

The TRANSFORMER

Supporting and celebrating facilitators of AVP workshops

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This issue on Building an AVP Community in Prison was compiled by the first "inside" issue editor of The Transformer, Enthusiastic Eugene Dey, while at California Corrections Center in Susanville, CA, though at the time of publication he was in transit to another facility. Thank you, Eugene.

Building an AVP Community in a "War Zone"

By Enthusiastic Eugene

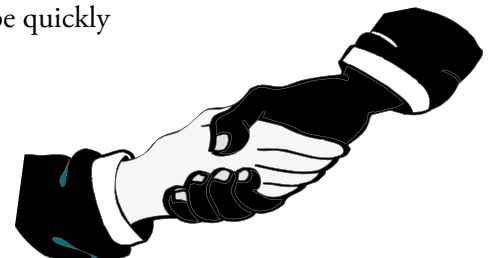
Building a sense of community is the key to the success of a workshop. In a conflicted region like the gang-plagued environment of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), building community in an AVP workshop is the first task at hand. In Susanville California Correctional Center lockdowns due to racial violence have been almost a constant since AVP arrived on Lassen Yard in 2005. Everything I have learned about conflict resolution has been achieved in an environment mired in sectarian conflict. I have learned to "trust the process" and to be open to "transforming power."

In our Basic Workshops, the Concentric Circles exercise has been one of the most powerful community builders (*Basic Manual*, E-19). Starting with the "simple" task of getting relative strangers to talk to each other, the beginning of a community is formed. When individuals look into each other's faces and learn to listen, to speak about themselves—this is how we coalesce into a community—a healing effect for those of us who live in the "war zone." At the beginning of my work as a facilitator, I did not immediately recognize the effectiveness of Concentric Circles, but over time, especially when we later process the exercise, it becomes apparent.

For many Susanville inmates, an AVP workshop is the first meaningful interaction with a stranger. In the CDCR, interactions with others are not automatic occurrences due to tensions and intolerance fueled by peer pressure. Often, I picture how our International AVP program works in post-genocide Rwanda or some other region similarly fragmented by conflict. California prisoners do not break barriers at AVP-sponsored workshops; we smash them!

Workshops occur roughly once a month. Often, the sense of community established during a Basic Workshop, usually held months prior, needs to be quickly reestablished during an Advanced Workshop. Our first task is to get the group interacting again. As inside facilitators, we know this to be true—the process works!

Continued on page 2



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Continued from page 1

One of the most effective community-building exercises from our *Advanced Manual* is "Inclusion" (D-107). This exercise breaks many of the barriers in place before the workshop starts. It is the willingness to be vulnerable that gives a person the strength to trust a stranger, even an "enemy." The seeds of community and trust are planted. This icebreaker has proven effective on every occasion.

The ultimate goal is to take that sense of community established in an AVP workshop and bring it to a yard that is fragmented by conflict. While it would not be accurate to say that participation in AVP has eliminated the hate, anger and intolerance permeating Susanville's yards, AVP has become the institution's most popular program.

Eugene Alexander Dey, an inmate facilitator at California Corrections Center in Susanville, CA.

My Community

By Artistic Adrian

"I don't want to leave," I silently cried. Unable to seize a rare opportunity to overcome the tattered remains of a regrettable past, I did not want to fail yet again.

In the first light and lively of my first AVP workshop, I sat immobile, staring at the floor during "Big Wind Blows" (*Basic Manual*, F-8). If I never played games with family (I thought to myself beneath the genuine laughter), how will I be able to play these games with strangers? The specks of dust below me held no answers. With the possibility of being asked to leave for failing to participate, the inclusive smile radiating from Carefree Kathy's heart prompted an immediate evaluation of self and empowerment.

Not one self-conscious person—besides me—could be found in the group. No half-hearted laugh escaped the lips of the willing. I wanted to be what I have never been before: honest, respectful and caring. Trusting my inner sense to act and following the lead of my supportive fellow participants, I stepped cautiously into the blend as the big wind blew—embraced by a wide and welcoming group of non-judgmental people.

At the close of the Basic, I was in the company of a caring community that needed me the way I needed them. This prepared me to pass along what was handed down to me—the mortar of patience vital to the solid brick-building of the AVP community.

Submitted by Adrian Wycoff, a facilitator at Centinela State Prison.

Issues of *The Transformer* are created by you!

