



Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

PO Box 1775, Alamosa, CO 81101

Phone/Fax (719) 589-5255

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

2005 Annual Report

"If crime is a wound, justice should be about healing." (Dan Van Ness, Restoring Justice)

Overview:

Program Development -2005 was a year of growth and change for SLV-VORP in terms of program development. Most notably, we entered into a large collaborative grant to facilitate a three-year bullying prevention initiative at five after-school sites. This pulled us into a complementary, yet in many ways new arena of programming for our staff. It has also greatly heightened the level of interaction we now have with two key community partners – Tu Casa and Boys & Girls Clubs of the San Luis Valley – as well as with independent after-school sites in Capulin and San Luis. As with any collaborative initiative, there have been many hours dedicated to working through roles and expectations, along with team-building efforts generally. The investment thus far has produced both a breadth and depth of rich connections, with the shared goal of making our communities safer for all youth. We are thankful for the financial support and technical assistance available from the Colorado Trust for this endeavor. More detail on this initiative appears later in this report. On a smaller scale, we have researched restorative dialogue options for minors charged with underage possession of alcohol or drugs. We will begin to receive referrals from Judge Amanda Pearson of the Alamosa Municipal court on a pilot basis early in 2006, drawing on a model used successfully in Estes Park.

Technology - We continue to work at longer-term technology upgrades. During the first half of 2006, we hope to have completed the integration of a new case management database, in collaboration with several other community mediation programs throughout Colorado. We will also begin implementing a new state-wide data reporting system, called KIT, as part of our reporting requirements for two state funders: Tony Grampas Youth Services and Juvenile Accountability Block Grants. Finally, we have acquired QuickBooks software and will upgrade to this accounting system by mid-year. Luke Yoder has taken the lead in moving us towards these innovations.

Resources - In addition to the three major funders noted above (Colorado Trust, CDPHE – Tony Grampsas, and CO DCJ – Juvenile Block Grant), we are grateful to a variety of other public and private donors during 2005:

- Anschutz Family Foundation
- EPYCS clubs of three local high schools
- Federal Employee campaign
- National Association for Community Mediation
- SLV County Commissioners
- VALE
- Valley Community Fund, including state employee campaign
- Victim-Offender Mediation Association

Along with needed dollars, we are equally thankful for the many in-kind donations we receive on a daily basis. These include the key resources of office and training space donated by Sacred Heart Parish, as well as the invaluable human time and talents of our volunteers and board members from throughout the San Luis Valley. Hospice del Valle has also been generous during the past year with additional training space, as needed.

As we celebrate another year, we are mindful of the core values of our mission to provide restorative services to youth, families and schools. We trust, in the words of Dan Van Ness quoted above, that the work which we report below has been instrumental in some way in the healing of wounds - whether from crime, bullying, inter-personal disputes, or family conflict.

Victim-Offender Mediation:

Case load - We began 2005 with 17 open victim-offender mediation referrals. Overall, we received 47 new referrals during the year. Even though our total new caseload was 3 less than in 2004, some of our referrals were a bit more complex. For example, we processed an adult harassment referral involving a relationship with almost two decades of conflictual issues. Several of our teen referrals also arose from peer relationship issues, 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 school and after-school settings. These specialized referrals were more time consuming. But at the same time, they held interesting challenges for our mediators and most had positive outcomes for the victims and offenders that were served.

The majority of referrals came from the District Attorney's office, the Alamosa Municipal Court, and the Alamosa school system. Additional referral sources included victim advocates in both Conejos and Alamosa counties, the Juvenile Magistrate for the judicial district, probation, and other area schools and after-school sites. Thirty-nine referrals closed during the year were mediated with a signed contract or otherwise successfully conciliated. We also closed 14 referrals after intake, in which the victim and/or offender chose not to mediate or one party was unavailable, and closed 1 additional case that was mediated without an agreement. Altogether, we closed 54 cases in 2005, and carried over 10 open cases into the new year. We recognize and thank our

VORP mediators, without whose volunteer support and dedication we could not serve our community in this capacity. We also recognize the on-going leadership of VORP's program manager, Paula Medina.

Impact data – As noted above, 72% of closed cases resulted in successful completion of services. This included full payment of any related restitution, as well as compliance with behavioral terms of the agreements. A recidivism study was conducted during the year, on all juvenile cases closed 6-12 mos. preceding June 30th. This study involved 24 cases, covering 22 unduplicated youth offenders. The overall rate of recidivism for all cases was 7 youth, or 32%. However, for those 15 youth who had successfully completed services, the recidivism rate was only 20%. Only 1 of these youth was involved in a more serious incident, with the other new charges being related to status offenses (driving w/o a license; underage possession). By contrast, the recidivism rate for youth who did not complete services was 43% - more than double. In addition, these youth on average recidivized with more serious felony offenses.

School Programs:

In 2005, VORP's school programs arena expanded increasingly to include work at after-school sites throughout the Valley. Work in these settings has largely focused on VORP's new undertaking last Spring to facilitate a collaborative, 3-year grant to implement bullying prevention at 5 after-school sites. This bullying prevention work has led to an increase in VORP's contacts with after-school sites in other capacities as well. This shift places two key areas underneath the "school programs" umbrella: direct services to schools and work in after-school sites.

