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Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program

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Restorative Justice brings victims, offenders and the community together to search for solutions and reconciliation. SLV- VORP offers the opportunity for young offenders and their victims to meet with trained, volunteer mediators from the community to discuss the offense and "make things right." VORP also assists schools in developing conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, and other restorative alternatives to suspension.

FALL

NEWSLETTER

2001

TRAINING ON RESTORATIVE OPTIONS FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Thirty school and community leaders from around the Valley attended a 2-day training on Aug. 16 – 17 to learn more about restorative options for school discipline. Sponsored by SLV Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program, the training was a follow-up to an earlier workshop in May which addressed the question: How can schools and the broader community strike a healthy balance between addressing basic safety and discipline concerns, while providing more restorative options for youth who have violated school rules? Lead trainer was David Claassen-Wilson, Restorative Justice coordinator for the Colorado School Mediation Project.

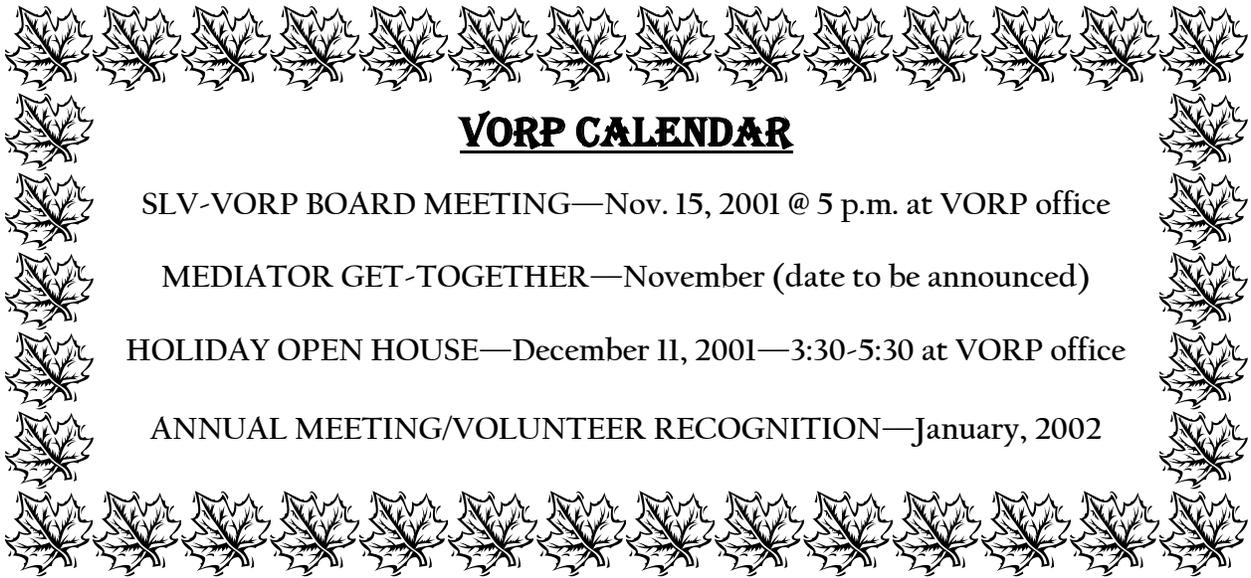
The training focused on Restorative Discipline Conferencing as an alternative or supplement to the more conventional student suspension response to school infractions. In the Conferencing model, students and their parents meet together with school staff and others impacted by the misbehavior to discuss three key questions: What was the harm? Who was affected? Who should be responsible to repair the harm? The dialogue is facilitated by trained volunteers. If consensus can be reached, a contract is made to address the concerns, while keeping the offending student still integrated in the educational setting.

Schools in Front Range communities which have been implementing this model are finding that the added investment of time upfront can de-escalate problems in a positive manner and often results in lower repeat offenses throughout the year.

The Alamosa School District co-sponsored the event and sent a sizeable team of administrators and counselors, along with superintendent Henry Herrera and two school board representatives. The Alamosa district plans to pilot a Restorative Discipline committee this Fall to explore uses of the Conferencing model and other restorative options for discipline and conflict resolution throughout the District. Neil Seneff, the new Ortega Middle School principal, will coordinate this effort. Other school administrators in attendance included representatives from the Sanford and Sargent districts.