Which quarter does your local group, prison, yard, committee or region want to sign up for? Summer or Winter 2010 issues? Contact, avppat@earthlink.net or P.O. Box 3294, Santa Barbara, Ca 93130 for details.

Community in Action

By Musical Michael

Of all of the AVP activities, I have found that the most beneficial exercises are those concerning the building of community. As an “inside” facilitator who has been involved in multiple prison workshops, I have the additional benefit of experiencing how community affects participants after the workshop is over. Where once it was not present, a sense of camaraderie is now expressed in a multitude of ways: from a simple handshake, a look with a nod, or maybe even a vague reference to how “Mrs. Mumbly” is doing.

These simple gestures of acknowledgment are not the goal but are indications that a community has been formed. The interaction among members takes place in the subtlest of forms, even on a personal level. A former participant once shared with me that he found himself in a potentially explosive situation where the presence of another AVPer reminded him that a “win-win” outcome was possible without resorting to the typical violent solution. Seeking me out to share this experience of his own accord is the ultimate validation of our program.

As facilitators, we recognize that exercises like “Concentric Circles” and “Affirmation” (Basic Manual, E-19 and E-5) can be so powerful. But rarely do we give credit to “Mrs. Mumbly” and “Sing Fling” (F-15), which achieve bonding through laughter. Laughter is something rarely enjoyed as openly by an adult at an “inside” workshop. This emotional release is one with lasting repercussions as it fosters and reinforces the relationships that are created in our

workshops. This in turn supports the bonds of community at the heart of non-violence. This is not to say that the “deep” exercises do not have their place; rather, we should be conscious of all of the parts of the community-building process. Countless times, former participants have expressed how they thought an exercise was silly in the moment but later realized it had been a long time since they had laughed or shared like they had in the workshop. This realization shows that the power of laughter plays a huge role in the building of community.

Having experienced a sense of community is why former participants open themselves to “Transforming Power” when they find themselves in potentially violent situations outside of the workshops.

That old adage about “strength in numbers” does apply. When my facility had a run of monthly workshops, not only did we experience a noticeable difference in the drop of violence, but also the sense of community that spilled onto the yard created a new atmosphere—settling disputes by violent means started to become rather distasteful.

The creation of a community is made possible by trusting and engaging in the process, not by merely bowing down to our perceived need to tackle the “deep exercises.” The true seeds of community are planted throughout the workshop, and growth continues (hopefully) after the workshop has ended.

Mike McDonald, California Correctional Center, Susanville, CA, is an “inside” lead.

Team Community

By Eugene and Mike

It is not just about how smoothly an exercise is run or if a facilitator remembers not to step on another facilitator’s toes during an exercise. How their actions affect the sense of community within the workshop’s team is the primary consideration. The true heart and soul of community is how the team models mutual cooperation.

If the team is not working together and is not communicating openly with each other, how can they expect the participants to behave as a community? It all goes back to the pre-workshop contract. The facilitators need always to be mindful of these basic ground rules.

The sense of knowing each other, which grows from meaningful communication, is the glue that binds a team together. This in turn provides a catalyst for the growth of community within the workshops. Everything else flows easily from this position of mutual respect.

For more information on Team Building see archives at TheTransformer.us Fall 2007 issue.

Eugene Dey, an inmate facilitator at California Correctional Center, Susanville, CA.

Broken Squares

By *Sincere Steve*

I watched intently as the people eagerly began the exercise (*Basic Manual*, E-9). However, one person quickly became confused. When someone in the group offered the needed pieces, the person struggling did not immediately put it together. With too many pieces, a participant is too absorbed in “his problem” to notice those silently offering him the missing piece of his “broken square.”

Slowly, smiles formed. As the epiphany came upon them, they slid over the almost completed square. The other two group members also smiled in silent agreement. Upon completing a square, the final member in the laboring group looked up and saw the other three smiling at him. He slid the remaining pieces over to the member with no square, offering a sheepish grin. The final square was completed, and the exercise was brought to the discussion phase.

This experience has given me, a new facilitator, a rather unexpected insight into how a community is built. On many occasions, I have

seen someone struggling with something, and I tried to offer a solution to the problem. It was something I had to resist during the exercise of “Broken Squares.” In retrospect, it is quite clear I was merely interjecting myself into the situation, offering a quick fix of sorts to solve the technical problem.

