



# The TRANSFORMER

Supporting and Celebrating the Facilitators of AVP Workshops

## Getting Ready for a Workshop

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*Each issue is written by a different local group around the theme of their choosing. Let us know when your group wants to write an issue!*

A Publication of AVP/USA

## Preparing For A Workshop

Those who have come before us have simplified AVP workshops with good manuals to a point that the most energy occurs *during* a workshop with a team. No lectures and few handouts combined with a flexible agenda make an AVP workshop seem like a piece of cake compared to other trainings; however, organization prior to the workshop is still valuable. Individual preparation for a workshop makes it and the team hold together better. This issue of *The Transformer* looks into some of the behind-the-scenes preparation.

Getting ready is more than materials and other details being in order; personal emotional and physical readiness clear the way to a meaningful workshop. Facilitating a workshop when ill or exhausted is likely to contribute more challenges than are fair to the participants and the team. The feeling that one person is crucial to an already complete team needs to be examined before the team ends up dealing with one person's needs rather than the group's as a whole. Even leaving in the middle is often better than sticking it out when feeling awful.

Watch for the Summer *Transformer* on "When things go wrong; making them right." Let us know your stories before the April 15 deadline: (Prisoners can mail to The Transformer. P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. All others electronic preferred: [avppat@earthlink.net](mailto:avppat@earthlink.net))

### AVP Calendars For Sale

By Barbara Thorngren

Our inside AVP facilitators at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord New Hampshire have created a beautiful, informational wall calendar (16 ½ x 10 ½ when hanging on the wall) printed at the prison on heavy card stock. The inside cover has all the general AVP information from our flyer (you can change the contact information to your local AVP person). Each month has a powerful picture that an inmate created – the pictures are oil paintings, drawings and wood burnings. Each page has a Transforming Power principle on the top – they go amazingly well with the different pictures.

We printed 500 and have sold over 300!! The money we raise pays for our basic AVP supplies and operating expenses, cups, plates, napkins, tea, etc. The AVP inside facilitators wanted to generate their own revenue to pay for the programs – I am deeply grateful for their ideas, commitment and artistic abilities. If you would like to purchase a calendar, please send a \$10.00 check (this includes shipping and handling) payable to AVP NH and mail the check to P.O. Box 128, Peterborough, NH 03458. If you would like to order more than one calendar, you can contact me [atbthorngren@peaceworks.us](mailto:atbthorngren@peaceworks.us) for pricing. Allow 2-3 weeks for delivery.

One of our outside AVP facilitators gave them out as gifts to all the outside AVP facilitators that had worked with her. Thank you for your support!



## The **TRANSFORMER**

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First year as new facilitator is free (submitted by local coordinator).

Back issues may be found at [www.thetransformer.us](http://www.thetransformer.us).

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.



## The Kit

Every lead needs a kit of supplies to facilitate an AVP workshop—or not. What one facilitator puts in a workshop kit can vary a great deal from another one. From the individual who had two large closet-size cupboards storing materials in a prison to the lone bike-riding facilitator who carries the whole kit with him, we find the individual differences AVP allows and welcomes. The questions of what one needs to take into a workshop and how they are stored or carried were asked on the AVP-L list serve (a great source for new ideas for your AVP workshops and local groups). The responses are collected here. Thank you to all who responded; you know who you are, but the list is too lengthy to list you all by name.

*If you could take only five items to a workshop, what would you take?*

This question evoked the following lists:

**Tangibles** in order of times selected:

- 1- Manual ("My manual with all its notes.")
- 2- Newsprint  
(“Post-it style flipchart paper relieves the need for tape which would take up one of these list items [though costs much more]. Also, I can make a mandala or anything else like that when I need it.”  
Use newsprint instead of Tinker Toys for Cooperative Construction or Masks.)
- 3- Markers  
(Dry-erase markers? In case you run into a white-board, can also be used on newsprint)
- 4- Masking tape
- 5- Materials prepared for the workshop (Gathering, Exercise and L&L cards; affirmation posters; AVP certificates, TP cards, Broken Squares, Attendance sheets)

*Plus*

TP Mandala in pieces (English on one side, Spanish on the other)  
Pencils for everyone (“Pencils would be nice, but participants usually can bring one if I remind them on the first session; and we can do the first session without written exercises.”)  
Blank paper (for copying and for exercises)  
Also suggested by only one person each: pictures, list of approved items signed by prison official to tape to box top or just to have on hand so that the above items are not arbitrarily rejected in the trap, another facilitator or two, diverse group of participants, food and coffee for myself in prison.

