

## Victim Services and VOM Programs: Can They Work Together

A Careful Consideration of Strategies to Understand Each Other

by Mary Achilles and Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz

This article was developed for a workshop titled "Collaborating with Victim Service Programs" at the 1998 Annual Victim Offender Mediation Association Conference (VOMA) in Tucson, Arizona.

Four issues became clear to both of us as we sat down to prepare for our workshop at the VOMA Conference:

- There is conflict between victim service programs and victim offender mediation programs;
- The conflict seems to arise from misperceptions that each have of the other;
- Victim service agencies and victim offender mediation programs have many goals;
- It seemed to us that from our experience in our respective fields we might be able to identify at least some of those misperceptions and craft some strategies for bringing these two entities together.

After laying out the misperceptions and strategies in the following sections, the bottom line

*Mary Achilles is the Governor-appointed Victim Advocate for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz is the Director for the Mennonite Central Committee, Office on Crime and Justice, and a VOMA Board member.*

can be viewed as a need for both victim service programs and victim offender mediation programs to learn about each other, to respect each other, and to promote the services that each provides within the community.

### For Victim Services Programs:

We need to recognize that acknowledging the humanness of the offender and working with programs that view the offender as a client is a new and challenging task for many of our colleagues. We need to recognize that the movement that started and developed these opportunities for victims was someone else's movement. We also need to acknowledge that victims are asking to meet with the person who caused the harm and that a mechanism for this dialogue to happen should be available in the community. Also, shall we dare say that this should be considered as an element of basic services available in a community for victims? Therefore, we need to work closely with victim

offender mediation programs. We need to spend time understanding the work they do and continue to ask questions even if we do not like the answers so that we can build mutual respect.

### For Victim Offender Mediation Programs:

The perceptions that are listed in this article are not necessarily true of all victim service programs but are issues that we have come across in our work.

As mediation programs we need to recognize that we are viewed by victim services as being offender-driven rather than by our own perception of being an

advocate for both victim and offender needs. We need to recognize that victim service providers have worked closely with victims in our cases from the initial trauma and bring a broader understanding of the victims' needs of which we are unaware. We need to recognize that to begin a victim offender program without victim service providers at the table is not only insensitive to victim issues but is antithetical to the practice of restorative justice within our communities. We need to continue building bridges to cross the information gap between victim offender programs and victim service programs in order to provide those services which best meet the needs of victims, offenders and communities.

See Working Together on page 11

*"The bottom line can be viewed as a need for both victim service programs and victim offender mediation programs to learn about each other, to respect each other, and to promote the services that each provides."*

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**The Research & Resource Review**  
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See Pullout Insert Between  
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## VOMA Connections

VOMA Connections is published by the International Victim Offender Mediation Association. VOMA's mission is to provide inspiration, leadership and information-sharing in the development and support of various models of justice which create opportunities for dialogue between victims, offenders and their communities for the purpose of healing and restoration.

VOMA welcomes contributions, including short articles, literature reviews, case studies, program news and other interesting info. Photos and graphics are also needed. Views expressed within the VOMA Connections are those of the authors and not necessarily those of VOMA.

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#### Beverly Moore

Restorative Justice Program  
Community Mediation Services  
44 West Broadway, Suite 202  
Eugene, OR 97401  
541/344-5366; fax 541/687-8392  
e-mail: mediate@efn.org

or

#### Annie Roberts

Center for Restorative Justice and Mediation  
University of Minnesota, School of Social Work  
Dakota Co. Community Corrections  
1406 Palace Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55105  
tel/fax: 651/699-4532  
e-mail: annwarnerroberts@compuserve.com

### Victim Offender Mediation Association Administrators

Bill and Wendy Preston  
4624 Van Kleeck Drive  
New Smyrna Beach, FL 32169  
tel: 904/424-1591  
fax: 904/424-6129  
e-mail: voma@voma.org  
on-line @ www.voma.org

## 1999-2000 VOMA Board of Directors

### Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, Co-Chair Region III

MCC Office on Crime and Justice  
2501 Allentown Road  
Quakertown, PA 18951  
215/536-2733; fax 215/536-2783  
e-mail: amstutz@fast.net

### Jan Bellard Region IV

Mediation Network of North Carolina  
P.O. Box 705, Brevard, NC 28712  
828/877-3728; fax 828/877-5060  
e-mail: janbellard@citcom.net

### Bobbie Boland, Region VII

270 Indian Meal Line  
Torbay, Newfoundland  
A1K1B4  
709//437-5760  
e-mail: bobbieb@morgan.ucs.mun.ca

### Hans Boserup Region VII

Sundsmarkvej 20  
6400 Sonderborg, Denmark  
Phone : +45 74423605  
Fax: +45 74434442  
e-mail: boserup@po.ia.dk

### Dave Doerfler Region V

Texas Dept. of Criminal Justice  
Victim Services Division  
P.O. Box 13401, Capitol Station  
Austin, TX 78711  
512/406-5441 or 800/848-4284;  
fax 512/452-0825  
e-mail: david.doerfler@tdcj.state.tx.us

### Kathy Elton Region VI

Mediation Programs Coordinator  
Administration Office of the Court  
P.O. Box 140241  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-0241  
801/578-3984; fax 801/578-3843  
e-mail: kathye@email.utcourts.gov

### Kathy Hall, Secretary Region II

Iowa Mediation Service  
1025 Ashworth Road, Suite 202  
West Des Moines, IA 50265  
515/223-2318; fax 515/223-2321  
e-mail: amh335@aol.com

### Bruce Kittle, Co-Chair Region II

The Restorative Justice Project  
University of Wisconsin Law School  
975 Bascom Mall  
Madison, WI 53706  
608/262-4013; fax 608/263-3380  
e-mail: bakittle@facstaff.wisc.edu

### Doris Luther Region III

P.O. Box 335  
Cumberland, ME 04021  
207/829-5775; fax 207/829-6894  
e-mail: dluther@igc.org

### Carolyn McLeod Region I

Community Justice Prog., Washington Co. Court Serv.  
P.O. Box 6  
Stillwater, MN 55082-0006  
651/430-6948; fax 651/430-6947  
e-mail: mcLeod@co.washington.mn.us

### Beverly Moore Region VI

Restorative Justice Program/Community Mediation Services  
44 W. Broadway, Suite 202  
Eugene, OR 97401  
541/344-5366; fax 541/687-8392  
e-mail: mediate@efn.org

### Ann Warner Roberts Region I

Center for Restorative Justice & Mediation  
University of Minnesota, School of Social Work  
Dakota Co. Community Corrections  
1406 Palace Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55105  
Tel/fax: 651/699-4532  
e-mail: annwarnerroberts@compuserve.com

### Barbara Schmidt Region V

KINnections Program  
Kansas Children's Service League  
1365 N. Custer  
Wichita, KS 67203  
316/942-4261; fax 316/943-9995  
e-mail: bschmidt@kcscl.org

### Walter "Drew" Smith Region III

New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission  
1212 Edgewood Avenue  
Trenton, NJ 08618  
609/777-3189 or 609/292-8087; fax 609/292-7906

### Sue Wiese, Treasurer Region II

Mediation Services - Franciscan Skemp  
LaCrosse County Administration Center  
400 N. St., Suite B01  
LaCrosse, WI 54601  
608/784-7322; fax 608/784-5910  
e-mail: wiese.susan@mayo.edu