“Broken Squares” was a lesson that opened my eyes to allowing people to make an attempt at a solution (autonomously) and to gain personal growth throughout the challenge. At the same time, as a community member, I learned that the process of allowing fellow members to experience their capability and feel confident is an integral element of the process. Without stymieing fellow community members by being insistent or overbearing with my “directing,” I can offer assistance when appropriate.

The sense of community I gain from AVP workshops manifests in my daily life. I look forward to becoming a supportive member of the prison AVP community.

Steven Klaas is an inmate facilitator at Susanville who just facilitated his first workshop.

The Flag

By *Retired Rick*

As a veteran and the Vice Commander of Veterans in prison, my ability to work as a member of the AVP community began as a veteran’s advocate.

Now, as a facilitator of AVP, I have learned to take a larger role in the process by which community is perceived.

I take these duties very seriously as my loyalty to community is dear to my heart.

I constantly struggled over how we honor the American flag in prison. When the administration allowed our nation’s symbol to hang torn, tattered and filthy, I had a dilemma on my hands. How do I approach the prison administration regarding this issue? As a member of the larger community who may or may not honor the “Flags of our Fathers” and as a member of the smaller community of AVP, I chose to use my skills as a facilitator to resolve the dilemma.

I struck a compromise, rather than choosing to have a confrontation. By thinking before reacting and expecting the best from the administration, I was able to realize we are all part of a larger community. This community, especially for those of us who have served.

Richard Dollar is a Susanville, CA inmate, an AVP facilitator and a vociferous advocate of patriotism.



Growing Up in the AVP Community

By *Joyful Joseph*

I have come to realize that as children we are all born into a community free of prejudice. We learn in our tender years to carry out the wishes of others. Hurtful and adverse opinions are formed without just grounds. At some point, we became set in our ways. We harbor hidden agendas, good and bad, as we wander throughout our lives. In our journey, some are fortunate to meet others who bring the experience of Alternatives to Violence. We become part of this larger family, a larger community.

Through my means and tools regarding community-building skills, I have learned that they are only as effective as the community that surrounds and interacts with me, as I with them. My gratitude is released into the family that we have become, a family who advocates nonviolence and creates unity within our community.

Joseph L. Gallardo is an inmate at Centinela State Prison, El Centro, CA.

AVP Practice (Support) Groups Under the Radar and Very Important

By Jazzy June Johnson

We all know the power of AVP Workshops. However, unless one has trained as a facilitator and periodically facilitate workshops, one can easily lose the benefit of AVP in everyday life whether one is inside a prison or in the community. This possibility has been recognized, and efforts have sprung up to provide support in the principles of AVP for our graduates.

Typically, these groups are called support groups or dialogue sessions. In Shirley Medium Prison in Shirley, Massachusetts, with which I am most familiar, we call them “Practice Groups.” This name was chosen very deliberately to recognize that while people had been given the basic tools of AVP in a Basic and Advanced Workshop, further “practice” was needed to incorporate AVP values and principles into the fabric of one’s being and daily life.

At Shirley Medium Prison, we organize our “practice groups” in eight-week cycles, focusing on a different topic chosen by the participants themselves for the full eight weeks. In the last three years, focus topics have included: Forgiveness, Dealing with

Tragedy, Removing Barriers to Communication in Relationships, Decision Making, Transforming Anger and Tools of Transforming Power. Largely, we use the Advanced Manual for exercises that relate to the focus though we have brought in other material, such as Kubler Ross, in *Dealing with Tragedy*. For each cycle, we have three inside facilitators, along with our two outside facilitators. We have found that this opportunity for more regular experience at facilitation has built a stronger, more capable cadre of inside facilitators that has been noticed by our other outside facilitators.

Inmates can sign up for eight weeks at a time. Preference is given to those men who have had both a Basic and Advanced workshop. However, we do have to acknowledge that we have bent the preference for a particularly eager person who has completed just a Basic.

We find the format allows for deeper discussion, and a rich and caring community is created. It is the opinion of this writer that AVP National should make continuing groups an endorsed and encouraged avenue of AVP in action. Perhaps the pages of *The Transformer* can be utilized to tell the story of other continuing AVP groups.

Editor’s note: Read the following “Support Groups in U.S. Prisons” articles to learn about others’ experiences throughout the country.

