



NEWS

VORP of the Central Valley, Inc.
May 1996

'Reconciliation happening' say VORP participants

by Ron Claassen

Last week my wife Roxanne completed a VORP case, and I was privileged to accompany her and observe. I am continually amazed at the movement in personal attitudes. I would say the reconciliation was substantial.

I observed a 10-year-old boy, who had participated in trashing a second grade classroom, stand in front of the principal, tell him what he did, and offer his sincere apology. Later I watched the boy stand in front of the classroom and offer the class an apology along with a money order for \$100 – money he saved from Christmas gifts and chores. The child's mother encouraged him and was proud to observe him accepting responsibility.

The teacher used this opportunity to help her class learn about the difficulty and the importance of apology and expressed profound appreciation for and acceptance of his apology.

I wish all of you would have had the opportunity to observe these events with me. I left each of these meetings, as I often leave VORP meetings, thinking to myself that I had just experienced a "holy moment." It seems clear to me that I observed significant restoration in the individuals and reconciliation in relationships.

I sometimes wonder if I am just observing these meetings through my own wishful reconciliation lens which filters in certain information and filters out other information.

To provide some objectivity, VORP sends an evaluation form to victims and offenders requesting feedback after every case. Over the years, our evaluation form has changed many

times as we try to construct it in a way that will give us information related to our primary goal: to provide a fair process which encourages and supports efforts toward restoration of individuals and relationships impacted by crime.

We recently changed our form and we have received a small sample back from both victims

and offenders. I believe that we are getting some objective confirmation of the restoration of individuals and relationships.

This is the first time we have included the question about feelings for both victim and offender. The reason we included this question on the evaluation is because we want to get some

VORP case wrapped up with candy bars

by Cecilia Weaver & Julius Lockett
with Ron Claassen

Our story this month is from Cecilia Weaver and Julius Lockett.

Cecilia is a teacher and is working on a master's degree in special education and a graduate certificate in conflict management and peacemaking at Fresno Pacific College. Julius joined our staff this year as a full time case manager. He has eight years prior experience as a police officer in Atlanta, Georgia. He is an ordained Baptist pastor, with a master's degree in public and urban affairs. We are delighted to have him on our staff. He accompanies many volunteers as they request assistance with case work. They each did part of the case and each wrote part of the story.

Names and some details have been changed to protect identities of the participants.

When I arrived at Jay's home he was there with both parents. They invited me into the dining room. As I described the function of VORP, two preschool children were listening curiously. Jay's

head was lowered and he looked very nervous. I was somewhat overwhelmed with the father's presence. He was wearing a tank top and his upper body was tattooed. I found myself thinking, "What are you doing here? This is your first VORP case and this man's lifestyle is very different from yours." Then I caught Jay's eye and knew why I was here.

I felt the tension in the room as I explained the option of "making things right" between offenders and victims. Dad wanted to know why the other boys had not been cited. I felt helpless because I had no answer. I did say that I felt Jay was lucky to have an opportunity to participate in this program and do his part in making things as right as possible with the victim. I added that it would take courage to own his part in the event and to want to do his part in trying to restore the damage.

I asked 10-year-old Jay to describe what happened that day. Jay sketched the event with limited recall and information. His dad interrupted several times reminding him not to lie. Jay

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feedback regarding reconciliation. I have defined reconciliation as movement along a continuum from hostility toward caring.

I think that having victims and offenders indicating significant movement along the continuum toward caring is very positive.

Before participating in VORP, only 50 percent of offenders and 25 percent of victims reported significant levels of caring for the other. Offenders' level of caring after the VORP meeting (from 50 percent to 83 percent) indicates a substantial and positive change in attitudes. For victims, the impact of participation in VORP is even more dramatic, with care levels rising from 25 percent to 83 percent!

The initial response to our new evaluation form supports my observation that VORP is a powerful reconciling process for both offenders and victims.