Enthusiasm for the training was high. At the close of the two days, most participants rated the content as "highly stimulating," and especially enjoyed the informal, interactive format used for the presentation. Clearly, the audience was excited by the possibilities which lie ahead in using approaches which are more restorative, rather than simply punitive, to address negative behaviors in school settings. For more information on this event and on future trainings on this topic, contact SLV-VORP, 589-5255.

--Alice M. Price, VORP director



VORP CALENDAR

SLV-VORP BOARD MEETING—Nov. 15, 2001 @ 5 p.m. at VORP office

MEDIATOR GET-TOGETHER—November (date to be announced)

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE—December 11, 2001—3:30-5:30 at VORP office

ANNUAL MEETING/VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION—January, 2002

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SLV VORP SUPPORTERS

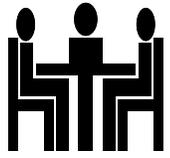
- Please add me to the mailing list for the next mediator training
- I am enclosing a tax deductible contribution for \$ _____
- I am enclosing the name & phone # of a church or civic organization that may be interested in a presentation about VORP

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SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund

San Luis Valley



Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program

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Tales from the Table

Over the years, VORP has found a rich cross-over between the work it does directly with and for schools, and the mediation of court-referred juvenile offenses. The following case mediated last Spring is a prime example. The case involved a young boy who committed vandalism at a nearby elementary school. While the incident took place outside school hours and did not involve a current student at the school, the school was in the youth's neighborhood and he had attended there as a younger child.

Jake (not his real name) took responsibility for his actions and wanted to participate in mediation. Prior to the VORP referral, Jake and his dad had already repaired the physical damage done to the school's greenhouse. However, Jake still wanted to apologize in a more direct way. A meeting was arranged for Jake to meet with the elementary principal, along with his mother and two VORP mediators. Jake explained to the principal how he and his cousin had been playing in the playground and then began throwing dirt clods at the greenhouse. Afterwards, he had had to go to the police station and felt very scared and sad. His cousin, who had been visiting from out-of-town, returned home and left Jake to take responsibility for the damage. Jake then expressed how very sorry he was. The principal readily accepted his apology and felt that he was sincere. She told Jake that she was proud of him for taking responsibility for his actions and for being willing to meet with her.

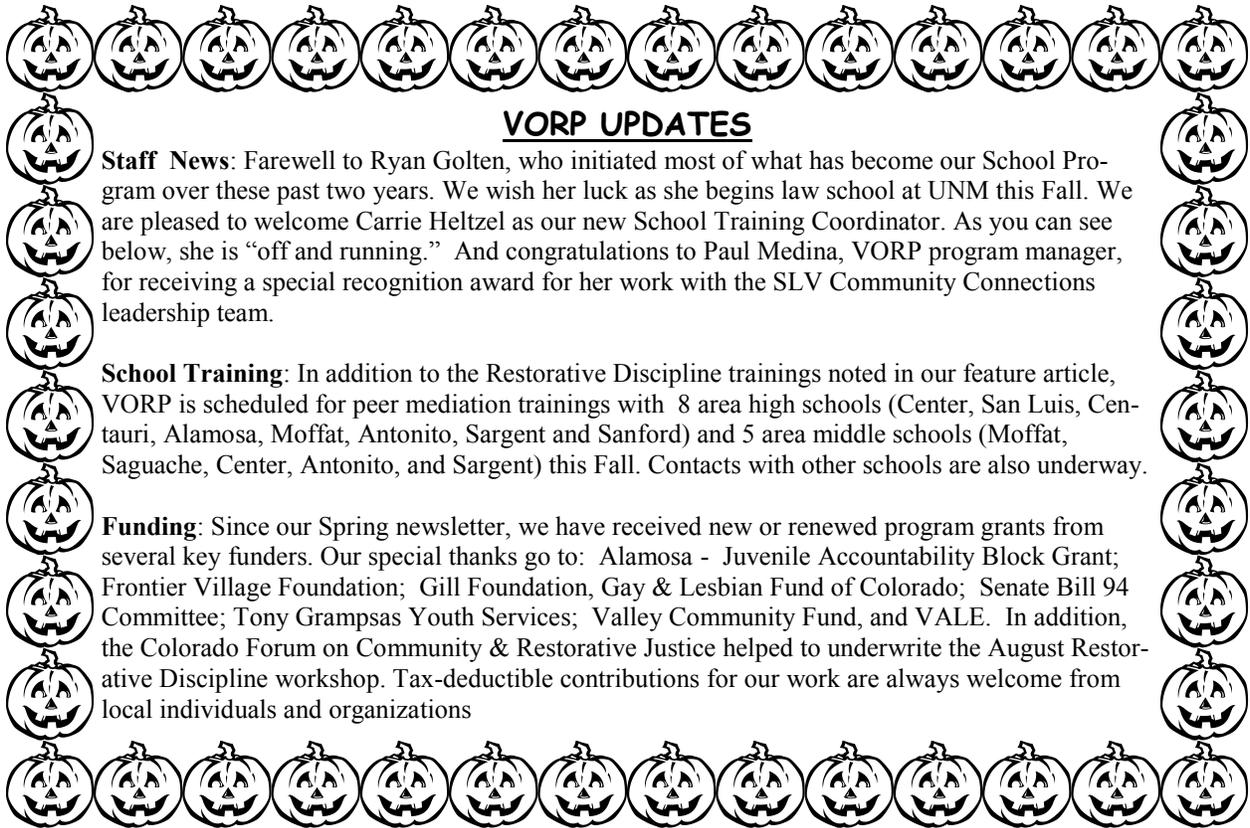
She then told Jake about how hard she and many others had worked to get the greenhouse up and running. It had taken two years and they had finally gotten everything completed just before the vandalism took place. She expressed how sad and disappointing it was for her and for all the people who had worked on the project to learn of the vandalism. The principal did a great job in helping Jake to understand how his actions affected so many. Jake, not realizing this before, once again apologized to her.