Support Groups in U.S. Prisons

In Auburn, NY

By Caring Cynthia MacBain from Upstate NY

We have support groups for Advanced Workshop graduates three Tuesday evenings every month (the other nights are reserved for facilitators). Since we are limited to the number of people on a call-out, we ask that people note if they cannot come for a while (classes, job) but would like to be put on at a later date.

The support group meets from approximately 7–9. The first meeting after an Advanced Workshop is for brainstorming and prioritizing issues and focusing on topics they would like to work more on. That meeting can include a “check in” (how is everyone doing, feeling) followed by a gathering and a light and lively.

The subsequent support group meetings, led by facilitators, are a good opportunity for apprentice facilitators to hone their skills. Each meeting consists of gathering, exercise, light and lively and break, exercise or discussion, and closing.

We ask participants to choose and lead light and livelies and gatherings. It is easy to make a copy of the gatherings from the *Advanced Manual*. This is an opportunity to see who may develop into facilitators and be asked to the next Training for Facilitators.

In Shirley, MA

By Nurturing Neil Whitehouse

Our structure is an eight-week cycle, meeting 90 minutes every Monday evening excluding holidays.

We encourage three or four inside facilitators who have completed the Training for Facilitators to assist in facilitating the sessions in each cycle. Participants are expected to have completed a Basic Workshop.

The group chooses a theme at the beginning of each cycle, i.e., forgiveness, relationships, self-awareness, etc., as the focus for the cycle. The theme is developed through participation in a gathering/exercise/sharing structure that incorporates AVP principles.

Support Groups in U.S. Prisons

Elmira CF in NY

By Simply Susan Wolf

We meet every second and fourth Friday evening. The support group session goes from 6:15 until 9:15, with a break. Three outside facilitators are able to participate, and we have a fairly large group of inside facilitators/apprentice facilitators. The inside and outside coordinators and facilitators draw up a skeleton agenda, by consensus, which includes welcome, check-in, gathering, light and lively, business, exercise and closing for every session. At each session, different apprentices sign up for an activity they have worked on since the last meeting. Thus, the men get to practice different activities and hone their skills until the next AVP workshop. We conduct the business portion as a whole group.

Call-outs have been arranged in between support

group meetings so the inside facilitators can get together and organize the set of activities for the next support group. On the 2nd Friday, only facilitators and apprentice facilitators are called out for the meeting. On the 4th Friday, half or more of the men who have completed a Basic AVP Workshop are called out with some of the apprentice facilitators. The next 4th Friday, the other half of those who have taken a Basic Workshop are called out.

At ECF we can have only two full workshops a year, six months apart, and those workshops must be held during the week. Being able to participate in support groups keeps AVP alive in the men's lives and hearts and gives them a chance to practice their AVP skills.

CTF Central CA

By Loving Linda McCue

Our support groups are called "mini workshops." Anyone who has taken a Basic is eligible to participate. We keep a Basic group together, as the bond is strong, and pair that group with a new group so they will meet and form a bond with other AVPers as well. We have a theme each time and do two exercises, a gathering, a light and lively and a closing. We meet for two hours on Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m. Some times, when we choose a long exercise, we do only one. We never drop the gathering or light and lively. Some of the themes we have covered, which have been chosen by the inside facilitators, are community, self-esteem, trust, racism and stereotyping, self-discipline, peer pressure, self-examination and transforming ourselves. Attendance at these workshops has been quite successful as there is often a long wait between workshops due to a small number of outside facilitators. These workshops keep the participants connected to the AVP community and give them something to work on in their lives. Most of the participants keep coming back although nothing goes in their files—they welcome the support!

I urge you to start support groups in your area. They have kept the participants motivated to work toward non-violence in their lives.

In Iowa State

By Smiling Sandy Krell

The Iowa State Penitentiary (ISP) has an AVP support group that meets once a month for an hour. Following prison administrative policy for support groups, one of the inside counselors is the nominal "sponsor" for the group and sits in on the meetings. (We tried to get the administration to accept a community volunteer for that role, but they did not feel they could make an exception for our group.) The inmate facilitators who have facilitated all three levels of workshops form a leadership group. They meet with me once every three months and decide who is going to facilitate each meeting for the next three months. The designated facilitator picks a gathering and a closing. The content in between varies from discussing one of the Transforming Power guides or issues they are having with applying AVP or doing a role-play and discussing it afterward.

