

## ***SLV VICTIM-OFFENDER RECONCILIATION PROGRAM - 2003***

2003 was a strong year overall for SLV-VORP. Program-wise, we expanded our services with a new pilot project for Parent-Teen mediation, described in more detail below. Financially, we returned to a stable budget, after unexpected cuts in two key state-sponsored operating grants in July 2002. We closed 2003 with a reasonable reserve, earned through extra contracting for outside grant administration for a few months. We are grateful to our faithful donors, local partners, board, staff and volunteers for their on-going belief in and support of our mission and programs in the San Luis Valley.

***VORP Case Referrals:*** 2003 was once again an interesting and challenging year for mediation referrals. We began the year with a carry-over of 15 open cases. We had 59 new referrals, up by 1 from last year. This is a very positive final statistic, as referrals were slow through August. Starting in September, referrals increased, with 34 new cases opened in the last four-month period. Needless to say, we were pleased and extremely busy this Fall. 32 cases were mediated with signed contracts or otherwise successfully conciliated during the year. We completed an intake with the offender in another 20 referrals, but either the victim was unwilling or unavailable, or staff screened out the case. In 3 other referrals, the offender was unwilling to participate; in the remaining 3, we received no response to our intake efforts. Altogether, we closed 58 cases in 2003, and will carry over 16 cases into 2004.

We continue to receive many referrals from the Alamosa Municipal Court, and maintain a strong relationship there. We also receive referrals throughout the valley from the District Attorney's office, probation, schools, juvenile diversion, and the juvenile magistrate. Recently, we accepted new referrals for youth conflicts arising in restraining orders filed in Costilla and Saguache county courts. These cases have been challenging, as they involve multiple families, and one includes parties living out of the area who visit family locally. Many thanks to our 20 VORP mediators. We could not handle a caseload in this amount and in all our counties without these important community volunteers.

***School Programs:*** As in past years, we have provided significant services to area schools in 2003. Carrie Heltzel coordinates this work, which includes skills trainings, as well as consultation and restorative intervention in disciplinary matters. In March, we hosted our 4<sup>th</sup> annual Teen Mediator Summit at ASC, attended by over 70 high school students and sponsors from 7 area high schools. The theme addressed bias and intolerance in schools. The morning focused on skill-building, with an afternoon keynote by Brent Scarpo, producer of the award-winning video, "Journey to a Hate-free Millennium." Seven students were also honored with VORP's "Extra Mile" award, for outstanding contributions as peer volunteers. Carrie provided refresher training in June for the mediators at Centennial High School. In the Fall, she provided several peer mediation trainings, for Mountain Valley, Alamosa, Center and Moffat High Schools, as well as Ortega, Moffat and Mountain Valley middle schools. Antonito and Sargent High Schools are scheduled for a January '04 refresher.

As part of our on-going partnership to integrate restorative discipline into the Alamosa school district, Carrie and Alice provided one-day trainings for the all-building administrative team in February and for Boyd Elementary staff in August. Plans are underway to introduce some of these same skills to the adult and junior staff of the Boys and Girls Club in early 2004. April 14<sup>th</sup> has been set for the 5<sup>th</sup> Teen Mediator Summit.

***Parent-Teen Mediation Pilot Project:*** 2003 saw the genesis of a new parent-teen mediation project, coordinated by Carrie. The intent is to provide assistance to families with teens who are experiencing conflict on a “normative” scale, and need help to negotiate such issues as driving, curfew, grades, and decision-making. Twelve volunteer mediators participated in specialized training in August and September. Referrals from such sources as high school counselors, Boys and Girls Club, and Social Services began in mid- September. We targeted a goal of mediating 12 cases in the first year, but current trends indicate this target could easily be exceeded. As of January, 8 intakes have been staffed. Five were mediated and reached full or partial agreement, and 1 settled outside of mediation by the end of the year. Two others are pending in January 2004.

While VORP has requested that referral sources screen out high-risk cases for this pilot year, the majority of cases mediated so far have involved more high-risk or chronic behavioral dynamics. These include issues of sexual activity, teen parenthood, drug and alcohol abuse, run-aways, early emancipation, and teens already involved in school disciplinary and/or juvenile court charges. Cases thus far have ranged from one to five multi-hour sessions. The time and ability to mediate these cases represents a high commitment on behalf of our volunteer. We feel fortunate to have a pool of such dedicated, talented, and professional individuals around which to build this program.

***Volunteer Mediator and Community Trainings:*** No training of new VORP volunteers was held in 2003, as our focus this year was on advanced training for Parent-Teen mediators. Presentations on VORP were provided by Paula to two ASC sociology classes and an Iliff Seminary conference in Denver. We also hosted two local one-day workshops and a conference for the broader Valley community. A June workshop by Girls Etc. focused on gender-based prevention and treatment for adolescent girls. A September workshop by Kay Pranis focused on circle process facilitation.

weekend conference in October targeted local faith communities, raising awareness about restorative justice and possible initiatives for congregations. Keynoters were Paul Barru, of Colorado Forum on Restorative Justice, and Lola West, chaplain with the Youthful Offender System. Other community outreach included talks at two local peace gatherings, facilitation of parent-youth dialogue at Sacred Heart parish, and programs on our services for the SLV School Counselor’s Association and Alamosa Social Services.

***Other Key Events in 2003: Regional & National Conferences*** – Carrie attended the School Mediation Center conference in Denver in June. Paula and Alice had the privilege of attending a bi-national conference of VOMA (Victim-Offender Mediation Association) in November. Excellent materials and contacts were found to enrich our local program. **Board & Staff Retreat** - In April, we held our fourth annual retreat in Moffat. Along with other business, significant time was focused on program expansion, including the option of initiating a Parent-Teen mediation pilot project.

--Alice M. Price, Exec. Director

Paula Medina, Program Manager

Carrie Heltzel, School Training & Parent-Teen Coordinator