

VORP NEWS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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HOW DO WE TEACH KIDS THAT CRIME DOESN'T PAY, SO THEY "GET IT"?

STORY #1



Consider the Ruiz family and their son Jimmy.

Jimmy cries as his mom, Margaret, scolds him. He's broken trust with her again. He promises to do better next time, but the next day he ignores his mom's requests for help and again neglects his school work. She yells. He throws attitude. In turn, he loses privileges. He counters with more crying. More promises are made. Then it starts all over again.

Margaret is hurting. The pain of this situation has become unbearable. It's hard to keep her focus at work and with her own schooling. She's becoming convinced she's a bad parent, and thinks she just needs to do more and better. She's too embarrassed to admit her struggle with her son to others. She's becoming more isolated in this battle, and she feels she's losing ground with Jimmy with each passing conflict.

Jimmy's unfinished homework, poor grades, and recently missed school days are now getting the school's attention. They're frustrated and beginning to talk about what to do about Jimmy, his mom and their family.

What kind of support and accountability could best equip and encourage this mother and her son?

VORP visits the home through a teacher's invitation. A Parent-Teen Mediation is held to

discuss the issues Jimmy and Margaret are deadlocking over.

The first evening is spent telling and summarizing their stories of how they have been experiencing one another. This is the empathy building phase. Key issues are also identified.

The second evening is spent discussing these key issues for both, working at problem solving, and developing a support and accountability plan to look out for one another's welfare. They will meet again in a month.

STORY #2



Carl, Ricky and Rudy are disputing students at a local elementary school.

The school principal brings the boys into his office. They're pretty nervous. They're about to be scolded for supposedly fighting off campus near a school bus stop.

The principal believes he knows what happened and what best to do. Privately, he gives them "the what for," and then announces to their teacher that, "he has dealt with the issue and the boys." Problem solved.

Carl & Ricky walk back to the classroom, joking. They have made it through another encounter with an over-bearing adult. "No worries," they think to themselves, "these adults say a lot, but do little." As for Rudy, well he is still worried. These other two students had tried to jump him and then lied and said it was the other way around.

The real injustice between the boys is never touched on, and an opportunity to work on a plan together to address these behavior and attitude issues among the boys is missed.

Carl and Ricky, at least for now, have the heat off their back. Their animosity for Rudy hasn't changed, nor their trouble-making off campus. When the adults are around, they act all respectful, but that is about as far as it goes.

The problems are buried. The conflict remains unresolved.

STORY #3



At a local high school, a teacher's school bag is missing and a personal cell phone is removed from his bag. The bag gets shuffled around the detention room. The bag had been accidentally left behind in the course of the day's school duties.

Within the hour, though, Mr. Dunn is able to return for his bag. He discovers his cell phone missing. Soon, the three boys last seen near the bag are detained. The boy who took the cell phone is caught, and is later referred to VORP by Probation for possible mediation.

During the mediation, Vickie Ochenbein, one of our co-mediators on this case, observed that Tony, the juvenile offender who took the phone, was awkwardly laughing off what happened. Vickie didn't say anything, but that began to tick her off. "He wasn't getting it. He wasn't taking this seriously enough," she thought. The cooperative spirit in the room was about to quickly dissipate.

Surprisingly, Mr. Dunn, the victim, didn't over-focus on Tony's attitude or behavior. In fact, he responded first by saying to Tony, "Tony, you know, this crime didn't hurt me so much as it hurt our school."

This seemed to surprise Tony. There was no angry language, no threats, no put-downs. Instead, there

Did You See???

VORP received some great publicity last month by KSEE Channel 24. Reporter Paul Chad-erjian came to the VORP office and interviewed Executive Director Jay Griffith and Doug Noll, VORP mediator and local restorative justice advocate with Lang, Richert, & Patch.

The story explained the program's approach to criminal justice and highlighted two cases in which an agreement was reached and carried out.

was this self-controlled irritation being expressed by the victim, which was soon followed by a genuine seeking for Tony's welfare, his future interests, like football, and what it would take to achieve his interests.

