

VORP

NEWS

of the Central Valley, Inc.

May 1997

VORP made possible by people responding to the call of service...

Service connects our moral beliefs and the life we live

by Ron Claassen

"There is a call to us, a call to service—that we join with others to try to make things better in this world." Robert Coles, in his book **The Call of Service**, attributed this quote to Dorothy Day, 1955. Coles describes service as the connecting point between our moral beliefs and our life lived.

Roxanne and I (married for nearly 29 years) have been reading this book together. (We have found reading some selected books aloud together is one good relationship building experience for us.) This quote, his description of service, and much of the content of this book have provided us with significant discussion material. We would highly recommend it. It seemed that we couldn't read much without relating it to personal experiences and VORP.

After first escaping victims' pursuit...

Graffiti offender turns himself in, makes things right

by Jacqueline Sichon
with Ron Claassen

Our story this month is from Jacqueline Sichon. Jacqueline has completed seven cases.

In October of 1996 I received a case which seemed as routine as any other case. But, I reminded myself that I have learned no case is routine and life never goes exactly as planned.

Robert Coles said that he learned from his parents that stories are a means of glimpsing and comprehending the world; they knew that service is a means of putting to use what has been learned, and that in the daily events designated as service, when we are joining together with others to make things better in this world, wonderful stories are encountered and experienced.

I can certainly see this in my parents who, at age 81, are still deeply involved in service. Dad still (as a volunteer) maintains the yard at the church and the church pre-school and delivers hot meals. Mom still devotes substantial time teaching and loving the children at the pre-school.

When we visit with them, my parents always have many stories to tell of their experiences.

And, if you have any doubt that significant stories emerge from service, I would encourage you to talk to any of our VORP volunteer mediators. If you give them a chance they will have a significant story to tell. Each month, because of this newsletter, we look together at one of these stories.

It has been people responding to this call to service that has made VORP possible. Financial contributors, volunteer mediators, board members and staff, all working with VORP in order to help make our world a better place to live.

As you know, VORP volunteers are now working with more cases than ever (60-70 per month) and it is at a time we currently have no funding assistance from city or county to provide the staff support. Several supplemental support options designed to help VORP grow, seem possible for later this year. For now, and so for throughout our history VORP has been made possible by a combination of stories, all related to service. Together, they make another wonderful story.

Let me tell you part of our current staff story. Julius, our case manager, is formerly a police officer who could be earning much more but has been contributing his enormous talents to managing our case load. Victoria, a recent college graduate from New York, heard the call to service and is working on a subsistence allowance while managing our agreement follow-up service.

Jay, recently graduated from seminary, is working with VORP on far less than he deserves, because he wants to serve, to connect his moral beliefs with his work. Jamie, after graduating from college, has been in a routine of working to earn enough and then volunteering to serve while living very simply until he needs to return to work for a period of time.

Phil and Julie Bender are pastors, between pastoral assignments, who have come from Ontario, Canada, to volunteer with VORP for five months. Their service with VORP is being made possible by generous contributions from them and a number of individuals from Mennonite Community Church.

When you combine these stories with those of more than 300 active volunteer mediators, over 40 supporting churches, and nearly 500 individual contributors, in addition to the many significant stories of individuals making VORP possible from within the criminal justice system, all working to make things better in this world, our service, as a group, is becoming a significant story in our community and with interest that is world wide.

I first called the mother of the 15-year-old boy, Phil, who had been charged with graffiti and vandalism. Mother said that she and her son were willing to meet with me the following week. We met as planned at the College Community Church.

Phil told us his version of what happened the night he was arrested. He had been visiting at the home of a friend who had another boy there that Phil knew only slightly. When a family conflict arose, Phil and his new acquaintance, Bob, left the house together and were walking around the neighborhood. Phil said his companion suggested they graffiti a garage that was just ahead of them. Bob pulled a can of spray paint from inside his jacket and proceeded to paint the garage. Bob talked a reluctant Phil into painting one letter on the building.

As they were walking away they saw the owner of the property. In passing, they all said hello and spoke briefly but pleasantly to each other. When the owner saw his garage, he immediately suspected the two boys and, together with his brother, gave chase. They caught Bob, but Phil got away. The owner called the police, who showed up at his home soon thereafter and interrogated Bob. Phil was anxious about what was happening to his new "friend" and if he might be caught by the police later. He decided it would be better to turn himself in then, instead of waiting. When he told them his version of the story, the

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VORP relies on your CONTRIBUTIONS!