**Intangibles** in order of popularity:

- A sense of humor, playfulness
- Empathy, compassion, a big, loving heart
- Openmindedness: “My goal is to keep learning and growing”
- Flexibility: “My ongoing readiness to be flexible with time and the agenda”
- Creativity
- Respect, appreciation, empowerment:  
“My intention to encourage sharing and avoid lecturing”
- Patience, perseverance, tolerance
- Sense of responsibility for the “whole”:  
“My sense that the process works, that our team will work together,”
- cooperation
- Centeredness
- A good night’s sleep/good breakfast
- Smile

*“The most important kit is in my head and heart - lessons learned from so many mentors.”*

# How do you take your "kit" into the prison?

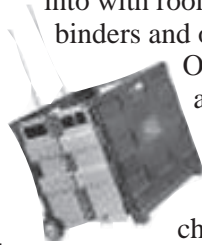
"Our materials are kept in the prison in a locked cabinet. We are permitted to bring in replenishments if we put these items on the gate pass (newsprint, tape, markers, pencils, etc.)" "The inside coordinator and outside coordinator have the combination. The materials are brought to the workshop rooms the morning of each workshop day by the inside coordinator with the assistance of others. They are returned to the cabinet at the end of the day. At our bi-monthly support group meeting before the workshop, we check to make sure we have all the supplies we need."

"I carry my kit in a good-sized rolling case when I do a full three-day workshop. I have a smaller (carry-on size) rolling bag for minis or other smaller workshops. Some things I store permanently in the bags, and other things I store elsewhere in order to duplicate them when needed and keep track of when I am running low. It sometimes happens that something is left behind, so my latest plan is to prepare a personalized checklist for each kind of workshop and check it off before going in. Maybe keep it in a plastic sleeve in an outside pocket of the bag. I spread out too much in all areas of my life!" "I always used a large tote box attached to a set of wheels. None of the prisons where I facilitated would let me store anything in the prison. Of course, that meant bringing everything through security three times each weekend. My funniest story is the officer at security who insisted on going through four sets of tinker toys, piece by piece, and who got so wrapped up in that procedure that he forgot to frisk me."

"We have access to a closet in which some larger materials are stored, such as tinker toys, easel, newsprint, posters. Two volunteers (on the outside) restock a rolling suitcase with handouts, fresh magic markers, pencils and other materials needed for each specific workshop."

"After years of lugging around a series of packages, tubes, rolls and bags, I finally found a metal file box complete with latch and carry handle with space for letter-size manila folders and their

contents plus the other "stuff." And then a thrift shop showed up with a foldable "basket" on wheels with a collapsible handle that the box fit into with room to spare for manuals, binders and other books. (Staples Office Supply has them but at a price higher than my \$5 thrift store bargain.)



**Rolling is far better than carrying.** Flip chart sheets go into a piece of carpet roll center tube that soon acquired a simple handle and a closed end, plus a crude cap to keep it all from sliding out."

"Last trip inside, I took a little luggage cart with the following attached:

chart paper, small file box with handouts and certificates, larger box with tape, pencils, pens, post-its, mandala, CD of meditative music, chime for ending exercises, markers and an AVP bag with manuals (mine and for the new facilitators) and my lunch. (We had to take all the supplies in and out every day.)"

"We have a long track record at this institution, so that when the rules changed to require 'clear' containers for items being brought into the institution, we have been allowed to continue to bring in the rolling suitcase."

.....  
**Rolling is far better than carrying.**  
.....


## If the kit is already in the prison, what preparations are made for your arrival? Where is it stored?

"Our materials are kept in the prison in a locked cabinet. We are permitted to bring in replenishments if we put these items on the gate pass (newsprint, tape, markers, pencils, etc.)" "The inside coordinator and outside coordinator have the combination. The materials are brought to the workshop rooms the morning of each workshop day by the inside coordinator with the assistance of others. They are returned to the cabinet at the end of the day. At our bi-monthly support group meeting before the workshop, we check to make sure we have all the supplies we need."

"At our institution, our Friends have been allocated room in a locked storage closet in the chapel. Therefore, all that is needed is for the staff sponsor to open the door and the inmates to pull everything out and replace it upon completion. This is very user friendly."

"In two prisons we had lockers-- one on rollers that the inside team kept straight and let us know what to bring to keep it supplied properly and another, a locker stored in a hallway niche (took about two years to get it!) without wheels. It had a special lock which both the staff and outside team members could open."

"Until a few months ago, I had the stuff in a big plastic tub with a lid that we had to [lug] in every week. Now, our 'stuff' is stored in a beautiful wooden box on wheels. The box has the TP mandala carved into it as well as a poem. There are two compartments. The top one has all the supplies, and the bottom one has shelves for our AVP 'library,' which we are currently trying to stock. The box has a padlock and is locked in a storage room, which contains all the other self-help groups" stuff. The storage room is located next to the chapel, so the officer in charge of the chapel unlocks the room in the morning the first day of the workshop and the inmate facilitators get the box out and set up the room, usually before the outside volunteers get there. I then bring in handouts for a particular workshop and anything else we need to re-supply the box."

