If both parties agree on entering the process, the VORP mediator contacts them and a meeting is scheduled. The mediator begins the meeting by stating: "We are here to explore ways to right the wrong you have done and to help you navigate through what happened. We understand what was going on and what both of you were feeling to one another. Using the "VORP Peacemaking Model" Sara was able to help them navigate through what seemed to be a very natural and common written response. Although both sides knew what happened, until that point they only knew their side. The "recognizing injustices" part of the meeting helped them describe what happened and express their feelings to one another.

As each offender told their story the victim repeated it in his own words, they all began to understand what was going on that night and when this crime happened. Each boy expressed that they now saw what they had done as a stupid thing and that they had not been thinking. The manager also told his experience and emphasized how when it first happened he really felt scared, intimidated, embarrassed and angry having much of this hate language directed at him. The young man took turns summarizing what he
Learning, healing are voluntary, cooperative processes

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or violations have been recognized? (2) Do we agree that the following items (maybe apology, restitution, or other constructive acts) will restore equity as much as possible? (We realize that there is some portion of equity that is not covered by these.) (3) Do we agree that the following items, if completed, will create a safer, more civil and constructive future for everyone involved and do we have clear arrangements for follow up meetings and an accountability process? (4) Do we agree that all of these agreements are respectful, reasonable, and restorative for all of the parties?

In all of the mediation programs mentioned above, the participants are involved in the first place because of a negative experience. What these programs do is to offer the participants a chance to decide how they want to approach the problem and then to decide if they think they have arrived at some agreements that will transform the negative experience(s) into something less negative or perhaps even into a positive.

Voluntary participation does not mean that if one doesn’t choose this option, the problem will just go away. The context for these programs is that if you don’t choose to deal with it using mediation, or if you try this way and can’t find a way to improve the situation, then some other process will be imposed. Voluntary, in these cases, means that the parties are given a choice about which process to use and are not forced to participate in a mediation or to make any agreements even if they choose to participate in mediation. In the case of Redress, it is assumed that all supervision will enter the process if the employee wants to enter it. However, when it comes to agreement, the agreement must be voluntarily.

Some are suggesting that VORP should be more like the restorative justice programs in this entry part of the process. They are suggesting that if the victim wants to participate in mediation, the offender should be required to participate. The second part would continue that any agreements made must be voluntary on all sides.

Perhaps the question could be put another way. It seems to me that if someone is adamantly opposed to entering the process, it is very unlikely that it will be productive. If, however, we think of a continuum from totally opposed to totally in favor, we might say that it is not appropriate to force someone into a mediation who is on the totally opposed end of the continuum.

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Learning and healing are voluntarily and cooperative processes. My experience is that if the parties decide they want to find a constructive agreement for both, they can. The question seems to be how to create an environment where the parties voluntarily decide to be constructive with each other. The VORP process has proven to be very successful in creating this environment.

Volunteers needed!

VORP mediators learn and practice peacemaking skills they can use in the home, workplace, and congregation. The next three trainings are scheduled on: September 10 & 11, October 5, 12 & 19, and November 12 & 13.

For participants who agree to take three cases, the cost of the training is only $20; for others, the cost is $100.

Call VORP for details at 291-1120

we do know that there is a significant difference in what happens after a meeting if the decisions are voluntarily agreed to by all of the parties. The relationship of the parties is more cooperative. When an agreement is arrived at voluntarily by all parties, and the compromise rate of the agreement is much higher when all say they have agreed as opposed to a contract or decision imposed where at least one of the parties says that they had no choice.

In my opinion another great part about the meeting was that the parents of one of the offenders finally realized that their son had been doing some pretty bad things. They pledged their commitment to spend more time together and work with their son to create a better future. Seeing the parents and young people making commitments to work with each other seemed like another big step on the road to healing.

Thanks Margaret and Sara. “Blessed are the Peacemakers!”

VORP relies on your contributions

This is a good month to make a resolution to make/continue or to start supporting VORP financially.

The VORP Peacemaking Model can have a powerful and positive impact on people and communities. If each person receiving this newsletter gave $20 per month, VORP could double its case load.

Please consider making a modest yet significant contribution to building a safer and more peaceful community.

Offenders promise ‘never again’

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had said. The one least willing now asked, and “how do you feel now?” He said that even though it had been painted over, if you look closely, you can still read it. “I still feel bad!”

It appeared to me that this talking and summarizing facilitates crucial understanding and recognition that is essential to building trust and beginning the restorative process.

In discussing restitution, the monetary part was the easiest. Each offender committed to paying for half the damage. The personal side was the trickiest. After verbal apologies and much discussion, each offender promised to write a letter of apology to the victim. Because the crime had affected many people, the letters were to be shared with those involved. This part of the agreement was a way for the boys to express their apologies and commitment to change to the larger community, and create a larger circle in which they would be held accountable in the future.

At the end of the meeting “future intentions” seemed clear. After talking to the victim and understanding that what they did affected real people in real serious ways, the offenders made promises to never do this type of thing again.

As Sara was writing the agreement, there was some silent time. The offender, who initially was least willing, voluntarily expressed to the victim again, “I’m very sorry for doing this to you.” The manager responded with appreciation and expressions welcoming him back to the community since he had accepted responsibility and now is making things as right as possible.

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