



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

PO Box 1775, Alamosa, CO 81101

Phone/Fax (719) 589-5255

slvvorp@amigo.net <http://www.slvvorp.org>

2004 Annual Report

"If you're careful, the repair can actually add to the beauty of the thing – because it is a testimony to its worth." (E. Berg, The Art of Mending)

Overview: 2004 was a year of growth and change for SLV-VORP in three key areas:

- **Program development** - the board voted to extend the Parent-Teen mediation pilot project, begun in Fall 2003, into an on-going service of the agency.
- **Staffing:** we were fortunate to receive a full-time Mennonite/Americorps volunteer in August. Luke Yoder, who accepted a two-year assignment, moved quickly into the coordinator role for the parent-teen project, as well as for school programming. This provided a smooth transition with Carrie Heltzel's leave-taking to pursue work primarily in other parts of the state.
- **Technology:** we made several strides, updating our computer network, getting DSL, and developing an independent website address. We also entered the digital age with a new camera and printer/scanner.

Having a younger staff member again certainly has many benefits, including easing our technology transitions with more in-house expertise. Our next goal is to update our case management database system to more ably track our mediation work in all three program areas. We are discovering that this is not an easy task, and are partnering with community mediation programs around Colorado on this effort. This will hopefully allow us to customize some already-tested software for our own particular needs, as well as share data more readily with statewide colleagues, funders, and interested researchers.

We are grateful to have had a stable budget this year and a good outlook for the next:

- Two key sources of state funding that were in jeopardy have been restored, at least for the short-run:
 - Tony Grampsas Youth Service
 - Juvenile Accountability Block Grants
 - Other public money comes from the local VALE board and the SLV County Commissioners' budget process

- Undergirding these are our private funders, of which we had several this year:
 - Anschutz Family Fund
 - Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado
 - National Association for Community Mediation
 - three high school EPYCS clubs
 - Valley Community Fund, plus state and federal combined campaigns

We are also thankful to local individuals and congregations that support our work through financial and in-kind donations. Most notably, this includes office and training space that is invaluable to our work, donated by Sacred Heart Parish, and additional training space at First United Methodist Church of Alamosa. Last, but not least, are the many people throughout the Valley who serve faithfully as board members and volunteer mediators. They, along with those we serve, inspire us and help us keep our mission and programs fresh and responsive to community needs.

As we celebrate our tenth anniversary year, we look back at our humble beginnings as an all-volunteer initiative. While we take pride in the agency we have grown and all we have accomplished, we strive to hold fast to our community roots and the restorative principles that nourish them – working together to repair harm and restore relationships. In the words of a fictional character commenting on the work of restoration in broken relationships, “If you’re careful, the repair can actually add to the beauty of the thing – because it is a testimony to its worth.”(E.Berg, *The Art of Mending*) Some of the sites and subjects of our hopefully careful “repair” work in 2004 are detailed below.

Victim-Offender Mediation: We began 2004 with 16 open victim-offender mediation referrals. Overall we received 50 new referrals during the year, down by 9 from last year. Even though our total caseload was down, some of our referrals differed a bit from our typical victim-offender cases. For example, we received more adult referrals than usual, including neighbor-to-neighbor disputes. Also, several of our teen referrals arose from requests for restraining orders between peers, rather than delinquency charges. Another trend was the high number of referrals for school-site incidents during the year, which we attribute in part to our other work with schools. Some of these special categories of referrals were more challenging and time consuming, due to on-going relationship issues. But at the same time, many were interesting for the mediators and had positive outcomes. 35 of the referrals handled during the year were mediated with a signed contract, or otherwise successfully conciliated. We also completed 16 intakes in which the victim and/or offender chose not to mediate or one party was unavailable, and closed 2 other cases after referral because both parties felt there was nothing to negotiate. Altogether, we closed 53 cases in 2004, and will carry over 14. Two of these carry-over cases already have mediated contracts, but will not be closed until restitution is fully paid.

The majority of referrals came from the District Attorney’s office and the Alamosa Municipal Court, with which we maintain strong relationships. We were pleased to receive referrals from victim advocates in both Conejos and Alamosa counties this year, and have strengthened awareness of our services with advocates throughout the Valley. Other sources included Judge Martin Gonzales, Alamosa County judge and Juvenile

Magistrate; district and private probation, and area school administrators and counselors. We recognize and thank our VORP volunteer mediators, without whose support and dedication we could not serve our community in this capacity.

