

SAN LUIS VALLEY VICTIM-OFFENDER RECONCILIATION PROGRAM - ANNUAL REPORT – 2002

2002 was a challenging and at times stressful year. Last-minute news of major state budget cuts, effective in July, knocked us off our stride for several weeks. Close to 50% of our basic operating budget was affected. After lots of scrambling, belt tightening, and grant writing, we are pleased to report that – unlike Colorado - we still accomplished all our major program goals and can present a balanced budget going into the year 2003! We offer a special “thank you” to our staff, board, volunteers, funders, and friends near and far for hanging in with us. Once again, the strength of a community-based, grassroots approach has stood us in good stead. Perhaps this period will serve as a good reminder of what we try to teach and model in our work and training: with crisis comes opportunity.

Staff: Paula Medina and I continue to serve as part-time staff (Alice-25 hrs; Paula 30 hrs/week). This is a positive and flexible working relationship, and I appreciate Paula’s willingness to pick up the “slack” with program services and volunteer connections, during those times that I have had to be absorbed with fundraising. Because of unexpected budget constraints, it is perhaps best that we never found a long-term staff replacement for Ryan Golten as school program coordinator. Instead, Carrie Heltzel has provided school mediation trainings and Tim Dellett has assisted with other student skill-building events, on an “as needed” contract basis. We also enjoyed the help of three interns during the past year: Jeremy Meder, Spring semester ASC sociology intern, Savannah Spillers, Summer Upward Bound high school intern, and Frank Martinez, Fall semester ASC sociology intern. We look forward to a Spring ’03 ASC sociology intern beginning shortly.

Case Referrals: The year 2002 turned out to be a most interesting year for cases. We have had 58 new referrals this year, which is down by 12 from last year. Although our referrals were down, the cases referred seemed to be more complicated than in previous years. We also had a carryover from 2001 of 21 open cases. 45 cases were mediated with signed contracts or otherwise successfully conciliated during the year. We closed 61 cases altogether, and will carry over 18 into 2003. This year we again received many of our referrals from the Alamosa Municipal Court. We are pleased to have such a positive relationship with the City of Alamosa. We have also established a good relationship with the public defender’s office and Judge Kuenhold, in the Conejos and Costilla district courts, and referrals there are increasing. Referrals continue from the district attorney’s office, juvenile magistrate, probation, juvenile diversion, mental health, and schools. We also, we received our first juvenile parole referral involving a very serious offense. This case, plus several others, became quite involved. Five cases had large amounts of restitution, involving many staff hours. We also had cases involving multiple victims, with our volunteer mediators putting in long hours. It has been a challenging year, but also very rewarding and productive. Many thanks to our volunteers and to our intern, Frank Martinez, for their case assistance. We look forward to another busy year in 2003.

School Programs: Despite not having a staff member specifically designated to coordinate school programs, we were still able to provide significant training services to area schools during ’02. During the Spring ’02 semester, Paula and I provided regular weekly skill-building activities

for the Suspended and Expelled Student program at Ortega Middle School. In March, we also hosted our 3d annual Teen Mediator Summit at ASC, attended by over 80 high schools students and sponsors from 9 area high schools. The timely theme was "Teen Suicide Awareness." Carrie provided refresher trainings later in the Spring for the peer mediation teams at Centennial High School, as well as for Center and Sargent Junior High Schools. In the Fall, she provided several more peer mediation trainings, reaching Antonito, Mountain Valley, Alamosa, Sanford, Centauri, Center and Moffat High Schools, as well as Ortega, Moffat and Mountain Valley middle schools. Paula, Tim and I led a one-day skill-building event for Alamosa Open High School students and staff, and Tim conducted a six-week series of activities in the late Fall with the Suspended and Expelled Student program at Ortega Middle School. In terms of the Restorative Discipline focus, I and board member Shirley Atencio made a presentation to the Alamosa school board in September, and a refresher training on Restorative Discipline for the district's building administrators is planned for February '03. Plans are also underway for the 4th Teen Mediator Summit for later in the Spring.

Volunteer Mediators and Community Trainings: Volunteer mediators continue to be a vital part of our program. Approximately 20 mediators were active with the program during 2002. Two-day trainings for new volunteers were held in both February and September, to keep our roster active. Several current volunteers, as well as some teens, assisted us. A lunch get-together was held for all old and new volunteers on Halloween, combining costumes, good food, and skill-building on the theme, "What scares you about mediation?!?" Short trainings were also conducted during the year for the Adelante program case management clients and for the Alamosa County Sheriff's Department parole officers and victims' advocates.

Other Key Events in 2002: Restorative Justice Conferences – Paula, board member Pat Herrera and I attended the statewide RJ conference in Keystone in September, sponsored by the Colorado Forum on Community and Restorative Justice. Alice and Paula helped to host workshops there, and Alice also participated in a panel on innovative RJ community initiatives for youth. For our local RJ conference in May, two resource persons from the Girls' Equity Coalition presented a one-day workshop on Gender-related Issues in Treatment for Adolescent Girls. The event was well-attended by representatives from many area agencies and churches, along with several adolescent fostercare families. **Board & Staff Retreat** - In April, we held our third annual full-day board and staff retreat in San Luis. It was a productive day, with special focus being given to a visit from the peer mediators at Centennial High School in San Luis. A highlight was being able to preview the video footage from their school, shot by the national video crew from the Methodist Church in December '01. **Holiday Open House** – In mid-December, we again hosted a successful Holiday Open House at the VORP office. This was our third such event, and has become an annual way of inviting a wide variety of community members and colleagues into our offices and thanking them for their support and referrals during the year.

--Alice M. Price, Exec. Director
1/03