The institution has set a limit of 30 inmates maximum in any meeting. AVP has been at ISP for a little over three years and has had over 150 people participate in workshops, about 90 of whom are still at ISP, about 60 of whom are active members. We had to write a proposal and by-laws to get started.



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Find Your Group

By Tenacious Tony

Prison is a savage place prone to violence. . . . We come here alone. The need to ally oneself with others is much more than an attempt to overcome personal loneliness—it is a matter of personal safety. For the most part, we become close to others from our own hometown or county, or others of our own race—certainly none beyond this barrier.

AVP shatters this prisoner mindset. We voluntarily thrust ourselves into the midst of other groups, interacting with those whom we have been taught to distrust—enemies

with whom we share an uneasy truce—from a distance . . .

Through the AVP experience, I have learned how much we have in common. I have come to know men from every imaginable background and have developed friendships that better reflect the multiculturalism of the new millennium. My AVP community has put to rest much of the racism and hatred that marred the 20th century that still characterizes prison. . . . *We AVPers are not alone anymore.*

Submitted by Anthony Kunkle an inmate facilitator at California Correctional Center, Susanville, CA.

“What Community Means to Me in This Environment and My Part in It”

By Amazing Armando

TO BE KEPT WITHIN LIMITS COMPLETELY/ A FAÇADE
 THE SOIL IS SLIGHTLY PARTED/AND A SEED IS PLANTED
 THE EARTH IS HOME/AS I LOOK AROUND/I SEE THINGS THAT REMIND ME OF OUR
 UNIFIED BODY/A BODY UNIFIED IN DEED/DEVELOPING
 SURROUNDED AND BOUND BY MUTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES
 CONDITIONS AND VARIOUS OBJECTS/THE SPLENDOR OF IT ALL OVERWHELMS ME
 AT TIMES/THE SOIL SO SOFT
 NOTHING SO NATURAL AND IDENTIFIABLE/A MEDIUM
 IN WHICH LIFE TAKES HOLD AND PROMOTES GROWTH GRADUALLY
 AS NEEDED/WITH WATER FALLING IN DROPS FROM THE SKY
 THE RAIN AND ITS COLDNESS IS WARMING/THERE!
 AN ORGANIC SUBSTANCE ESSENTIAL FOR NUTRITION
 SOIL WITH ITS COMPOSITION/A FLOWER’S BASE ROOTED
 AND AT ITS CENTER THE OVARIES/HERBS/FRUITS/AND VEGETABLES MEDICINAL,
 SAVORY, AROMATIC QUALITIES
 COMMUNITY AND MY PART
 LIKE A GARDEN, IN HARMONIC AND LASTING PEACE
 EVER SO EMBRACING.

Submitted by Armando Sanders, a Facilitator at Donovan State Prison, San Diego, CA.

AVP 2010 National Conference

Transforming AVP's Power: Expanding Diversity

The local conference team in Minnesota is hard at work planning next year's gathering. So, do your part and hold the dates over the Memorial Day weekend, May 27–31, 2010.

The site is the Dunrovin Retreat Center, a relaxing and beautiful location 30 miles northeast of St. Paul, MN, on the beautiful St. Croix River (designated as a Wild and Scenic River by the National Park Service). The nearest small town is Marine on the St. Croix, MN.

Details of the weekends' program will be available on the national (www.AVPUSA.org) website in late December, including registration forms, scholarship application and list of well-known key presenters and special one-day programs.

Please consider leading a breakout session during the conference. Here is a list of potential themes for sessions: Re-Entry, Youth, Diversity, Prevention/Remediation, Trauma/Healing, New Exercises, and the always famous—Workshops from Hell. We are also planning a session on "Including song in AVP workshops," which might lead into an evening "Songfest." So, bring your *AVP Song Book* if you have one.

See you in May,

Your AVP-MN Conference Team



Dunrovin Retreat Center
(<http://www.dunrovin.org/home/>)



AVP-International**Kenya, Nepal, South Africa – Interested Yet?**

The 2008 AVP-International Gathering (IG) in Kenya brought together about 120 people from 23 countries. It was extraordinary to spend 5 days with creative, innovative, dedicated people who are all committed to AVP. Nepal, site of our newest country program, was chosen as the site of the next IG in 2010.

It was recognized that, between biennial International Gatherings, AVP needs enabling structures working on shared issues. The Gathering tasked John Michaelis of AVP-USA/Australia to convene new committees, building on work and lessons learned after the previous IG (held in South Africa in 2006). We have encouraged participation from the whole AVP international community.