The impact of Mr. Dunn's response to Tony's immature behavior soon had a noticeable impact. Vickie later remarked, "Tony gradually took the meeting more seriously," and we soon experienced him becoming more self-revealing.

Tony's mother was soon feeling more free to participate as well. The mediation had turned a corner. The level of safety and cooperation had increased. More energy was now being focused on addressing Tony and his mom's underlying needs and concerns, than in prematurely turning to corporal punishment, scolding or separating a person from the community in order to drive home the point that this was wrong and that personal changes are needed. A plan was emerging. Now all we needed was some caring adult supervision in order to achieve it.

Tony, of course, would be on Probation for the next year, even though he had returned the cell phone undamaged, and was not keeping the same company of friends as before. But still more personal accountability was needed.

Mom went on to emphasize her interest to see him do well in school. Mr. Dunn suggested tutoring, Tony was hesitant. He didn't seem sure about this option. As mediators, we wondered, "Why was he hesitating?"

At this point Mr. Dunn was close to leaving. What more could he do?



It was then that one of our support mediators asked Mr. Dunn a question: "What have you learned that most helped you do well in school?" Mr. Dunn paused for a second, and then shared about his high school and college GPAs. He said, "I wasn't the smartest, but I worked hard, finished my homework, and turned it in on time. And I did well."

Tony was asked to repeat what he'd heard. He responded with, "I just don't know how to deal with all the homework that comes at me!"

Mr. Dunn was then asked to summarize. As he did, he discovered that Tony's real and pressing need was not simply for tutoring, but for help in becoming more organized with his studies.

"Unfortunately," Mr. Dunn said,

"our tutors work on specific areas of study, not organizing one's studies." So a new problem emerged: who could help? After a brief silence, the answer surfaced. **Mr. Dunn perked up and announced, "You know...I could help."**

Tony agreed eagerly. They're to meet weekly. Amazing!

Righting the wrong, developing empathy, expressing personal concern, and participating in problem-solving together uncovered and resolved a disruptive need.

It takes a little more upfront time and energy, but if we listen long enough, without harshness, we discover the most just thing to do —

Blessed are the peacemakers! Thank you Vickie Ochenbein & Jennifer Greene, for co-mediating this case. God bless you both.

TRAINING in "Classroom Discipline and Peer Mediation Training" is coming up on July 24-27, 2000. It is for local school professionals and community members.

It will be conducted by the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at Fresno Pacific University.

The Peace Center also offers a **curriculum designed to teach students how to resolve conflicts peacefully**: it is entitled, "Making Things Right."

Widely acknowledged for their leadership in the field of Restorative Discipline, the Peace Center offers cooperative conflict management and discipline systems for use in schools, juvenile detention facilities and group homes.

Specialized Mediation services are also available for: family, business, church, community & political disputes.

For Information & Reservations: Call 559.455.5840 or 800.909.8677 or on the NET: www.fresno.edu/dept/pacs.

Volunteer Mediator

Next Training

April 28 & 29
 Friday-6:30 to 9:30PM
 Saturday-8:30AM to 3:30PM

TO REGISTER:
 CALL THE VORP OFFICE
 TODAY!

To Contact Us:

Office559.291.1120.
 FAX559.291.8214.
 General e-mail.....vorp@fresno.edu.
 NEW Mediator e-mail.....
vorpmediators@hotmail.com.
 Program information and current & past newsletters.....www.vorp.org.

Volunteers, Staff Support & Staff

- *Our VORP Volunteer Community Mediators
- *Oasis (Older Adult Social Services) — Newsletter Preparation
- *Carol Pryor & Karen Giese — Newsletter Publishing/Editing
- *John Wiens — Finance/Reparations Manager
- *Corine Ross, Karen Giese, Emily Foss, and Theresa Lovelace, Chad Pinther, Pearl Nadeau and Kimberly Stauble — Case & Reparations Management, Staff & Office Support

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