



Teaching Life Lessons

For nearly forty years, Willow Gables Resident Warner Strube taught high school chemistry, making significant contributions to the academic lives of his students.

As a volunteer with Lancaster Area Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (LAVORP), Warner is using his extensive experience working with teenagers to teach juvenile offenders life lessons about accountability and responsibility.

“When we first moved to Willow Valley, I knew it would be difficult to retire and not do anything, and I was looking to volunteer in an area where I felt I could make a contribution. A church bulletin had a list of volunteer agencies that needed help,” says Warner. “All my life, I’ve worked with children in the academic area, and here was a chance to work in a non-academic area. I decided to volunteer because I thought I could relate well to kids. I was 68 when I started, and I’ve been doing this for nearly eight years now.”

LAVORP is a faith-based, non-profit organization based on the concept of restorative justice. The organization, which works hand-in-hand with the Juvenile Justice system, provides opportunities for victims to meet face-to-face with juvenile offenders. The offenders accept responsibility for and learn the impact of their actions and make amends to their victims. Victims have an opportunity to tell their story as part of the healing process and have their needs met.

As a volunteer facilitator, Warner plays a critical role in bringing the victims and offenders together.

“The whole concept of restorative justice was new to me,” says Warner. “In retributive justice, you ask, ‘What law was broken?’ In restorative justice, you ask, ‘Who has

been hurt?’ In retributive justice, you ask, ‘Who is to blame?’ In restorative justice, you ask, ‘What are the needs of the person who has been hurt?’ In retributive justice, you ask, ‘What does he or she deserve?’ In restorative justice, you ask, ‘Whose obligation are those needs?’ It’s a different approach.”

Warner explains that his role is to act as a mediator. “We meet the victim and talk about what’s happened, and then we go into the prison and speak with the offender. After a series of meetings, we bring victim and offender together for reconciliation and restitution.

“My first case involved a couple who lost their son in an auto accident to a drunk driver, and the person was given 34 to 40 years in prison. At the end of the meeting, the fellow asked for forgiveness, and that meant so much to the couple whose son had been killed.”

Warner says through the restorative justice process,

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justice and mercy are balanced, and young lives are changed. Youth working with LAVORP have a low recidivism rate of only 17%.

“Over and over, I’ve seen that restorative justice is very effective and meaningful to the kids who have been involved with it,” says Warner. “The juveniles have to pay back money if they broke car windows or caused other loss. They have to meet with the victim face-to-face and make amends.”

Warner says this volunteer experience has changed him as well.

“One thing I’ve learned from my volunteer work is how important it is to listen,” he says. “I think I’ve become more sensitive to people on both sides, and I’ve become a better listener. It’s very gratifying to be an instrument for reconciliation.”