Along with AVP folks from around the world (Kenya, Australia, Nigeria, South Africa, Britain), AVP-International already has begun work with the active involvement of several AVP-USA people: Nancy

Shippen, John Michaelis, Deborah Bromiley, John Shuford, Deb Wood, Carolyn Polikarpus and Peg Erlanger. However, we still need more people to make AVP-International a strong and viable organization.

Join the Effort

AVP-International is seeking people who are interested in promoting AVP at an international level. We are an active group with many projects and goals that require more resources. We need your help! Below are some facts about our work, vision, mission and committee descriptions. Are you drawn to a committee? Your passion is all that is required.

If you would like to join our efforts, please contact one of the co-clerks of our Coordinating Committee: John Michaelis or John Shuford, via email: avp-committee@googlegroups.com.

AVP-International Structure

AVP International reorganized itself after the 2008 Gathering into the following:

- Coordinating Committee (similar to AVP-USA's Committee of Committees)
 - › Focus on the vision and mission of AVP-International
 - › Coordinate and share information
 - › Strategic planning
 - › Global new initiatives
- Information Committee
 - › Present a strong professional public face for AVP
 - › Enable internal communications
- Education Committee
 - › Provide education and resources for AVP training worldwide
- Finance Committee
 - › Assist regions and local groups to become financially stable and independent
 - › Raise funds necessary to support the activities of the international AVP structure
- Regional Committee
 - › Catalyze the formation of regions
 - › Provide regional support
 - › Promote cross fertilization within regions
 - › Provide support for AVP in new countries
- International Gathering Committee
 - › Work with host countries to plan and implement IGs
 - › Repository for international learning

AVP-International's Vision:

A nonviolent society where we all live in peace

www.avpinternational.org

International Gathering Planned for Nepal Oct. 2010

Funds need to be raised (\$12,000/year) to help AVP-Nepal develop so it can host the conference. Nepal represents an important opportunity to help facilitate a transition from a violently formed government (the Maoists) to a nonviolent post-election period.

Funds for scholarships are needed to ensure the widest and most diverse participation possible at the gathering.

AVP-International Mission:

Gather and provide resources and services for the AVP community to reach and sustain our full potential for peace and nonviolence worldwide



They didn't fit...

For articles that didn't fit this month go to www.TheTransformer.US.

Inmate-to-inmate Communication and Community Building

Edward P. Sabin, PhD, formerly with the Research Unit, Social Services Administration for Maryland Department of Human Resources and now a volunteer with the Alternatives to Violence Project, has written a report for a workshop at the Johns Hopkins 58th Institute for Spirituality and Medicine: "Violence and the Challenge of Healing in Our Communities."

AVP in Jordan

In this issue are photos taken in Jordan presented during a slide show by Rebecca Walkley, Carol Ann and Ray Boucher.

See these and other articles at www.TheTransformer.us.

Photos from Jordan

At left: *The ball is a cultural adaptation for this popular closing. If anyone is uncomfortable touching hands, it can be avoided.*

Below: *During a fishbowl on "Is violence ever justified?" Jordanian comments revealed little difference from U.S. participant responses.*

Youth Empowerment

By *Kinetic Khalil*

Why should we work with the youth? Because they are our future, and they need our support and whatever positive experiences we can provide.

While working with youth can be challenging, it also can be the most rewarding. Over the period of my incarceration, I have discovered that a synergistic energy evolves when youth work with each other. Empowering certain youth to lead the way is the first step.

Many incarcerated youth, especially males, have never been told that someone is proud of them, that they did a good job, or that their help is needed to do something positive and constructive. This is where the work must start—with genuine positive reinforcement and affirmation to develop trust and self-esteem.

The next major step is responsibility. It is important to give the young people not only a task to complete but also a sense of ownership regarding the task. For example, the task might be to paint a garage, which would include giving them responsibility to choose what colors they want and designating tasks amongst themselves.

The third and final step, formed after the first two steps have been implemented, is getting the youth to gain a form of attachment to the task at hand. Using the example of the garage again, once the task is complete, the youth can put a name on the garage and even begin to use it as their clubhouse. This step serves two purposes: first, it gives the youth a place where they can be safe and where positivity can be fostered, and second, it gives them something to call their own and for which they can be responsible.

