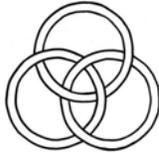


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Formerly San Luis Valley Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP)

"It is not enough to prepare our children for the world; we also must prepare the world for our children." – Luis J. Rodriguez

2007 Annual Report

Ring out the old, Ring in the new:

2007 has been a year of change for San Luis Valley VORP. Through a series of discussions among the staff and board, a decision was made to transition to a new name for the agency beginning in January 2008. Our new name is Center for Restorative Programs. As in cultures that bestow a public name on a child only after her or his personality or role in the community becomes clearer, those of us close to the agency felt it was time to represent more accurately the deepening and broadening of our mission since our conception in 1994. That part of our work that draws on the rich tradition of the victim-offender reconciliation model will always remain central to our identity. However, we have expanded and hope to continue to grow in programmatic focus over the years, in response to community needs. These new arenas still embody the core principles of restorative justice for addressing harm or brokenness in relationships: inclusion, accountability, and restoration. In our work with youth-in-conflict, we continue to draw on and balance these principles in designing models appropriate to varying contexts: victim-offender dialogue, teen-on-teen conflict, bullying, a spectrum of other disciplinary incidents, parent-teen mediation, etc. This is an on-going learning process, as we strive to offer youth ways to "make things right" with others.

Along with our name change have come other updates to our office. We have a new logo to grace our letterhead, brochures and calendars. Our website, sorely in need of updating, is being revamped at our new address: www.restorativeprograms.org. With the support of extra state funds for juvenile services that became available unexpectedly mid-year, we also were able to update both the hardware and software for our computer network. Another issue related to office facilities has been in discussion this year. While our arrangement with Sacred Heart parish has been a welcome one for many years, how to address the need for additional space for staff and programming remains an unanswered question. No formal capital campaign has been undertaken, but the board has begun to explore new avenues for fundraising, as well as potential alternate sites.

Victim-Offender Dialogue:

We began 2007 with 10 open victim-offender mediation referrals. Over the year, we received an additional 57 new referrals, including several school-site incidents. Of the 56 cases closed during the year, 48 were mediated or otherwise successfully conciliated (86%), with all but one mediated case resulting in resolution of concerns (98%). We also completed 8 intakes where one party chose not to mediate, a party was unavailable, or other circumstances prevented the case from moving forward. We will carry 11 pending cases into 2008. Our referral level stayed fairly steady throughout the year, with cases from most counties in the valley. The majority of referrals came from our long-term partners at the District Attorney's office, Probation, Alamosa Municipal Court Judge Amanda Pearson, and the Alamosa school system and involved youth offenders. Through our outreach to schools, we also received referrals from the South Conejos and North Conejos districts,

as well as consulting this Fall with several other area school administrators regarding school-site incidents. Alamosa County judge Michael Gonzales, with whom we had a close relationship as Deputy District Attorney, also referred two adult matters involving inter-generational family disputes. We have a small, but dedicated group of volunteer mediators. Without their support and dedication, we could not serve our community in this capacity. We welcomed some new volunteers in 2007 and hope to add to that base during 2008 trainings. Paula Medina continues to provide oversight to this program area, as well as general coordination of our volunteer mediators.

School Programs:

During 2007, we devoted a significant amount of time to school programming. This included a several month process designing and preparing for the valley-wide School Climate Symposium. This 3-year initiative, funded through The Colorado Trust, will formally end in Spring 2008. We are in a period of transition as we consider how to integrate the anti-bullying work we have been doing through this generous grant into our other more established menu of programming for schools, after-school programs and other youth-serving sites. Erin Kenzie has provided over-all coordination of services in these program areas, with able assistance from Claire McArdle, who joined our staff as a full-time Mennonite volunteer in September.

Bullying Prevention Initiative– Our final full year as the lead agency for the Bullying Prevention Initiative ended with a winding down of implementation activities. As we approach the conclusion of the grant, we have entered a phase of evaluation and sustainability planning. Earlier in the year, we provided all-staff training related to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program for the three Boys & Girls Club sites originally targeted by the grant. We also continued to provide training and technical assistance to the Centennial school district, whose staff we had trained in the Olweus program during Fall 2006. Additionally, we worked with our partners, Tu Casa and Boys and Girls Clubs, to provide a series of Get Real about Bullying Prevention classes for middle school youth at Sacred Heart Church in Alamosa and Monte Vista Middle School. We also included bullying prevention resources during the School Climate Symposium, as discussed below. As the year drew to a close, we initiated conversations with districts that attended the Symposium regarding on-going needs in this arena. In December, this included participating with Tu Casa on a panel for all middle and high school students at Mountain Valley. This event, which included a keynote by Chief Jackson of the Alamosa Police Department, focused on the growing concern of cyber-bullying.

