

Ellie Bluestein on Ron Claassen:

Congratulations Ron Claassen. You have certainly advanced the common good by bringing the Victim/Offender Reconciliation Program to Fresno and teaching the mediation process to hundreds of people, including me. It was offered to the Human Relations Commission when I was on it. Don't remember if it was one or two full days, but I think I still have the handouts from it. It changed my life. I learned how to really listen, and how to forgive.

I remember almost all the mediations I did for VORP. I learned so much from each one of them. This is my favorite. There was a fight between two boys outside their high school. The smaller boy ended up in emergency with several stitches very close to his eye. The culprit was suspended. When I called the wounded boy his mother was quite astounded that I should even ask her to meet with the mother and son of the other side.

The mother of the bigger boy, who had caused the wound, was most eager to meet the other mother and apologize for what her son had done. When I explained this to the first mother and mentioned the circumstances of the other boy, she agreed for her son and herself to meet them. We met at a church office, on neutral territory. The boys told what had happened while we listened. There had been a group challenge to the bigger boy, and he felt he had to defend his honor. His mother was most concerned about the suffering the mother and son had endured, the damage, the stitches, the bloody clothes that had to be replaced, and offered to pay for costs. The mother, a single working mother who had been called at work and told to come to the emergency room to see her son covered with blood and learn that he narrowly missed losing his eye, saw that the other mother was a serious diabetic, in a wheel chair, had been in the hospital at the time of the incident, and that her son was her caretaker, and also that her house had been flooded during that time, and they were living temporarily in a motel.

She immediately turned down the help, said that her insurance covered the medical costs, that the clothing had already been replaced, and that she was just happy that the injury was not more serious. The mothers had immediate rapport and understanding towards each other. The boys both apologized for their roles in the incident, and when we got up to leave, shook hands, and the big one, who had caused the injury said, "this should never have happened. We could have been friends."

That's what you're teaching us Ron. People don't need to hurt each other. We can all be friends. Thank you, thank you.