Financial support is critical at this point. Thank you to all who are contributing. As you can see from our story, your service in this way is working to make our world a better place. VORP could do more if those who received the newsletter and are not yet contributing, would join in this effort. Any amount is welcome. As I mentioned, about 500 are contributing. If that number was doubled the service story could continue to grow. Grants give VORP an additional boost from time to time, but the long term stability of VORP lies with those of you who combine your beliefs and action to make VORP possible.

Imagine the potential change in our community if this was happening more.

Despite frustrating delays, VORP process ends in reconciliation

Continued from page 1

owner and police did not believe him because Bob had blamed him for instigating and painting most of the graffiti. Phil was arrested and the Bob was released.

Phil was very upset that he was held responsible for the all the graffiti when he had only painted one letter, but after he heard about the VORP process he still agreed to meet with the property owner and discuss what happened and try to make things as right as possible.

I spoke to victim, the property owner, and he agreed to a mutual meeting. When I called Phil's home to confirm the date for the mediation, his mother told me that her son had gone to his father's to live and I would have to contact the father to arrange another meeting. She gave me his pager number as the only means of contacting him.

After many tries during the next two weeks, Phil's father finally returned my page. Father told me that his son had been falsely accused and pushed around by the arresting officers. He, therefore, saw no obligation or need to participate in the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program.

I called Phil's mother and explained the situation. She was a great advocate of the VORP process and told me she would try discuss with her son and his father, the importance of participating in the program and let me know the results of their conversation. It is now past Halloween and getting close to Thanksgiving.

After Thanksgiving mother called and told me that her ex-husband resented the police, the court system, and my interference, and he and his son would definitely not participate. I contacted Julius at the VORP office. He said he would personally visit the boy and his father and review their options with them and see if after some further consecration they might decide to participate.

At this point Thanksgiving is only a memory and Christmas is just around the corner. Shortly after Christmas Julius met with father and son and they agreed to the mediation if the mother would attend the meeting. Julius then put the ball back in my court and asked me to continue with the case.

Once the holidays were over, I again tried to contact the property owner, but found he had moved. I finally reached him at his work number and was assured he would meet with Phil as soon as we could arrange a date. That was the last time I talked to the property owner. He changed work locations and all of my attempts to reach him failed. Again I appealed to Julius for help and again he came through. He somehow contacted the brother of the property owner who had not only been living at the house at the time of the incident, but had also chased the boys. He agreed to the mediation and we set up a joint meeting.

That meeting was canceled because Phil was sick with the flu. The days were warming up, the spring of 1997 was on the horizon. I was at the point where I just knew this meeting was never going to happen!

I tried again, a meeting was set, and we met! Perhaps this lengthy period of delay contributed to the success of the meeting. It seemed Phil had time to consider the fact that one letter of graffiti or twenty letters is still graffiti and he was responsible for his actions. He also seemed to understand that it was his action and others like him that drove these two people, who were tired of seeing their premises vandalized time and again, from their home.

In addition to clearly expressing his frustration with graffiti, the owner's brother was extremely supportive and understanding when he told Phil how he felt about the occurrence. He said he could identify with the boy making mistakes and being influenced by others. And,

he added that he had learned that even though it may seem easier to agree with friends to do something you know is wrong, it is much better to stand alone in a decision you know is right.

After going through the court system, doing community service and meeting with his victim, Phil definitely agreed and said he had no intention of damaging people's property again. Although the owner's brother said monetary restitution was not important to him, Phil came prepared with money to pay for his portion of the paint used to erase the graffiti. In addition, and more important I think for all of us, he also brought a letter of sincere apology for both the owner and his brother.

Another exciting part for me was that both Phil's mother and the owner's brother are considering becoming VORP volunteers. I was reminded again, patience and persistence do pay.

Thanks Jacqueline!

Blessed are the Peacemakers!

VORP training & experience can have a positive impact on your life!

VORP training includes life skills that can be utilized in all areas of your life including home, work, church, and all other relationships. VORP offers you an opportunity to put your learning to use in service to help make our community a better place. Join us at one of our upcoming training events.

- May 29, June 5 & 12
- September 12 & 13
- September 16, 23 & 30
- November 7 & 8

Please call Jamie at 291-1120 as soon as possible to make a reservation.

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