Chief Probation Officer, told Howard Zehr (in a private meeting to evaluate our program for us) that if we could handle it they would like to be sending approximately 50 referrals per month. To do that we need more volunteers.

Howard Zehr was our guest speaker at our Gathering on March 13. Howard graduated from Morehouse College in 1966 - BA, University of Chicago - MA, and Rutgers University - PhD. Howard provided much of the original vision and leadership as VORP was developing in Elkhart, IN and as it began to spread to other parts of the US, Canada, and Europe. His experience and vision have been inspiring to me personally and I wanted to share him with you. For those of you who did not make it to the Gathering I have transcribed and included parts of his presentation and am sending it along with this newsletter. (See "VORP in Perspective")

VOLUNTEERS: On May 13, 1986 an inservice training has been planned for VORP volunteers. Please reserve this date. You will be receiving further information in the mail shortly. You will also receive copies of the results of the Volunteer Questionnaire.

CONTRIBUTORS: Without your contributions VORP volunteers wouldn't have the opportunity to mediate victim/offender conflicts. There are costs to providing training and support for volunteers as well as co-ordinating efforts with the court and/or probation. If we are going to double our case load our costs will also increase. The budget is moderate and the service is great. Please share the VORP idea with others and invite them to join you in supporting the financial needs of VORP.

Christine Slonetsky, our case manager, has also been doing casework. She interviewed the victim in a case she worked with recently. The victim graciously allowed us to share her experience with you. The names have been changed to protect identities.

Christine: "Could you describe what happened the night your car was stolen?"

Susan: "It happened right before Christmas so I had been out Christmas shopping, and you know how you get really excited. I came home and my garage door was open and my car was gone. The first reaction that I had was that this just didn't happen to me. My car could not be stolen. I just kind of sunk from one extreme to the other in emotions. About two and a half hours later I had received a call from one of the offenders' parents. They had been called by a security guard who had pulled the offenders over for driving without lights."

Christine: "How did you feel about yourself, and the people who had taken your car once you discovered that your car had been stolen?"

Susan: "My first reaction was panic, disbelief and confusion. Then it set in that this had really happened to me. I had a feeling of violation that someone had intruded on my personal space and stolen my property. Not knowing the circumstances behind the robbery made things even worse. Not knowing how much time they may have been checking out the house, waiting for me to be gone. Not even knowing if they had been inside the house

itself. The first attitude I had towards the offenders - you know, I could have killed them. If I had come home a few minutes earlier and had seen them driving off in my car, I would have been very angry, and I would have wanted to get back at them in a very physical way. I would have wanted revenge at that point."

Christine: "What were your feelings after you had your first contact with someone at the VORP office?"

Susan: "Sort of relieved that someone was actually going to follow through on this case. Working with the police department, I was unable to get the information I wanted. Information regarding the incident itself, the offender, and the circumstances were all not shared. Working with the VORP office gave me a sense that I was going to be able to get some questions answered. The police didn't seem concerned about my concerns and questions, VORP obviously did."

Christine: "How did you feel after I came out to your house to speak with you?"
i) "What did you think about VORP and the way the program attempted to deal with conflict?"

Susan: "The first time you came out I was still feeling very angry, and yet you stayed very calm and objective throughout the interview. That, I think helped. I was able to get all of my anger out and finally express it to someone whether you wanted to hear it or not. I couldn't complain to the police department. I didn't feel that they had any contact with anyone to really know what this had done to me, and how angry I was."

Christine: ii) "Were your feeling towards yourself and the offenders changed at this point?"

Susan: "Yes, at that point I was probably less angry at the offenders. Maybe the time had sort of softened my feelings towards the offenders a bit. The immediate anger had gone with time. There was still a lot of anger there, but at this point it was more directed towards myself for having let it happen, than towards the offenders."

Christine: "What was your experience of the meeting between you and the two offenders? How did you feel about each of them and about yourself both at the beginning and at the end of the meetings? Let's begin with the meeting with Ken."

Susan: "At the beginning of the meeting, I sort of felt like I was going to be tough. I wanted Ken to know that this had effected me deeply. I think that I really wanted to at least see Ken cry. That sounds cruel. I think I wanted to see some regret, and see that he could really feel for what he had done to me. Ken was a really quiet person. He didn't speak up too much and, in a way, I at first found that really frustrating. He wasn't acting the way I was hoping. However, his father was very understanding, and that helped. I did get to see that Ken was not a hardened criminal. He was just a young boy - probably scared to death."

Christine: "What was your overall opinion of the meeting?"
i) "Were you able to communicate what you wanted to say?"

Susan: "I think so. Mainly what I wanted Ken to understand was that the theft had been a big deal for me, that it really effected me a lot. I felt that I was able to have him understand that."

Christine: "Was the meeting worthwhile and meaningful for you?"

Susan: "Yes, it was worthwhile in a lot of ways. I did get my questions answered about the specifics of what had gone on that night. I did get to see the offender in person and see that he wasn't really a bad kid."

Christine: "Was the restitution agreement satisfactory?"

Susan: "In the long run, yes. I did not know how co-operative the second family would be so I began pushing the first family who was co-operative. The father was very willing to try to work things out. In the long run everything worked out fine."

Christine: "Do you think that the meeting was worthwhile for Ken?"

Susan: "I think that it was helpful for Ken to see the impact that this sort of crime can have. That just because the car gets returned doesn't put things to square one. That it does have long term effects."

Christine: "What was your experience of meeting with Cathy? How did you feel about Cathy and about yourself both at the beginning and at the end of the meeting?"

Susan: "I think I was more relaxed at the second meeting. I felt that everything was getting taken care of. I was just looking forward to everything being tied up and over with at this point. I probably did have some preconceived notions about Cathy. My impression of Cathy though, again, was that she was really not a criminal when you sit down and talk with her. I was really relieved to see what she was really like."

Christine: "What was your overall opinion of that meeting? Were you able to communicate what you wanted to say?"

Susan: "Yes, I thought that the meeting with Cathy went smoother than the meeting with Ken. I think that part of that was just that I knew what to expect. I wasn't nearly as angry at that point. I guess I just wanted to get things resolved. You did have us explain to each other what the other person was saying. That seemed to improve communication and keep things on a very calm level."

Christine: "What are your feelings at the present towards yourself and Ken and Cathy?"

Susan: "The anger is gone, I know that. I think that the long term impact will be there for some time. I will never forget that this has happened to me. But that is something that I can deal with. Certainly the crisis has been taken care of through VORP and just through time. I will probably be less naive when it comes to crime happening to everyday people. In the back of my mind I thought that crime happened to other people; now I know that it does."

Christine: "What do you think at the present of VORP as a way of dealing with conflict and crime?"

Susan: "I would recommend VORP to other victims of similar crimes. It seems good for a victim to talk face to face with the offender. It helps the victim to see that the offenders are human beings too with their own feelings. If you understand someone's circumstances, and what may have led to the crime, you can see that it is not so personally directed towards you. Seeing that it is not personally directed at you helps smooth over some of those guilt feelings, and feelings of powerlessness. Lastly, I think that if more offenders had the chance to really understand what they had done instead of just being punished, they would maybe think twice before they do something again."

Thank you, Christine, for your great work. Thank you, Susan, for sharing.

Shalom,

Ron Claassen, Program Director