 Continued on page 4

## WORKSHOP KIT ON A BIKE

Stimulating Stephen Matchett, AVP/CA

As an environmental extremist—which is what the times we live in and my experience of Transforming Power have demanded of me—I have given up driving or riding in private automobiles. So these days I get around on foot, transportation and a 28-year-old Nishiki racing bike that I've fitted out for touring. My principal AVP beat is two women's prisons in California's central valley, in a little town 20 miles from the nearest train station.



When I travel there from my home in San Francisco to lead a workshop (Amtrak California lets bikes on all its trains), I carry my supply of newsprint rolled up in a sturdy cardboard mailing tube that I strap to the rack on the back of the bike. The rest of my kit fits inside one of the panniers (saddlebags) that hang off either side. (The other one holds my clothes and overnight stuff.) The kit consists of:

- A slim binder with my manuals and paperwork (kit inventory, clearance memos, log sheets)
- A set of reusable posters—Community Agreements; Transforming Power principles, guides and mandala; I-statement formula; roleplay checklist; Buttons circle; etc.—on heavy paper, folded
- A stack of colored construction paper for affirmation posters and art projects
- Handouts, evaluation forms, certificates and extra blank paper
- Picture-sharing set in plastic sleeves
- Two dozen pencils and a sharpener
- 40 doodle pens
- A dozen markers (Permapaque by Sakura are noxious-fume-free, by the way)
- A couple of rolls of tape
- A dozen small writing pads
- 200 3x5 cards
- Broken Squares set
- Feeling Faces paper plate set
- Pattern balls (small or compressible a plus!), a shaker for Crocodile & Frogs, and a kitchen timer
- A half-dozen glue sticks
- A supply of lapel pins and business cards for graduation if it's a Basic Workshop
- Consensus Triangles set if it's a Second-Level Workshop
- 120 colored 5x8 cards if it's a T4F (for feedback to trainees)



The only thing I don't carry is a stack of newspaper for Cooperative Construction and Crocodile & Frogs, which I'll ask another team member to bring, or scrounge on site. (Many California institutions don't allow Tinker Toys, which are too bulky to transport by bicycle anyway, so I stick to the newspaper-and-tape version of Cooperative Construction.)

I displayed this kit-on-a-bike at a statewide facilitators gathering and it made quite a hit—particularly the blinking red light on the end of the mailing tube. Speaking of the mailing tube, I secure the plastic cap with a velcro fastener, an innovation I learned from Bodacious Bob Barns. (My teachers are many!)

## Attention ☆ Attention

The Committee of Committees will be presenting some recommended changes to both the Bylaws and Policy Statement of AVP/USA at this year's Annual Business Meeting at the National Gathering over Memorial Day weekend, May 2010. Most of these changes will bring our written policies in line with current practice. To provide adequate notice and allow interested people time to review these proposed changes, they will be posted on the AVP/USA website on or about April 15th. We will notify you on the L when they are posted. At that time, print copies can be requested from Marge Schlitt, Clerk of CLARG, margeschlitt@mindspring.com, and any questions or comments will be gratefully received by Peg Erlanger, President, president@avpusa.org.

*Continued from page 3*

## If the kit is already in the prison?

“We have a very nice cart an inmate made some years ago [with] a tube on top [for] big poster-y things such as the mandala rolled up in it. Inside is a cardboard box with folders for handouts for various exercises, pieces for Broken Squares, a few extra copies of manuals and other bits of reading. There are also compartments for pencils, markers, dry-erase markers, napkins, paper towels, copy paper (the prison has suddenly clamped down on use of paper in the copier) and, of course, pattern balls with the rubber chicken!”

The prison supplies an easel and poster-sized paper, but they're very stingy with tape, which we have to bring in ourselves. The cart stays in the office of the Volunteer Coordinator when we're not using it. Lately we've asked to have it at our Team Build sessions so we can check the box to make sure we don't need to make more copies of something.”

## Keep up on what is happening in AVP

Sign up for AVP-L list-serve to receive intermittent emails (usually less than five a week) with questions asked by subscribers. Ask your questions and receive practical information from those who have been there. To add your name to the nearly 250 facilitators who are currently subscribed, send your request to Alan Taplow: ataplow@vmlink.net. Please include your address, phone number, and the local AVP council where you are active.

## Preparation inside a prison Waiting List Integrity & Facilitator Rotation

by "Dazzling Dan"

### Waiting List Integrity:

Waiting list integrity is crucial to the credibility of AVP. Quite often, the sign-up process is the first interaction participants have with AVP. When this process is conducted with fairness and honesty, it sets the stage for trusting the program early in the workshop. The process used in our complex is unchanged from what was initially formulated in 2005. It is effective, fair and maintains checks and balances.

AVP Coordinators, waiting list processors and facilitators need to keep in mind the agreement that all institutions make with AVP regarding participant sign-ups. "Registration for AVP workshops is according to the inmates sign-up date. A system needs to be devised to assure this happens." (*AVPUSA Bylaws and Policy Statement*) Simply put, sign ups are to be conducted on a first-come, first-served basis without regard to length or type of sentence, ethnicity, referral, story or court order. This end of the process instills responsibility in the applicant and ensures that all AVP participant sign ups are voluntary.