What was great about this mediation was that Jake got the chance to understand all the work many people had done on the greenhouse project and how his thoughtless behavior had impacted them. Moreover, having been willing to be accountable, he was then given a restorative opportunity. At the end of the meeting, the principal expressed her renewed trust in Jake by inviting him to come to the greenhouse over the summer. That way he could see what they do there and could work in the greenhouse himself, if he wished. Jake said he would like to do that very

A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt about the Sept. 11th tragedy. "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." The grandson asked, "which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" The grandfather answered, "The one I feed."

WISH LIST

- 35 mm camera w/flash
- Vacuum cleaner



VORP UPDATES

Staff News: Farewell to Ryan Golten, who initiated most of what has become our School Program over these past two years. We wish her luck as she begins law school at UNM this Fall. We are pleased to welcome Carrie Heltzel as our new School Training Coordinator. As you can see below, she is “off and running.” And congratulations to Paul Medina, VORP program manager, for receiving a special recognition award for her work with the SLV Community Connections leadership team.

School Training: In addition to the Restorative Discipline trainings noted in our feature article, VORP is scheduled for peer mediation trainings with 8 area high schools (Center, San Luis, Centauri, Alamosa, Moffat, Antonito, Sargent and Sanford) and 5 area middle schools (Moffat, Saguache, Center, Antonito, and Sargent) this Fall. Contacts with other schools are also underway.

Funding: Since our Spring newsletter, we have received new or renewed program grants from several key funders. Our special thanks go to: Alamosa - Juvenile Accountability Block Grant; Frontier Village Foundation; Gill Foundation, Gay & Lesbian Fund of Colorado; Senate Bill 94 Committee; Tony Grampas Youth Services; Valley Community Fund, and VALE. In addition, the Colorado Forum on Community & Restorative Justice helped to underwrite the August Restorative Discipline workshop. Tax-deductible contributions for our work are always welcome from local individuals and organizations

“THE PEER MEDIATOR’S RHYME”

The mediator’s rhyme remains a thin line,
between humanity and understanding conflicts
and fights, if we could just get along
without using fists we could turn on the light,
for people using only 5% of their mind,
when they could be using the other 95% to help find,
the reasons others are committing crimes
and the reason why they stay blind
to the fact that they react
too fast with a gat in the back
of an innocent bystander caught up in this rap,
which makes me kinda sick because a lick isn’t
worth a human’s life, material possessions
are an obsession with ignorance which isn’t right,
so all I can do is write about what I think and see
because a drink of Hennessie not gonna change
my perspective on time.
Peer mediators are like navigators,
showing you the right path,
forget the assassins hurting the world with their wrath, I gasp when I have no thoughts left in my
brain
but the only thing that makes me insane is
other people’s pain.

- Gerald A. Rodriguez- 11th Grade – Centennial H. S.