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Luke Yoder-School/Training
Coordinator



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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

PO Box 1775, Alamosa, CO 81101 (719) 589-5255

Fall/Winter

NEWSLETTER

2004

Program Philosophy

SLV-VORP brings young offenders, victims and the community together to search for reconciliation and solutions to "make things right." We also serve 1) Schools—facilitation, training and development around conflict resolution, peer mediation, and restorative discipline; 2) Families—Parent-Teen Mediation.

10th Anniversary Edition

Director's Updates:

The beautiful gold of Fall has largely passed; there is the nip of winter in the air. And with winter – along with lots of snow for our depleted aquifers, hopefully - comes VORP's annual holiday open house!! The upcoming open house is particularly special, as it launches the celebration of our 10th Anniversary year. Started as a pilot project in 1994, VORP officially incorporated with its own board in early 1995. We look forward to having many of you friends and supporters throughout this 10-year history join us on Dec. 14th . (See back page for details)

In addition to our usual assortment of mediation cases, the Fall has included a number of training events with area middle and high schools. Focused on skill-building for student mediators and their sponsors, these annual school trainings always reinforce three things: 1) Valley communities are full of youth with the personal resources and commitment to be peacemakers; 2) the insights and fun-loving spirit of teens are a welcome boost to us

"elders"; and 3) fluency in good listening and non-violent problem-solving should be taught as language skills to all children, beginning in kindergarten. Asked for "wishes" at the end of the day, one high school participant put it well, "I wish all students could be introduced to the mediation process and begin to use it in their own lives."

An added treat this Fall has been the opportunity to incorporate our newest staff member, Luke Yoder, into his role as our school program coordinator. Luke joined us in mid-August for a two-year term through Mennonite Voluntary Service/Americorps. Not only is Luke a natural when it comes to mediation skills, he also has great organizing talents. We have also enjoyed Shawana Green, known as "Shae", as our Fall sociology intern from Adams State. Single-handedly, they have driven the average staff age down from the 50's to at least the mid-30's - updating our music, lingo and jewelry in the process - for which Paula and I (and undoubtedly the youth we work with) are grateful!!

-Alice M. Price

Introducing our Intern

My name is Shawana Green. I am a twenty-two year old undergraduate student at Adams State College. My major is Sociology, emphasizing Criminal Justice and General Sociology, with a minor in Accounting. I am originally from Louisiana, but now reside in Littleton, Colorado. I grew up in various countries in Europe due to the fact that my father was in the Air Force. I have two younger sisters, one a junior in high school and the other a junior at CU - Boulder. Upon graduating from Adams State College in May 2005, I will be getting married and moving to Seattle, Washington.

I am doing my internship at VORP for the Fall semester because I am interested in restorative justice as it relates to juvenile offenders. I hope to gain knowledge and insight into the criminal justice system as it pertains to juveniles. As I write this, I am scheduled to help lead a mediation between two teen girls – which will be my first!

How Can You Help?

_____ I am enclosing a tax deductible contribution in the amount of \$ _____

_____ I am enclosing the name & phone # of a church or civic organization that may be interested in a presentation about VORP programs.

_____ If you work for a state or federal office, participate in your Combined Campaign, for which VORP is a recognized charity.

_____ If you have an account at SLV Federal Savings, stop by after Nov. 22nd and select SLV-VORP as a “Customer’s Choice” charity.

TALES FROM THE TABLE

As a recent addition to the staff here at SLV-VORP, I entered into my two year volunteer position with a bit of uncertainty as to how exactly I would be able to translate my recent college experience into a more “real world” setting. I graduated from Goshen (IN) College with degrees in Accounting and Bible & Religion and a minor in Peace, Justice, Conflict Studies this past May. It was after taking some courses in mediation and interpersonal conflict that my interest in restorative justice began to develop and that I began to explore options that might allow me to incorporate my desire to volunteer with my lifelong interest in peace-building. Finally, after much searching, I ended up here in the Valley. And if the opportunity to work for an organization like VORP meant that I “had” to live in a beautiful place like the Valley—well, I was prepared to deal with that reality!

As I’ve slowly begun to settle into my role here with VORP I have been continuously discovering new ways in which all of my classroom learning can complement the “real world” experiences I’ve been having. However, I have definitely also realized that there is no textbook, no professor, that can adequately prepare one for the power of real experience.

The first VORP case I participated in happened to be a prime example of an instance in which the actual experience was much more profound than any textbook scenario. The case landed on our desks as a referral from a county court involving a restraining order between two teenage girls. While this case initially seemed like a typical victim-offender situation, after meeting separately with the two girls and their parents it became evident that there were some additional considerations. During the intake process my co-mediator and I discovered that there had been quite a bit of previous history between the parents of the two girls, in both work and social situations. As a result of the conflict between the two girls, the relationship between the parents had also rapidly deteriorated—to the point that there was significant distrust and anger between the two families. This presented a unique situation in that both sets of parents also had an interest in meeting to work to resolve some of their differences.

“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.” - Sir Winston Churchill

Ultimately, we ended up setting up two separate mediations—first we met with the two girls and later the same day with the girls’ parents. In both instances, there were moments of frustration and even anger; however, these moments were brilliantly overshadowed by intense moments of clarity and understanding. In session with the two girls, it was extremely powerful to see a particular moment in which the two girls realized that one of their mutual “friends” had been feeding them both misinformation and thereby fueling their conflict. That realization truly seemed to open their eyes to the importance poor communication had played in their feelings toward one another and gave them hope that they might be able to avoid problems in the future.

Similarly, in session with the parents, moments of understanding and clarity overshadowed moments of frustration and distrust. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this mediation was witnessing the effect the preceding mediation with the girls had on the parents. By modeling good communication and a desire to put the conflict behind them and to move forward constructively, the girls had set a powerful example for their parents. This led to a desire on the parents’ behalf to reach an understanding from which they could, in turn, model positive communication and conflict management skills to their daughters. Ultimately, the parents were able to come to an understanding that mirrored this desire.

The opportunity to participate in a case like this was an incredibly powerful experience. I have become increasingly excited about the opportunities and possibilities mediation presents, and I’m certainly looking forward to soaking in more “real world” experiences.

-Luke Yoder



SLV Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program

10th Anniversary

and

Holiday Open House

Tuesday, December 14, 2004

4:00-6:00 p.m.

at the

Sacred Heart Church Fireplace Room

(across from the Alamosa courthouse on 4th Street)

SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund

San Luis Valley



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