The sign-up process should be transparent and accountable to both the AVP coordinators and the AVP local group. Adherence to the process easily addresses claims of preference or favoritism when waiting lists are long.

The following is an outline of the effective and credible process in use at our complex:

All sign ups are submitted in writing on a departmental "Request For Interview Form" via the institution's AVP coordinator.

The participants are placed onto the waiting list effective the date their request is processed. The requests are sorted by date on the request form. In the event that multiple requests are received with the same date, they are sorted alphanumerically by the participant's ID number.

A response is written on each request

indicating the effective date that the participants are placed onto the waiting list. When lists are especially long, this fact is shared with the participants to foster their patience. Then the requests are returned to the institutional AVP coordinator, who notes and signs the response. The request form is then returned to the participant.

On at least a monthly basis, updated waiting lists are provided to the institution's AVP coordinator. The lists include the participants' name, ID number, housing location and effective sign-up date. When asked, a waiting list status report is generated for the AVP coordinator. This report includes the total number of participants waiting on Basic, Advanced and T4F lists, as well as the total number of experienced and apprentice facilitators available.

When processing requests, watch for duplicate sign ups. This is common with long waiting lists. Ensure that a response is generated for each duplicate request, reminding them of their original effective sign-up date.

**Communicate.** Let people know when lists are long and logistical problems exist. Enlist the patience and understanding of the participants. Prior to the workshop(s), update the lists for the [present and current] what is meant by this? housing location of participants to ensure waiting list movement and full workshops.

\* In the event that sensitive or unresolved problems arise, communicate them with the institutional AVP coordinator and/or, if necessary, the AVP local group.

This process has proven to provide transparency, accountability and integrity to the AVP waiting lists. Further, it provides a mechanism to resolve disputes and misinterpretations within the guidelines of the policy agreement between the institution and AVP.

### Facilitator Rotation:

Credible facilitator rotation and scheduling also needs to employ transparency and accountability while keeping the purpose and needs of AVP foremost in mind. The following factors are employed in facilitator rotation at our complex:

Maintain a roster of current facilitators with their experience level and date of

last facilitated workshop. This roster is used to record facilitator rotation and scheduling.

Communicate via non-workshop clinics (where possible) to ensure facilitator interest and availability.

One experienced/seasoned facilitator is scheduled on a team with three apprentices.

Facilitator ethnic balance is attempted to provide the diversity of AVP to the participants.

While it is easy to enlist energetic new apprentices, mix them with the shy ones. Don't disregard seemingly insincere apprentices/facilitators. Schedule them with implied responsibility to give them ownership in AVP. Enlist them as part of a strong team.

Rotate all facilitators fairly and equitably, keeping in mind the needs of the AVP model and the outside facilitators scheduled to be present.,

Recognize egos and hidden agendas within facilitators. Capitalize on their benefit to others, AVP and a compatible team.

Community – Community – Community!  
Team – Team – Team!

**"Trust the process!"**

These factors employed within the facilitator rotation have proven to be fair, transparent and accountable. Facilitators are encouraged to be a representative of AVP and *Transforming Power*.

While this waiting list process and facilitator rotation has proven to be credible, transparent and accountable, occasional problems naturally arise. As they do, we try to keep in mind *Transforming Power*. When addressing problems, we suggest care and caution with regard to allegations of favoritism, being careful not to replace perceived or alleged favoritism with actual favoritism simply to quell a misperception. Integrity within these processes displays the integrity within AVP.

*Dan Rees is the AVP inmate coordinator and a highly capable lead facilitator at Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, CA.*

Let us hear from other inside clerks, coordinators or whatever you call yourself about how you operate your program. Write Pausing Pat, P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130

# Preparation for Workshops

By Bountiful Bobby

I have to laugh as I start writing this letter. After all, I once spent a day inside Sing Sing with a wire cutter in my hip pack that I had carelessly left there from some home repair project a few days before. (I guess that also shows how trusted AVP was at that facility-- that no one felt the need to search me before I was allowed in.)

Since I had been an elementary school teacher for 20 years, any preparation in terms of materials and activity instructions was pretty much part of my regular school routine. My personal preparation is more in terms of my attitudes and expectations.

## Here are two examples of what I mean by "EXPECTATIONS":

1. When I attended my Volunteer Orientation for the Colorado Prison System, the instructor singled out AVP, as compared to the many church groups there, because he knew AVP facilitators didn't go in with expectations that we were bringing a "special message" that would be a "revelation" and would be "life-changing." This head of the Volunteer Program thought that expectations were an expression of the need of the "Giver" and that wanting to have that need gratified left the "Giver" open to manipulation by the much more experienced and needy prisoner. To put it more directly, "expectations" are a hook, and the person skilled at fishing will use it to pull you in.

