

SAN LUIS VALLEY VICTIM-OFFENDER RECONCILIATION PROGRAM - ANNUAL REPORT – 2000

The year 2000 was a strong one for the San Luis Valley Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program, with advances in various areas.

Staff: It was the first full year that we enjoyed a three-member staff: Alice Price, Director; Paula Medina, Program Manager; and Ryan Golten, School Programs Coordinator. The staff works very well together as a team. As one of our community volunteers remarked recently, “you three complement each other really well, and you seem to have fun doing it!” Following a board retreat in June, at which the issue of work overload for staff was discussed, a goal was set to increase the annual budget to provide for 5 additional hours per week for each of these part-time positions. This goal was accomplished beginning with the September 2000 payroll.

Technology: In terms of technology, it feels like we are ready to enter the New Millenium! We are very pleased to have an upgraded computer system for the office. Through grants and software donations, we were able to purchase two new PC’s, network them with one older computer, and add a zip drive for back-up. We also added new case management software, customized for our agency. Through the dedicated work of volunteer Andy Zaugg, we now have a lovely, functional website on which to reprint our newsletter, announce trainings, and introduce folks near and far to our philosophy and work. Networking through e-mail both locally and regionally has become a regular part of our office communications, as has access to the internet at all three work stations.

Case Referrals: We have had a very busy year with case referrals. We increased our referrals from last year by about 10. We have had 60 new referrals this year, along with a carry-over of 7 cases from 1999. 31 of the referrals were mediated with signed contracts or otherwise successfully conciliated. We closed 51 cases in 2000, and will carryover 14 into 2001. This year we received many of our referrals from the juvenile diversion program. That has been a positive in that we had been trying to establish a more active relationship with them for some time. Most of these referrals have been shoplifting cases. Wal-Mart and City Market have been very willing to participate in these mediations and we have completed quite a few with both stores. It is always great to have the participation of the business community. Other referrals continue to come from the juvenile magistrate, probation, schools, mental health, and most recently the South Fork and Alamosa municipal courts. The more, the merrier. We look forward to another busy year in 2001.

School Programs: This was also the first full year – and a busy one – for our School Initiative. We assisted 18 high schools, middle schools and elementary schools with conflict resolution and peer mediation training, retreat facilitation, in-service workshops and conflict interventions. We also offered conflict skills workshops to five after-school programs and youth/parenting organizations, including the Boys and Girls Club, San Luis Youth Guild and Adelante Program. One of the year’s highlights was our first Student

Mediator Summit in March, attended by over 70 high school mediators, their sponsors and local volunteers. We will repeat this in 2001. Another highlight was a workshop, "Peacemaking in Rural Schools," presented in Albuquerque with teen mediators from San Luis, at the international Conflict Resolution in Education conference.

Through our work with schools and the justice system, we have become increasingly concerned with the trend towards criminalization of typical adolescent behaviors. In particular, we have observed the disparate impact of such policies and their enforcement on Hispanic youth in our local communities. During 2001, we hope to bring together adult and youth community leaders to address more restorative approaches for our schools and courts through one or more workshops or dialogue sessions. We plan to do this in partnership with the faith community. The working title for this effort is "Embracing Our Youth."

Volunteer Mediators and Related Training: Volunteer mediators continue to be a vital part of our program. Approximately 20 mediators were active with the program during 2000. Two-day trainings for new volunteers were held in both February and June, to continue to spread the word about VORP and keep our roster active. Several current volunteers, as well as some young peer mediators trained by VORP, assisted us. An evening get-together was held for all old and new volunteers in the Fall. More get-togethers, including advanced training, will be part of our 2001 training calendar.

Other Special Events in 2000: **Regional Restorative Justice Conference** - The early part of 2000 was spent planning, coordinating registration, and playing various other leadership and training roles for a SE Colorado Restorative Justice conference. The two-day event was held in Pueblo, and was the first such effort. SLV-VORP was one of several public and private partners in this collaborative effort. Over 150 people attended the March event, which received quite positive evaluations. VORP continues to enjoy some of the new contacts made through this effort. **Board & Staff Retreat** - In June, we held a full-day board and staff retreat at a cabin near Del Norte. It was a fun and productive day, in which our history was celebrated, ideas for the future were prioritized, and teamwork between and among staff and board members was increased. It was agreed that this was an important time for reflection and planning, which should be annual. **Holiday Open House** – In mid-December, we hosted a Holiday Open House at the VORP office. This was our first such event, designed to bring together and thank the many and varied folks we work with throughout the Valley: referral agencies, clients, schools, funders, other non-profits, our volunteers and board, and the many other community members who receive our newsletter and support us in various ways. Over 70 people came, and many others sent their regrets. The participants represented a rich cross-section of the community, and the afternoon was a fun time of networking and celebration. Like the Board/Staff retreat, this may become a "must do" for next year!