

VORP NEWS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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Happy New Year!

Restorative Justice Conference 2000—February 25th and 26th**Where:** Fresno Pacific University, Fresno, California.**Theme:** “Apology, Pardon and Forgiveness”**Sponsored by:** The Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies and VORP of the Central Valley, Inc.**To Register:** Contact “The Peace Center” at (800) 909-8677 or elenns@fresno.edu

Neighborhood Benefits from Victim Offender Mediation

A recent mediation in a difficult neighborhood helped one business owner and a neighborhood family to find a creative alternative to graffiti vandalism. This is a story about two families who chose a path not seen at first, when it became clear the offender may not have been actually involved in the offense.

The location of the incident was in south-central Fresno, an area more familiar with crime and hard times than peacemaking and hope. This particular area of Fresno has had a reputation for its gang activity and families facing the stresses and strains of social, economic and cultural barriers to mainstream life.

So, in the big picture of things, it may seem odd to say that one seemingly insignificant graffiti vandalism could have a significant outcome for the victim, offender and neighborhood, but it did.

The meeting started off like any other. Most everyone's eyes looked awkwardly about the room, uncertain and perhaps a little skeptical as to how much good could come out of this meeting. The parties were invited to introduce themselves as they'd like to be referred to in the meeting. John, the offender and his parent's were present, as were the business owner and his wife.

The mediators, Char Lawson and Jennifer Crist, didn't seem daunted by any of these things. It was their first mediation, and glad to see it come together. They had prepared well, and were focused and ready to begin. They had decided ahead of time how they would support each other as they walked the parties through the process. An experienced mediator was also present to lend any support, if needed.

First, the ladies moved into laying a foundation for the meeting. They explained the customary 3-step Reconciling Injustices process and the 5-ground rules for respecting one another. With everyone's commitment to this, and to look out for one another's welfare during the meeting, we were ready to begin.

John, the offender, began. “I was just walking

Volunteer Mediator Training Calendar 2000

February 4 & 5

Friday-6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30am to 3:30pm

March 4 & 5

Friday-6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30am to 3:30pm

April 29 & 30

Friday-6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30am to 3:30pm

June 13, 16 & 17

Tuesday & Friday

6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30 to 11:30am

September 8 & 9

Friday- 6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30 to 11:30am

October 12, 13 & 14

Tuesday & Friday

6:30 to 9:30 pm

Saturday-8:30 to 11:30am

November 10 & 11

Friday- 6:30 to 9:30pm

Saturday-8:30 to 3:30pm

TO REGISTER:CALL THE VORP OFFICE
TODAY!

through the alleyway on my way home. I saw some guys ahead of me tagging a fence.” He continued, “I recognized them as guys from the neighborhood, but I didn't know them.”

John would then see a truck come quickly around the corner. He noticed one of the guys who'd been tagging running down an adjacent alleyway, and the other pass him quickly on a bike. He could see them running from some guys, who turned out to be from the businesses on the other side of the fence. They were making a few citizens arrests. He said he got nervous and ran too, thinking he'd get blamed for the incident. Well, he did. Only one of the other boys got caught, but he wasn't referred to VORP.

Jack, the business owner whose fence was tagged, then summarized as best he could what John was saying. But he wanted to tell his view of what happened and how he wanted the wrong righted. He didn't seem too impressed with John's facts. The mediators redirected Jack back to simply summarizing what John was saying. There would be more time to clarify the things Jack was thinking and feeling in the meeting.

It was Jack's turn. As you might guess, his experience of what happened didn't match that of John's. Jack said he saw three guys in the alleyway. He believed they were all tagging. Besides the police had caught John. The Court agreed. So, if it look's like a fish, and smells like a fish,” one naturally reasons, “it must be a fish, right?” Let's just say we spent a little while on this one.

Jack and John started repeating themselves. The parties began to lock into their own view on things. Things were getting tense. Jack was becoming more frustrated, and said he had to go in 10 minutes. On the surface, it seemed as if John was avoiding or denying his responsibility in the offense. Silence.

Then, a turning point. The mediator team admitted their own confusion because of the different stories. By admitting their confusion, the group was set free to admit their own confusion. With this new openness introduced into the meeting, a new pathway was discovered.

John offered to draw a map. Everyone was open to that idea. Both eager, they each drew out how they saw things unfold. As they did, Jack and John, and the rest of the group, finally began to reconcile

Oasis

VORP would like to express it's sincere appreciation to the men and women of Oasis, also known as the Older Adult Social Services. It is located in southeast Fresno, near Fresno Pacific University. Operating out of 3 small homes, the Oasis facility enables the families of older adults to be cared for during the work week rather than having to choose institutionalization.