2. There will come a time, often at the end of the first day, but even more so maybe 3/4 of the way through the second day, that you will feel "this is the worst workshop ever" and "we have all failed" or "everything is falling apart." I expect these negative and maybe a little self-accusatory thoughts. These thoughts are normal and mean that there is enough tension in the workshop for something really creative or "transforming" to happen. To paraphrase a popular quote attributed to Nietzsche: "The universe must have chaos in order to give birth to a star."

## And here is what I mean by "ATTITUDES":

I approach Transforming Power and all AVP work from the perspective of an artist. As an artist, the finished product--the "work"--is fully revealed only at the end of the process. An ability to tolerate the "unknown," the "unpredictable," the "self-revealing" and "unfolding"--this is what designates the creative space of an artist. I return to AVP work because it increases my ability to engage with that creative space and nourishes my energy reservoir that is replenished whenever I enter into "that place of not knowing." This is not merely "empty space." It is, rather, "the place of potential." The absence of form in this "clear space" does not mean "nothingness." "Potential" is just as palpable as "Form." For a simple example, consider that "potential energy" is just as real (i.e., measurable) as "kinetic energy."

I also find that focusing on an attitude of "potential" and "possibility" helps overcome my prejudices and judgmental thinking. In this I am influenced by Marshall Rosenberg and his ideas of "Non-violent Communication": in particular, a perspective that each person is motivated towards the fulfillment, from his or her own personal perspective, of reaching for something good--a way to meet felt needs and gain equilibrium and stability. I think (or imagine) I understood him to emphasize that there may be self-destructive behaviors, but there are no self-destructive motivations.

This reminds me of a quote by Dr. King that "we must look for the good deep inside" our adversary. Indeed, it is a staple of TP stories when that moment is reached that the potential perpetrator and the potential victim are able to recognize each other as—to quote poet e.e.cummings—"humans merely being."

Well, there it is. This is the why and how I prepare for AVP workshops. I hope it stimulates your thoughts. Responses are always appreciated.

Bountiful Bobby Avstreich, AVP facilitator and storyteller

## A peek at AVP/USA Conference: What Does a Wonky White Chick Have to Offer AVP?

Hello to All! My name is Lighthearted Laura. And, yes, I'm a bit wonky; but to me, that's a good thing. I connect wonky with words like evidence-based, data-driven and research methods. Research methods are my passion because they lead to greater knowledge and effectiveness.

Perhaps you're wondering how research can be useful for AVP and why I might have some insights about violence worth listening to. Perhaps you believe only a person who has lived with violence can understand the need for an alternative way.

That may be true... And for that reason, I want to share my story with you. My encounter with violence may surprise you; it is stark, cold and brutal, having witnessed my father's death at the point of a gun held in his own hand. I learned very early that violence is the wrong way out. It solves nothing and leaves a whole mess of new problems in its wake. I'm driven to understand why people turn to violence because I believe understanding leads to empathy which, in turn, will lead us all to discover alternative, life-affirming solutions to problems.

Each day I receive wisdom from this mysterious thing we call Transforming Power--this force that reaches in to touch our souls, pulling us out of a dark, lonely prison into the light of friendship and community. Thus, my first message is to trust the big force of Transforming Power; allow it to embrace you and reveal your part in a bigger plan--a plan full of hope, promise and, yes, even joy. Now for the wonky part of my message: how we can use research to make AVP even more effective? For this, I'll teach you about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. So, take your reins in hand, strap on your spurs and get ready for a wild ride.

The First Horseman will help us create a clear answer to the questions:



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## AVP Workshop Readiness – Diversity

By Steven T. Garofolo, MPS, Ph.D.

The conventional wisdom is simple: Diversity is good. When inside and outside team members are too alike, the thinking goes plain vanilla. The team members look at problems and solutions with no one to objectively challenge prevailing ideas or exercises or to speak amicably on issues important to certain groups of participants. Having a diverse team changes all of that. Diversity is the impetus to Transforming Power.

Diversity leads to more innovation, creativity, outside-the-box thinking as well as more appropriate methodologies to enhance community during workshops...minimizing gridlock. The psychological-emotional-

### *Encourage self-expression as long as it is constructive and courteous.*

physical (PEP) landscape predicated from diversity elevates everyone's consciousness.

As much as diversity is something we intrinsically prize, the truth is that people often feel baffled, threatened or even annoyed by individuals with views and backgrounds different from their own. The results are when team members are appointed because their socialization and or concepts are homogeneous, yet diverse participants are less likely to feel isolated and ignorant. Constructive diversity on a team is the thread that can coalesce every facet of the workshop. The good news is there are ways to select a diverse team to enhance and empower your workshops by following some simple strategies:

**1- Choose team members carefully:** New team members

need to be savvy and aware of how they come across to others. The ability to disagree constructively should be high on the list of desired characteristics as well as experience in communicating with new participants and becoming a part of the team even when challenging it.