School Programs: 2004 provided VORP with many opportunities to serve area schools. Some of the services provided include peer mediation training and consultation, restorative discipline facilitation, and other direct intervention in conflict within the school setting. It has been a year of transition, as Carrie Heltzel moved out of her role as school coordinator at the end of the '03-04 school year, and new staff member Luke Yoder assumed these responsibilities just prior to the start of school in Fall '04. In the Spring, we hosted our 5th annual Teen Mediator Summit at ASC, attended by over 80 students and sponsors. The theme was "Breaking down Walls in our own Backyard," with a focus on cultural differences. The invitation to 20 adult community leaders from around the Valley to join the event this year added a new dimension of inter-generational dialogue on the theme. Aztec dancers and a rap artist also enriched the day, as did the surprise award of \$5,000 in scholarships by Frank Sanchez of ASC Student Affairs.

During the Fall, Luke and Alice provided training for 10 peer mediation teams, with assistance from Tu Casa staff member and volunteer mediator Teri Ebel. Students and sponsors from Alamosa, Antonito, Centennial, Center, Creede, Moffat, Mountain Valley and Sargent high schools, as well as Moffat and Ortega middle schools, participated in the trainings. In addition to these longer trainings, we have facilitated shorter workshops in settings that serve youth and young adults, such as the Boys and Girls Club, ASC, and a youth Service-Learning Conference. Also, we have consulted and/or intervened directly in a number of more specific instances of youth-in-conflict – both teen-on-teen and administrator-teen-parent conflicts - within school settings during the year. Over 20 of our mediations, some of which came to us as victim-offender referrals, involved school-site incidents. This has been an area of program development for us in recent years, and we are excited at the increased willingness of both juvenile justice and school personnel to consider restorative options in these situations.

As 2004 closes, plans are already underway for the next Teen Mediator Summit in Spring 2005, as well as for on-going support to existing peer mediation teams. In addition, VORP is in active discussion at year-end with several peer agencies about collaborative work on various school and after-school initiatives, including some possible new partnerships focused on bully prevention.

Parent-Teen Mediation: This program area, which began as a pilot project in Fall 2003, has seen significant success through its first year of operation. At the end of the initial 12-month trial, the Board supported the continuation of the project as a regular part of agency programming. The intent is to offer assistance to Valley families experiencing parent-teen conflict on a "normative" scale. We have continued with our policy of accepting cases through peer agency referrals, in an effort to provide an initial screening for the appropriateness of mediation. Referrals have come from sources such as Social Services, school counselors, and the Boys and Girls Club. During 2004, 13 Parent-Teen cases have been opened. Of these, 6 proceeded to mediation and are now closed, of

which 3 resulted in full or partial agreement. 4 referrals were either deemed inappropriate for mediation or the families declined services during follow-up on the referral. The remaining 3 cases are pending, with one mid-process and two still at the intake stage.

As during the pilot year, VORP has requested that peer referral sources screen out high-risk cases. However, many of the cases opened in 2004 involved fairly complex and chronic dynamics, which increased the number of cases that did not go to mediation or ended without more complete agreement. These issues included early emancipation, teens already involved in school disciplinary and/or juvenile court charges, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexual activity. Cases that have proceeded to mediation have typically ranged from one to four multi-hour sessions, with positive feedback from families. We are just beginning to implement pre- and post-survey instruments to participating families, to help them and us measure the impact of mediation on the quality of family communication and problem-solving.

As coordination of this program was in transition for three months prior to Luke's arrival, our volunteer mediators have devoted increased time and energy to these cases. Special recognition goes to Suzanne Shriber for her significant contributions during this period. In August, Carrie returned to train an additional group of volunteers who come from rich vocational backgrounds. We have been excited to introduce these new volunteers into our caseload, with good results. We continue to be thankful for the high skill-sets, dedication and energy possessed by this specialized team of mediators.

Other Training, Resourcing and Special Events: As in the past, we have provided programs about VORP services in a variety of local and regional settings during the year. These have included ASC classes, local advocates' training and networking meetings, county commissioner meetings, Family-Nurse partnership staff, and a community meeting in Creede. In addition, we facilitated a rural caucus at the statewide Restorative Justice conference in Keystone last May. For our local conference on restorative justice, we partnered with the Methodist Church and ASC to help plan and present at a weekend conference in November on "Peace through Understanding." One of the workshops was a demonstration of a restorative conference following a vandalism spree. Throughout the year, we have also shared our library resources and training materials with peer agencies such as Tu Casa, as well as with families and individuals interested in conflict resolution books and videos.

Our biggest special event of the year was our annual holiday open house. In honor of our 10th anniversary, we expanded this event to include displays of our history, a bigger array of food and drink, and live entertainment. Over 75 guests joined us in mid-December for a delicious buffet prepared by our board, good conversation, and inspiring music provided by high school student Antonio Lopez and long-time VORP partner Lenny Martinez. It provided a wonderful ending to a very good year.

--Alice M. Price, Exec. Director
Paula Medina, Program Manager
Luke Yoder, School Training & Parent-Teen Coordinator