Meeting ends with boys sharing handshake, candy

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continued to look down. Mom sat very quietly, but looked compassionately at her son. After some conversation Jay finally said that what happened was that he and his buddies had jumped Nick for his candy. "What was that like?" I asked. "I don't know. We just wanted the candy," Jay replied.

We talked about how he was caught and the consequences he has already experienced. We agreed that Jay had made a serious mistake and it is difficult for anyone to admit that he has done wrong. We also agreed he could put this behind him and have self respect for attempting to make things as right as possible with Nick. I asked Jay if he ever sees Nick at school and asked, "What is it like for you?" Jay said, "We just stare at each other." We agreed that meeting with Nick might help change that.

Jay and his parents said that they thought the VORP process sounded like a good idea and they would participate.

Urgent Need for VORP Mediators Continues

Please consider becoming a VORP Mediator. VORP mediators attend a nine hour training which continues throughout the first case and thereafter as needed. Mediators often work in pairs or with assistance as needed from VORP staff. Cases are assigned and selected based on the mediator's experience and comfort level.

Mediators provide a significant service to the community and report significant improvement in their relationship and leadership skills. For mediators who work with three or more cases, the cost for training is only \$20 (\$100 for those who do not choose to mediate VORP cases).

The dates for the next training events are:

May 23, 30 & June 6
September 13 & 14
September 24, October 1 & 8

I met with Nick and his grandparents. Grandmother said that Nick's mother had died last year and she was caring for him and the two other children. The school had not informed her that there had been a problem. VORP was the first contact with them.

They were surprised that Nick had not said anything. Nick was quite a bit smaller than Jay, and his demeanor was different. He said he was afraid of John. He was confused about why he had been singled out. The grandparents encouraged Nick to talk and they kept themselves out as much as possible. They nodded a lot and were listening to their grandson. Nick's description of what happened was short and to the point. The part that bothered him the most was that he continues to see John and doesn't know if something else is going to happen.

I then told Nick that a joint meeting could be set up with his grandparents present. At the joint meeting he would have a chance to tell Jay about that day, how he felt about being jumped, and what would set things right between them. He would have a chance to hear from Jay – what Jay told me – that he knew it was wrong and he wouldn't do it again. "I asked him if the thought that would be a good idea. He said, "Yeah."

I told him there would be rules to follow at the

meeting so everyone would have a chance to talk. Everyone will use manners and there are no put-downs. I asked his grandparents what they thought about the boys getting together to resolve the situation. They looked at each other and both agreed that it was a good idea. "So, can I set the meeting at school for next week?" They agreed, but said that grandmother could only meet in the mornings.

We met for the joint meeting at the elementary school where the incident occurred and where the boys attended. They listened to each other and summarized what the other one said. It seemed to be going pretty well until Jay called Nick a snitch. We talked about that and about our agreements to be polite to each other in the meeting. Jay made a sincere apology. It seemed to be a turning point in the meeting. When they talked about what would be needed to make things right between them, the focus was on agreeing to not calling Nick bad names anymore, not jumping him again, and not fighting. After the agreement was signed, Jay offered Nick another apology and a handshake after the agreement was signed.

Since candy was the problem initially, I brought some Snickers candy bars for both boys. I gave them the candy and they left the meeting laughing and talking in a friendly way with each other.

VORP Relies on Your Contributions!

VORP relies on your contributions! VORP cases would not happen if it were not for you who contribute some of your hard-earned finances.

Your contribution makes it possible for mediators to approach offenders and their families and ask them if they are willing to accept responsibility for the offense. Your contribution makes it possible for mediators to meet with victims and listen to their frustration and pain as they seek healing. Your contribution makes it possible for mediators to encourage and assist reconciliation between victims and offenders. Your contributions made it possible for Jay and Nick to transform their relationship from fear and hate to fun and friendship.

You will receive a letter and a phone call inviting you to pledge a financial contribution to VORP. Please say "YES!"

No amount is too small.

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