**2- Assist new team members:** Senior members must have a chance to make a favorable impression and connect with others in a caring setting before their first official workshop. Giving the new team member insight into the team's operating philosophy can help to avoid errors of judgment. Debriefing after team meetings can help, too, giving the new member an opportunity to

comment on different aspects of the workshop, which helps them make contributions right away.

**3- Don't give in to get along:** Team members need to propose that dissenting voices are necessary to inhibit gridlock in workshops. New team members should be encouraged to share their opinions during the workshop readiness in order not to trigger "time-outs" in workshops, causing negativity.

**4- Encourage initial dissenters:** New team members sometimes tire from the struggle of making themselves heard, feeling isolated and ignored, then end up self-censoring, for fear of being alone in their opinion... even though they were put on the team for their unique perspective. Encourage self-expression as long as it is constructive and courteous.

**5- Have new members share the role of Devil's Advocate:** Yes, you heard me correctly. The team needs a ,devil's advocate but it shouldn't always be the same person who may end up typecast as an oddball or cynic whose comments should not be taken too seriously.

**6 Review the role of team leaders:** Increasing diversity is ultimately a test of leadership, which has to change from chief strategist to that of co-facilitator. Required skills for this include the ability to keep discussions on track, bridge gaps between sessions and elicit the viewpoints of those who are less opinionated while cutting to the heart of issues without bruising egos.

Diversity eliminates polarization, collusion or splits into factions determined by how the different participants perceive the team individuals. The contribution that diversity offers each workshop is transpowerful in itself. To unlock the benefits of diversity is to heal the sad hearts and hopeless inner child of participants.

*Steven Garofolo has been incarcerated for the last 35 years since age 17. His experience began with the original Think Tank in Green Haven Prison that led him on an daring endeavor of Satyagraha (the practice of nonviolent resistance developed by Mahatma Gandhi). Entering the system at a 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade level, dyslexic, and with a displaced moral and ethical compass as well as rogue manner, Steven has undergone a metamorphosis: earning an interdisciplinary doctoral degree.*

## 20 Ways toward Understanding the Prison Experience Through the Eyes of Long-time AVP/NY Prison Volunteers

Before a community volunteer first goes into a prison to facilitate, a number of considerations need to be explored. For experienced facilitators, the following list is not new (much was rewritten from the “Quaker women” piece many are still using), but might be a good reminder or a way to explain the experience to newcomers. Excerpted from the AVP/NY Volunteer Handbook, you will find wisdom and practicality from our original AVP organization.

1. Prison is, to outsiders, a foreign country. As in any foreign country, it is wise to be quiet, observe, listen, learn the language and identify the values of the prison culture before advancing too many strong opinions or taking any drastic action.

2. Don't be afraid to define yourself clearly. You are not required to be all things to all people at all times or to live up (or down) to any stereotype prisoners may have about you as an outsider. You are entitled, moreover, to define for yourself and for others what you choose to be or not be, do or not do. This will take some time, but you should be aware of the need to do it from the beginning of your prison volunteering. Even after you have clearly defined yourself, expect to be tested—again and again. Eventually, however, if you are firm in sticking to your definition of yourself, others will adjust to it.

3. Expect to meet many tremendous and valuable people in prison. Expect also to meet some champion manipulators. Do not be surprised if these sometimes turn out to be one and the same person. Manipulation is a form of survival for the powerless.

4. Especially at first, people may find it helpful, as soon as possible after volunteering in a prison, to share with a trusted friend the feelings generated by the prison experience. It is a rare person who does not experience anger, fear, pain, outrage, wonder and other strong emotions upon contact with the prison environment. These feelings, shared, can lead to much that is constructive and

rewarding. Unshared, they can lead to emotional burnout and ill-considered actions.

5. People can expect to feel an unfamiliar, very heady and very addictive “super star” feeling, especially at first in a prison. It may arise from sexuality in a deprived environment or from the unfamiliar power that comes from knowledge of another world. Remember that as an AVP facilitator, you may have been part of a team that brought a means through which someone may have discovered a new and wonderful sense of community. In any case, do not let it go to your head.

6. It is possible that you will feel alienated after volunteering in prison from other people who have not shared and do not understand this experience and from the society that produced and maintains the prisons. Share the humanness of the people you have met in prison without expecting that others will understand what you do.

7. Expect to find in prisons all the corruption and evils of society as well as all the goodness of human nature—both magnified larger than life. Therefore, resist the temptation to:

a) Romanticize the prisoner. If his or her being incarcerated does not necessarily make him or her a monster, neither does it necessarily make him or her a saint. To assume otherwise is always inaccurate, usually patronizing and sometimes dangerous.

b) See COs and other prison staff as obstacles to our program. Some may be supportive of AVP; others may not. All are responsible for security and have specific procedures they are required to follow. Many are good people trying to do a hard and thankless job well.

