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Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

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

Spring/Summer

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.

SLV-VORP NEWS

VORP Updates

When we decided early last Fall to trim down to two newsletter editions a year, little did we suspect how quickly ‘03 would fly by. Now we find ourselves nearly at the mid-point of a new year—and behind again in our newsletter production! In our case, “no news is good news.” The past several months have been filled with lots of hard work by our staff and volunteers. Program services are being delivered in three different arenas: 1) victim-offender mediation; 2) mediation and restorative justice training and intervention for schools; and 3) our newest area, parent-teen mediation. Just as importantly, we still believe in and fully enjoy what we do. As one board member commented at the close of a recent board-staff retreat, “this is my most fun group!”

Though public funds for youth programs are less available and even less predictable, we continue to find creative ways to bring restorative options to our Valley communities. I realize as I write that ‘04 marks our 10th anniversary year for victim-offender mediation services – having started in mid- ’94 as a “pilot project.” For small non-profits, I guess that puts us in the “survivor” category!

Speaking of “pilot projects,” last September we launched a Parent-Teen Mediation project with a target of 12 referrals during our pilot year.

As of May, 13 referrals have been received and the board has approved continuing into a second year. We are pleased to be teaming up with Face-to-Face, a restorative justice program in the Denver area that also provides Parent-Teen mediation, on an outcome evaluation tool for families utilizing this service.

This new endeavor could not have succeeded without the many hours dedicated by our project coordinator, Carrie Heltzel, and a core of specially-trained volunteer mediators. In mid-August, as we prepare to enter our second year, we will host a training for new parent-teen mediation volunteers. If you or someone you know might be interested, call for more details.

The August training for parent-teen mediators will be Carrie’s last “official duty” for SLV-VORP. She has joined her husband in Aspen where he recently began a long-term contract as a pianist. Despite the wonders of long-distance communication, we miss her. We know that the many schools and families she has worked with over the past three years will miss her kind spirit and wise ways, as well. We’ve begun the process of looking for the impossible “replacement.” In the meantime, if you hear of any lucrative piano-playing jobs within commuting distance of Alamosa, let us know!!

--Alice Price, Executive Director

2004 PEER MEDIATOR SUMMIT A SUCCESS

- *"I learned that many other cultures are a lot like mine and some are very different. You should accept everyone for who they are."*
- *"I realize it is important to know yourself. Don't change yourself to please another person. Be happy with who you are and where you came from."*

These student comments were written following the recent Peer Mediator Summit. On April 14, 2004, nearly 100 student and adult community leaders and hosts converged at Adams State College for the 5th annual Summit. Organized by SLV-VORP, the event tapped the passion of both youth and adults to share and learn from each others' experiences. The theme, "Cliques, Cred & Culture," set the stage for a wide variety of activities throughout the day.

Seventy peer mediators and sponsors attended from eight area high schools – Centauri, Alamosa, Moffat, Mountain Valley, Monte Vista, Antonito, Centennial, and Center. This year, community "elders" were also invited from throughout the Valley to watch and learn, share their wisdom, and lend their support to the work of these teen mediators. Over 20 adult leaders, including judges, mayors, school board members and others, were warmly welcomed and lent their gracious spirits to the day.

Audrey Liu, "artist-in-residence," greeted participants with brightly colored mask-making materials. Soon masks of all types adorned the walls of the conference space in a creative reflection of the many "faces" of culture and identity. Artifacts from the SLV filled another corner of the large room.

The morning session - led by multi-cultural trainers, Bill de la Cruz and Lora Vivas - was spent exploring cultural attributes and values. Activities ranging from journaling and guided visualization, to small and large group dialogue, engaged everyone in deepening their understanding of what culture is, how it impacts our lives, and how it can provide both strengths and barriers to personal growth. Old and young alike enjoyed sharing stories. Several expressed surprise at how little they really knew about their own heritage, and how rich it was to explore these questions.

After lunch, Aztec Dancers from Mexico and Colorado enthralled the audience with dancing and cultural sharing. In addition to information about Aztec traditions, two teens in the troupe spoke about the power they find in holding onto their cultural roots and values. Their involvement with Aztec dance has given them a foundation and sense of purpose that overrides the typical stresses of the teen years.

Gerald Rodriguez, a journalism student at ASC and former peer mediator from Centennial High School, followed with a rousing rap session. Sharing several original raps. Gerald demonstrated how rap has been an important outlet for him to express his cultural and social concerns since his early teens. He and his friends even use "battling raps" as a non-violent form of conflict resolution.

Inspired by the day and Gerald's beats, Amanda Pearson, a local judge and attorney, stood and shared her own rap, written on the spot. She

encouraged the youth to think seriously about democracy, and the responsibilities that come with it: "Oh say, can you see? It's up to you and me. To participate, communicate; not eliminate differences, but learn."

No Summit is complete without recognition of accomplishments during the preceding year. Rob Rubidoux, retiring counselor at Alamosa High School, was recognized for many years as a Peer Mediator team sponsor. Eight students were also recognized with the annual "Extra Mile Award" for outstanding service: Alamosa – Jenna Garcia; Antonito – Melissa Trujillo; Centauri – Clay Jordan; Centennial – Christina Ruybal; Center – Stacey Kuntz; Moffat – Elise Lovato; Monte Vista – Rachel Doyle; and Mountain Valley – Debbie Ortega.

In a surprise treat five other teens left with \$1,000 each in scholarships to ASC. Frank Sanchez, assistant provost at the college, said he was moved by what he had observed of the day's gathering. "Peer mediators, with your skills, attitudes, and leadership potential, are just the type of students we want here at Adam State," he commented.

At the close of the day, one student said it well: "If I had one wish, it would be for everyone here to reach out and teach what we've learned. Today was an important day. Everyone should be able to experience this."

--Carrie Heltzel, School Program Coordinator

The Cultural Hegemony Remedy

By Gerald (G Stylez) Rodriguez

I think I've found the remedy for conflicts, making bomb hits/
Collaborating with the music to forget about the nonsense/
The process takes a long time/

But I think we can decrease it if we use these strong rhymes/
Cuz wrong minds and cocked nines can lead to disaster/
Unlike those racial slurs they will kill you much faster/

And I'm not saying I'm the master when it comes to mediating/
But I'm appreciating all the training I received with patience/
So you can sit back and keep waiting for the world to stop hating/
But it's up to me and you to get the ball rotating/

Ya'll gotta face it, racism, violence, and disrespect are getting old/
Cuz all we're fighting over is color, power, and gold/
It's under our very nose, but the truth be untold/

Don't be a victim to the devil's every mold, you shouldn't be bought nor sold/
Everyone is their own person, but why choose the path of evil and keep hurting/
It's obvious this hate isn't working, let's try honoring each others cultures and
opinions/

And maybe we'll come out winning instead of losing and sinning/
I'm telling you hip hop can bring back the grinning and wipe away the frowns/
It's the remedy for conflicts that I think I've just found/



Calendar

Three-session parent-teen mediator training
August 16, 17, & 18, 4:00-9:00 p.m.
Sacred Heart Church Fireplace Room—Alamosa
call 589-5255 for details. (supper provided)

HOW YOU CAN HELP

_____ 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 PROGRAMS.

_____ IF YOU WORK FOR A STATE OR FEDERAL OFFICE, PARTICIPATE IN THE COMBINED CAMPAIGN, FOR WHICH VORP IS A RECOGNIZED CHARITY.

SLV-VORP is a member of Valley Community Fund



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