These steps can be applied in many situations with regard to AVP Youth Workshops. Youth participants can be trained to be facilitators. For participants, the message is better received when they have a connection to the messenger, the youth facilitator.

Youth empowerment is feasible and attainable. I am a product of that empowerment. Hopefully, from here on out, we all will play our part in this effort

Submitted by Kinetic Khalil, aka Alvaro Cumberbatch, Green Haven CF, New York.

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**Want to write an article for
Spring 2010 - on Getting
Ready for a Workshop?**

What does it take to get ready for a workshop? What kind of emotional, physical and psychological preparations have you found that work?

Fall 2010 is being written by the Youth Committee. Contact jubilantjudy@mac.com to contribute.

Put on your calendar:
May 27-31, 2010, for Annual
Conference in Minnesota

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT:
INMATE-TO-INMATE COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

May 13, 2008, Workshop

The Johns Hopkins 58th Institute for Spirituality and Medicine: Violence and the Challenge of Healing in Our Communities

Edward P. Sabin, Ph.D. retired
Research Unit, Social Services Administration
Maryland Department of Human Resources
Volunteer, Alternatives to Violence Project

ABSTRACT

With state and federal budget cuts and tenuous public support for rehabilitation, a volunteer and inmate run rehabilitation program in prison has clear advantages. The author participated in Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops at a medium security prison in Jessup, Maryland in 1994 and subsequently became a facilitator at numerous AVP workshops at a second prison in Jessup. This presentation records impressions from the first two workshops in which the author participated together with subsequent observations regarding the viability of a largely inmate led rehabilitation and community building program in prison. The program stresses experiential learning to promote alternatives to violence. Trust building activities, games, communications exercises, and role play are used to train participants. A goal of the workshops is to counter the predominant prison culture of reserve and distrust. Initially cool and reserved, by the end of the three-day workshop, many participants express enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to get better acquainted and to speak freely about important topics. Evaluation studies show that AVP can make a positive contribution for participants at an individual level and can affect the environment of a prison.

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT:
INMATE-TO-INMATE COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a volunteer run self-help training program begun by inmates in a New York state prison in 1975 with the help of a Quaker volunteer group. Since 1975 AVP has grown and spread, mainly by word of mouth, to prisons and other facilities in 40 states and over 10 countries according to the AVP web site (www.avpusa.org). Over the years, the program has received local news coverage and has been the subject of several articles in the professional literature (see references).

The first AVP workshops I participated in took place in a medium security prison for men in Jessup, Maryland, over two three day periods in July and September of 1994. The 16 to 18 people who participated in the workshops were mainly inmates, mainly male (one outside female volunteer participated) and predominantly African-American. The ratio of facilitators to participants was approximately 1 to 4. The facilitators were inmates trained in AVP with the exception of one outside facilitator at the second workshop. The first workshop was also to have an outside facilitator but at last moment, a family problem prevented her participation. The inmate facilitators included several apprentices who were gaining experience during the workshops.

The setting was a large room, an activities area in the prison. Not air conditioned, it was very hot during the first workshop. Whirring fans made it difficult to hear. About 18 men (the group fluctuated in size slightly from session to session) and one woman sit in a circle on plastic and metal chairs. Hot water, instant coffee, and canned juice were available on a table in the corner. A guard sat at a desk at the door to the room to check people in and out.

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE FIRST WORKSHOP

AVP workshops start with a name game used as an ice breaker. Participants are asked to think of a positive adjective to describe themselves starting with the same letter as their name. For the rest of the workshop this becomes your name as in Excellent Ed or Fabulous Frank. Each person in the circle is expected to introduce everyone to their left using their adjective names before stating their own name.

The last people in the circle need to remember and state everyone's name prior to stating their own name. Often people at the end of the circle need help from others to complete the task. Thereafter participants are asked to preface any remarks to the group by first stating their adjective name.

Early in the workshop, an apprentice facilitator reviewed the ground rules for the workshop which are printed on posters. These are process guidelines such as "We refrain from put-downs of ourselves or others," "Do not speak too often or too long," "Volunteer yourself only, don't volunteer others," and "Everyone has the right to pass."

AVP stresses experiential learning and downplays lectures. Some goals of the workshop, such as building trust, are pursued indirectly or non-verbally through tasks that require cooperation, through games, and through "lite and lively" sessions. The purpose of these exercises appears to be to break down prison definitions of toughness or self-sufficiency. One game is "Big Wind Blows," a variation on musical chairs. Another game involves two person teams who move about with locked arms. Other light sessions involve tossing multiple fuzzy balls across and around the circle in a given sequence.