This Fall, Alice Price traveled to Clemson University to attend the second stage of a two-year training process to become nationally certified as an Olweus Bullying Prevention trainer. If she is able to complete an additional 12-month consultation with a second new school site in the coming year, her certification will be final. This will allow us to continue to offer this service in the future.

School Climate Symposium – By far the biggest undertaking of the year was a 3-day School Climate Symposium. Planned in collaboration with Tu Casa and Boys & Girls Clubs of the San Luis Valley, the event primarily targeted area school administrators. The Colorado Trust, the Gay and Lesbian Fund of Colorado, and Adams State College provided significant underwriting, allowing us to engage high quality resource speakers. The event opened with a community reception, book-signing, and key-note address by Barbara Coloroso, a best-selling author on bullying dynamics. Around 200 youth and adults attended from throughout the Valley. Over the following two days, an in-depth symposium for 60 school and community leaders was held at Adams State. Fourteen national and regional experts presented research and best practices on topics related to school climate, including the critical connection between social-emotional health and academic success.

The Symposium was an opportunity to draw on our learning from the Bullying Prevention Initiative to assist schools with sustainable, systemic change related to school climate. It also strengthened our relationships with area schools. Of the Valley's 14 districts, 9 sent

representatives: Alamosa, Centennial, Creede, Moffat (including Crestone Charter School), Monte Vista, North Conejos, Sanford, Sangre de Cristo, and South Conejos. Also in attendance were Police Chief Jackson of Alamosa, Board of Cooperative Educational Services staff, our non-profit partners, the Religious Ed director from Sacred Heart parish, Senator Salazar's local representative, and a number of faculty, staff and teacher education students from ASC. Since the event, we have offered follow-up consultations to attending schools and to student services and public safety staff at ASC.

Other School Activities – Sangre de Cristo School District had us train all staff in restorative discipline methods in August. In October, we hosted peer mediation trainings for Valley high schools and middle schools. Over 95 students, along with adults sponsors from Sanford, Moffat, Creede, Center, Centauri, Sangre de Cristo, and Centennial high schools and Ortega Middle School, attended one-day trainings. We welcome Sangre de Cristo as the newest team in the Valley. Over the year, our on-going partnership with the Alamosa District remained strong and continued to diversify. We met several times with groups of administrators and staff to discuss such topics as anti-bullying efforts, restorative discipline, truancy, and other concerns. We also participated in a district-wide strategic planning process and are currently developing resources to respond to a request to facilitate Girls Circles for at-risk teens. We are exploring funding options to allow this partnership to grow in the coming year. We anticipate relationships with other districts to expand as well, as a result of contacts made with administrators during and after the Symposium.

Parent-Teen Mediation

Renee Mackey has worked part-time to develop this newer area of mediation services. Numbers still remain small, with 9 new family referrals during the year and 12 cases closed during this period. Families who are not self-referred have a high rate of declining services or dropping out mid-way. Many referred families have been found to be in need of more intensive interventions than mediation. Our volunteer mediators have done a commendable job, despite these challenges. We also continue to explore ways to make this service accessible, timely, useful and culturally sensitive for families for whom mediation is an appropriate avenue for addressing and resolving parent-adolescent conflicts and concerns. A special thanks goes to Michelle Salazar and her Spanish translation students at Adams State, as well as to volunteer Jose' Cholula, for assistance in translating forms for this program, as well as our agency brochures.

Other Community Training, Resourcing, and Special Events:

We continue to be involved in the community in various ways that broaden the scope of our normal programming. Throughout the year, we have presented programs or facilitated meetings on conflict resolution, communication skills and related topics to a variety of audiences, including Adams State College classes, Adelante, Boys & Girls Clubs of the Arkansas Valley, La Gente, SLV Catholic Deanery, Sacred Heart Parish Council, and Valley-wide Sheriffs' Victim Advocates. Additionally, Paula was heavily involved in planning and attending the September Rural Philanthropy Days events, along with board member Julie Zaragoza. A pilot project was initiated in the Alamosa community this Fall. In partnership with Alamosa County Court judge Michael Gonzales, Claire is offering mediation to parties in small claims court on a weekly basis. These cases include neighbor disputes, landlord-tenant issues and miscellaneous smaller money claims.

--prepared by the Executive Director and staff, January 2008