What is it they do? For 15 years now they have taken our freshly printed and folded newsletters and inserted, stamped, labeled and sorted them by zip code for our bulk mailing. Currently, VORP mails it's newsletter to over 3,100 people, most locally, informing them about our ongoing work for Restorative Justice within Fresno County.

the differing facts. Everyone was becoming clearer about what happened. While it was hard for Jack (and a mediator) to totally accept this new view, he became more open to working together with John on a mutual problem they still had.

So, in the second part of our meeting, we began to discuss what could be done. Jack was still concerned that the current graffiti on his fence would only invite more tagging, and further blight and notoriety for the neighborhood in the future. It made him and his wife angry. They like the area, and were committed to keeping a business there.

Jack said he'd like to see someone (meaning John) offer to whitewash about 100 foot of his alleyway fence. John was reluctant. It was like admitting he did it. And he was still adamant that he didn't. His parent's felt similar. John's dad especially. Speaking up, he said, "I know when he's lying, and this is not one of those times." His parents were equally uncomfortable about the implications of John doing this for Jack. Again, silence.

Here the support mediator helped by reframing the problem (to have the parties consider seeing it from another angle). Rather than strictly seeing this as an injustice needing righted, it was suggested, that this could also be seen as an opportunity for building peace and offering hope in the community. It was an opportunity for goodwill to be expressed. By possibly helping out Jack and his wife in this way, John wouldn't be admitting, "I did wrong and now I need to fix it," rather he would be saying, "I see a problem in my neighborhood, and I want to help my neighbor." This appeal to take the high-road, "looking out my neighbor's best interest as well as my own," helped the parties begin to reconsider their stuck positions.

John spoke up. He offered to whitewash Jack's fence and even suggested a friend who could paint a design on the fence which no one would mess with because he's a well know artist in their community. Jack and his wife offered to provide all the paint, and they even willing to pay John's friend to do the artwork. Also, Jack said he would make sure everyone knew about it.

Within a few weeks of the agreement the painting was completed and one of the local T.V. stations had came out to do a piece on their creative resolution to this crime. By the way, Jack and his wife stayed another 45 minutes at the meeting to work through this with John and his family. Neighbors being peacemakers, it's a wonderful thing to witness. Thank you, too, Jennifer and Char.

Blessed are the Peacemakers!

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Peacemaking 501:

"Humility—A Mediator's Greatest Strength" (Part 1)

by Jay Griffith

Recall your college education? Remember all those 101, 201, 301 and 401 classes? By now, with all the VORP newsletters you've digested, and all the practical wisdom you've gleaned from them, I imagine you are well into applying those basic models, principles, values and practices in a multitude of settings. You could probably write your own book based upon these experiences, or you could even teach your own classes.

We're calling this section "Peace-making 501" and it's for all those of you reflecting on how to improve the ways you value and serve people, especially in the face of the varieties of conflicts and/or divided interests you encounter.

Tell me, what is your tendency when you face conflicts and tough situations with others? I don't know about you, but when I face a conflict my thoughts and feelings can seem to grab me by the arms and run me towards one of these two doors as a way of dealing with that conflict:

Behind door number one: The desire to want to freak out, cuss out, or hit something. Here I can care little for what others think or feel, or the consequences for what I'm thinking or about to say or do. I can just want to take out my stress, anxiety or fear out on someone or something.

Behind door number two: I can sometimes think and feel overwhelmed. It's a zombie-like condition of gradually shutting down mentally, emotionally, spiritually. I can begin to zone-out and/or numb-out in the company of others. When I was younger, this may have been a strong desire to even beverage or pleasure out.

Have you ever experienced some of these same strong thoughts or feelings? These places aren't always very pleasant are they? But, they are a great reminder of something we all hold in common as human beings — we all have to

learn how to manage them so that we are safe and trustworthy people who seek to do what's best for one another's welfare and for the good of our community. So, how do we manage these human gifts from God?

There is something I find in mediation which is very helpful to me. You've probably heard us say how important it is to be clear about the value of the person and taking seriously the problem when a conflict emerges or is faced. If both parties are able to value these two things, we would say then, that they will very likely find a way together through the conflict.

At the heart these value statements is a very important character quality which a mediator must develop to become a better servant in the mediation room, and to create a safe environment for others to work through a difficulty — that is the quality of "humility."

It is a strength which will often go unnoticed in a mediation or a conflict, but one which give an entirely different feel to people's experience of one another's value and care for each other in the individual meetings with the offender and the victim, in the mediation itself, and even in the outcome of the mediation.

In the next newsletter I would like to try to clarify what I mean by "humility" and share from mediation experiences about some practical ways to embody this as we have opportunities to walk alongside of others.

Until then, God bless and keep you safe.

Volunteers, Staff Support & Staff

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Carol Pryor — Newsletter Publishing/Editing
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