8. Go cautiously at first; awareness comes with experience. The initial prison experience might be frightening in and of itself. If you have stuck with it long enough for this to wear off and you find yourself afraid of a given person, chances are that he or she may be dangerous to you. If you feel

resentful at demands being made on you, you may well be being hustled. Trust these feelings and seek support from experienced volunteers in dealing with the situation. Learn to “trust your intuition” and heed it. If after an initial exposure you find yourself fearful of the prison environment, you should not continue to go into prisons. This work is not for everyone.

9. Do not ask about what crime a person has been convicted of. AVP is about reaching for the good in each person.

10. Do not under ANY circumstances bring ANY contraband into the prison, no matter how innocent the “contraband” may seem and even if you don't agree with the rule. The introduction of ANY prohibited article by a volunteer is a misdemeanor at least and may subject that volunteer both to criminal prosecution, if caught, and to the closing down of the AVP program in that prison.

11. As for rules in general, expect to find some that seem unnecessarily silly, unjust or oppressive but never try to disobey them or discuss them with prisoners. Remember that the rules are subject to change at any moment. Questioning of rules should be done through the AVP outside coordinator and the regional AVP/NY Area Council. The AVP/NY organization can express objection to them with the NYS Department of Correctional Services.

12. Prisons are destructive environments. Essential, therefore, for you is to find a community that will offer you a safe place to vent your feelings and discuss your problems, without fear of judgment or condemnation. At the same time, that community must love you enough to reach out to bring you back when you stray onto dangerous or unproductive by-paths. AVP and Friends (Quaker) Meetings can be such communities. There are people in both who understand from experience what



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## 20 Ways toward Understanding the Prison Experience Through the Eyes of Long-time AVP/NY Prison Volunteers

it is to be human, the very definition of which means that one is imperfect and vulnerable in one's feelings.

13. Remember, also, that many people have to spend long years in this deprived environment and that it is important for them to adjust to the realities of doing time.

14. Do not be surprised, if you become overly preoccupied with an individual prisoner. Romantic attraction is only one of the roots of such preoccupation. Others are compassion, admiration for a strong personality or valuable talent or a sense of perceived injustice. Try to keep a balance and not invest all of your valuable energy in one person where there is so much need in others also.

15. Under no circumstances should you give out your telephone number or personal information that might identify where you live.

16. Prisons have proven that people learn little from punishment but more from example. What you do in prison, therefore, is more important than what you say there. A broken promise to an incarcerated person is even more painful than in normal life, and it is an act of cruelty. Even worse, it can further inhibit one's ability to trust; and since trust is essential for integration into a community, a broken promise may alienate the person further. Therefore, do not make unrealistic promises about giving your weekends for workshops or support programs.

17. AVP is not about "saving" others. It is about creating opportunities to practice nonviolence ourselves and share the gift of Transforming Power that was shared with us.

18. Always remember that we stand for AVP values and processes based on consensus, nonviolence, truth and the availability of transforming power to every person. These values are not likely to be found in prison guidelines for volunteers. Nevertheless, they are the

most valuable thing we have to offer to the prison and the world, and we should never allow them to be compromised, no matter how strong the pressure is to do so.

19. Remember that as an AVP volunteer, you are a member of an organization that has programs in prisons all over the state, the country and the world. How AVP volunteers conduct themselves in one prison is communicated by prisoners and administrators to other prisons. The reputation you establish in the prison in which you volunteer affects the reputation of AVP as a whole and the willingness of prison administrators to support AVP programs in the prisons for which they are responsible.

20. If we are to live nonviolently to the fullest extent we are able, we must practice nonviolent behavior consistently. We encourage and support others in living nonviolently as we get better at actually being nonviolent ourselves. AVP encourages all facilitators to take part in regular support groups and all-facilitator gatherings or workshops so that we may take on the role of participant and practice with our peers.

*Special thanks to AVP/NY for creating this thoughtful introduction to volunteering in a prison, so others might use it. Feel free to circulate it widely. (The section on physical attraction and power did not fit in this issue, but you will see it in the next issue as well as the revised edition of the AVP/USA Organizing Kit available at the national conference in May.)*

### Not all is perfect in AVP...

So tell us about a time when things went wrong and how you made them right, for the Summer *Transformer* before April 15 deadline: (Prisoners can mail to The Transformer. P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130.) All others electronic preferred: [avppat@earthlink.net](mailto:avppat@earthlink.net)



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### A peek at AVP/USA Conference:

What is AVP and what does it achieve? This step will help others understand us better. When this happens, I believe we will be welcomed into more prisons, schools and community groups. This will extend our influence and allow us to reach even more people.

The Second Horseman helps us understand the people in our workshops and their specific needs. With this knowledge, we can become more effective because we can tailor our program to the specific needs of each group.

The Third and Fourth Horsemen will show us how to test whether AVP is, in fact, causing the positive changes we claim. I won't try to do justice to these steps in this short essay, but I will present a riveting explanation at the National Conference in Minnesota in May.