School Sites – As in years past, VORP had opportunities for a plethora of rich interactions with area schools. These included peer mediation training and consultation, restorative discipline consultation, and several direct interventions with youth-in-conflict in school-based settings. We also hosted the 6th annual Teen Mediator Summit at ASC, attended by over 60 Valley youth and sponsors in the late Spring. With the theme *Personal Power: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, the Summit addressed VORP's newest area of expertise—bullying – from the perspective and experience of high school youth. The day was enhanced by a rousing presentation by Taiko drummers from Crestone, as well as through various activities and discussions led by facilitator Ken Puhler. The event was once again made possible due to the tremendous support of our staff, volunteers, board and Adams State College, each of whom contributed invaluable to make the day a success.

Peer mediation training was another key component of our school programs in 2005. In the Spring, a Centauri Middle School mediation class was trained to address peer conflicts and to explore initiation of an on-going mediation team at the school. With assistance from Teri Ebel, Tu Casa's education specialist, Luke Yoder coordinated and facilitated peer mediation trainings for 10 Valley schools throughout the Fall. Participants included high school teams from Creede, Alamosa, Centennial, Centauri, Center,

Sanford, Sargent, and Antonito high schools, as well as Sanford and Ortega middle schools.

Additionally, we have been involved in numerous other interactions with area schools. Increasingly, schools are referring school-site incidents to VORP for mediation or other restorative interventions. Although not all referred by school officials, 12 of the 45 new case referrals noted above involved school or after-school site incidents of some type. Additionally, VORP has provided various other workshops and presentations for schools around problem-solving processes, restorative discipline skills and models, and mediation-related topics, on request.

After-School Sites/Bullying Prevention – At the beginning of 2005, VORP began developing key partnerships with five area after-school sites, as well as Tu Casa, in preparation for submitting a grant to the Colorado Trust to address bullying prevention. The sites include the Alamosa, La Jara and Monte Vista locations of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the SLV, along with Valle del Sol community center in Capulin and St. Andrew Youth Guild in San Luis. While the grant was written to deal with bullying prevention, VORP’s interactions with the five sites has grown to include other facets of our work with conflict resolution and restorative discipline. The Alamosa Club, in particular, has utilized VORP to train both junior staff and adults in a variety of skills related to communication, mediation and restorative discipline. We also provided direct interventions with 3 youth involved in disciplinary matters in the after-school setting.

Our main work with after-school sites has consisted of administrative and training functions related to the bullying prevention initiative. As the lead agency, we have spent considerable time and energy ensuring that partnerships are functioning well, overseeing various aspects of grant administration, coordinating all-site trainings, and assisting with kick-off events and hands-on activities at each site. Included in the coordinating committee for overall leadership of the grant, along with Luke Yoder and Alice Price, are Kristella Mata Hartshorn of Boys & Girls Clubs and Teri Ebel of Tu Casa. While this start-up phase has been a challenge at times, it has also brought with it many rich interactions and relationships. We are also becoming more adept as a team with the particularities of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the research-based model selected for implementation under the grant. We are especially pleased to have received a mini-grant to bring a national Olweus specialist to the Valley in early 2006.

Parent-Teen Mediation:

This program area began its first full year as a regular part of agency programming in the fall of 2004. While it has remained small, it has continued to experience success through 2005. The intent is to provide Valley families with a venue for addressing “normative” adolescent conflict. In an effort to ensure suitability of cases, we have a policy of accepting referrals from peer agencies – rather than directly from families - to assist us in the screening and assessment process. Referral sources in 2005 included social services, victims’ advocates, judges, and mental health counselors.

Four cases from 2004 carried over into 2005. Additionally, 9 new cases were opened, resulting in 13 cases closed in 2005. Of the 13 cases, 8 proceeded to mediation and 6 families were successful in coming to agreements related to their areas of concern. Five cases did not proceed to mediation because they were deemed inappropriate at intake, the family declined services, or the family pursued other appropriate services such as counseling prior to or in lieu of engaging in mediation. We were pleased that one mother requested mediation with an older son, a few months after a school administrator had referred her and a younger son into a mediation process that she felt was quite successful.

A number of cases referred during the year involved more complex and high-conflict dynamics than the program was originally designed to address. Helpful feedback from our volunteer mediators has led us to revisit screening protocols at the staff level before passing referrals on to volunteers. This will hopefully allow for more thorough evaluation of cases prior to the additional intake engaged in by the mediators assigned to the case. We continue to be thankful for our highly skilled parent-teen mediators and the energy, enthusiasm and insights they bring to the table.

Other Training, Resourcing and Special Events:

As in the past, we have provided programs about VORP services, as well as skill-building workshops, in a variety of local and regional settings during the year. These have included ASC classes, presentations to the Valleywide county commissioners, SLV school counselors, the regional Catholic deanery, foster care parents, and others. We have also been involved for several months in a local coalition preparing activities related to a Spring 2006 production of *Dead Man Walking* by the Adams State College theater department. This has included assistance with a facilitator's guide for book study groups, and arrangements to bring in a photo portrait display of persons serving life sentences, as well as persons who are survivors of violent crime. Over the opening weekend of the play, VORP staff will also be involved in facilitating activities for a day-long community forum, keynoted by author Sr. Helen Prejean, on forgiveness. At the national level, our staff designed and co-facilitated a workshop on the challenges of rural restorative justice programming at the VOMA conference in Philadelphia in October. Throughout the year, we have also shared our library resources and training materials with peer agencies, educators, and individuals throughout the Valley, as well as answered many phone requests for information about restorative justice from varied venues throughout the region.

2005 ended with our annual holiday open house in mid-December. Despite a blustery, cold evening, dozens of friends and colleagues stopped by to enjoy some of what we hope VORP has become known for over the past decade: a place to be well-fed in both body and spirit.

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