I hope you will make a mental note to check the Program Itinerary for Laura Roberts' presentation of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." You are all invited to join me on this wild ride! Lighthearted Laura Roberts is a Quaker, trained in AVP and research methods. Her one-woman crusade to change the language of research to make it more welcoming and compelling is a lonely challenge.

## Transforming AVP's Power: Expanding Diversity in the 21st Century

Check out the 2010 AVP-USA National Gathering ([www.avpusaconference.org](http://www.avpusaconference.org))

Every year, the AVP-USA gathering is held in various parts of the country to bring together AVP facilitators for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, our organizational bylaws require an annual meeting to conduct business, such as holding a general membership meeting, electing officers, updating the bylaws and articles of incorporation and other activities as needed.

However, many of us find many personal reasons for attending. Reconnecting with old friends, meeting new ones, remembering those who are no longer with us, learning what is happening across the country and the world, learning new exercises and light-n-livelies and, maybe, just having a wonderfully relaxing weekend at a lovely location. This and more are all in store for those attending the AVP-USA National Gathering in Minnesota, **May 27 to 31, 2010.**

The theme of the 2010 conference is **“Transforming AVP's Power: Expanding Diversity in the 21st Century”** and will begin with a one-day Advanced Workshop focusing on diversity. The Friday workshop will be lead by **Margaret Lechner** (who lead last year's Advanced Workshop) and **Erika Thorne**, a long-time facilitator for Training for Change and a newly-minted AVP facilitator in Minnesota. The program committee is encouraging more breakout sessions to include the diversity topic in their content. To see the list of sub-themes for the conference, go to: [www.avpusaconference.org](http://www.avpusaconference.org) if there is something you'd like to present and it's not there, contact the program committee. The website for the conference also will have periodic updates with details on local transportation, breakout sessions and more. So view it often.

Our 2010 keynote speaker will be **Eddie Ellis**, known by many in the New York area as a participant in the famous “Think Tank” group of inmates whose initial work in Green Haven Prison in early 1970 led to the development of the Alternatives to Violence Project. Mr. Ellis appeared briefly at the 2009 conference in New York and said he was overwhelmed at what AVP had become. For a long period, he has been an advocate for reform of the prison system and has worked to help people who were formerly incarcerated. Currently, he is connected with the national effort to assist in the development of programs for this population. He will update us on what is happening, so AVP can find ways to put its programs to more use in the community.

Once again, partial scholarships will be available for national committee members, persons formerly incarcerated and first-time attenders. Check out the application materials on the conference website. If you intend to apply, you are urged to submit your application to the scholarship committee as soon as you can because funds are limited and applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Find the scholarship request here: <http://www.avpusa.net/schol2/index.html> Also this year, the AVP-USA Distribution Center will be stocked at the conference for the sale of manuals, DVDs and CDs, pamphlets and evaluation reports, booklets about AVP and nonviolence and The Transformer.

**The best rates for the conference (Early Bird registration) end on March 31**, so save some cash by registering early. These lower rates apply to registration (lodging and meals) and the Advanced Workshop. Register here: <http://www.avpusaconference.org/registration>

Each national gathering is unique and rewarding, and the 2010 one looks to be cast in the same light. It will be even greater if you are part of it. Register now and continue your involvement at the national level of the Alternatives to Violence Project.



### Tell us your stories

For the Summer *Transformer* on “When things go wrong; making them right.” Let us know your stories before the April 15 deadline: (Prisoners can mail to The Transformer, P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130.) All others electronic preferred: [avppat@earthlink.net](mailto:avppat@earthlink.net)

### A peek at AVP/ USA Conference

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## Looking for a few good writers...

With a dynamic theme that explores AVP at a deeper or more practical level for the Winter 2010 issue of *The Transformer*: AVP USA's newsletter is written by local groups. Any group can take on a quarterly issue, just write Editorial coordinator Pausing Pat: (Prisoners can mail to The Transformer, P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. All others electronic preferred: avppat@earthlink.net.

Do you have a hot topic you want to explore? AVP USA's newsletter is written by local groups. Write us with your fresh ideas for any *Transformer* issue starting with Winter 2010.

## Give a prisoner a year of The Transformer

AVP/USA has made a commitment to supply the first year of *The Transformer* to free to new facilitators. The cost of this puts AVP/USA in a budgetary hole. The Communications Committee has found all the ways to cut costs but still we need about \$1000 a year to support this commitment. By sending community graduates the newsletter electronically we can better afford this important freebie, however the prisoner facilitators must receive it by mail.

To make it possible to continue giving a one-year subscription to one prisoner T4T grad, consider donating an additional \$5 when you renew your subscription. Or support more than one, if you can.

Send a check today to: Alan Taplow, 844 John Fowler Rd., Plainfield, VT 05667

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Send the change to:

Alan Taplow  
844 John Fowler Rd.  
Plainfield, VT 05667

Same with the rest of you...



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## Let's hear from you...

Dozens of people have contributed to this issue, yet probably you have more ideas. Feel free to let us know your additions by writing to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, CA 93130