While I felt stiff and uncomfortable at first, I soon loosened up. I noticed that most participants were laughing or smiling at the end of the lite and lively sessions.

Lighter sessions are interspersed with more serious sessions. Typically participants break into small groups and take turns talking to one another about questions such as: "What about myself am I most proud?" "Who is someone I admire and why?" "What goals for myself do I have for the next 5 years?" After the small group sessions, participants sit in the larger circle and the facilitator asks for feedback on the exercise.

In another session, participants talk about values turned upside down in prison. Prison values include avoiding weakness--to not be a chump. People take advantage. You're either predator or prey. A tough moral dilemma raised in this session is what does a person do when violence occurs? Stand on the sidelines, turn away, or get involved? There can be a heavy cost to getting involved.

The facilitator stresses that AVP does not have answers to difficult questions. Instead each of us needs to look within ourselves for answers. However, preparation and exercises can increase the chance that we will be able to deal with difficult situations in creative and more humane way.

Another facilitator reviews a 12 point guide to "transforming power" in dealing with other people. The principles are printed on posters placed around the room and include guidelines such as "find something you have in common" "base your position on truth" "use surprise and humor" and "be patient and persistent" among others. The facilitator again stresses there are no magic answers for dealing with violence but that if we are prepared and use our intelligence, there are alternatives to fight or flight.

The first workshop ends on an up note with affirmation posters and a graduation ceremony. Affirmation posters are large sheets of paper with people's names written on it in fancy letters taped to the walls around the perimeter of the room. Walking from poster to poster, participants have a chance to write something positive about the person on the posters. At the graduation ceremony, a statement from a person's poster is read, the participant gets a certificate of participation, and goes around the circle giving high fives accompanied by applause from the group.

SECOND WORKSHOP IMPRESSIONS

I recognize some participants and facilitators from the first workshop but others are new to me. The second workshop opens with a name game plus a pantomime of who I am or an activity I like. Each person needs to name all others to their left in the circle and act out their pantomime. Others help when a person can't remember. There is kidding around about people near the end of the circle who

have so many names and pantomimes to remember. People tend to unfreeze with the attention they receive when others look at them and try to remember their name and pantomime.

Participants in the second workshop are asked to vote on a theme or problem to address during the remainder of the workshop. A facilitator writes suggested topics on a flip chart and discussion ensues. The choice is narrowed down to two topics: "troubled youth" and "problems in communication."

Some participants lean forward in their chairs looking at other speakers while waiting for their turn to speak on behalf of one or another of these topics. In the end a merged topic--problems in communication between youth and older generation--was chosen.

A recurring theme in several sessions is the gap between generations and the difficulty of older men (late 30's and 40's) in influencing or reaching the younger generation. The latter is portrayed as being wild, unpredictable, and headed for the morgue or jail. Sample comments include: "How do you convince a youth not to sell drugs?" "Need to offer options." "Can't stop youth from wanting nice things." "Telling someone is not good enough. I didn't listen when I was coming up--why should they?"

In one exercise we break into small groups. Our task is to write a problem we have on a piece of paper, fold up the paper and place it on the floor in the center of the small group. Next we pick up a piece of paper off the floor (not our own) and play the role of person seeking feedback from the small group on how to handle the problem. The paper I picked from the floor read:

"I'm very attached to money but the only way I know how to get it is from negative doings because I never had a job or proper attention as a child." When my turn came I stated this problem to the group. I received some advice about job-hunting. I countered with my not being able to live on a minimum-wage job. One participant answered my complaint about low wages with the phrase, "it's slow go or no go."

The second day I notice more smiles. Before a session gets started, participants grin before starting a conversation with me from across the circle. In a morning session, a respected facilitator, a leader in AVP at the prison, tells about lessons he learned the hard way. He says a person needs to risk losing friends and not give in to peer pressure. Something positive like friendship or loyalty can be negative depending on the situation. "It's hard to lose a friend (for not going along with him) but not as hard as doing 25 years." Trust is good but be careful who you trust because your friend can bring you down. "Life is short in the fast lane."

Facilitators make a pitch for young participants to help with a youth outreach program. Three young men in the circle get special attention as it is thought they can bridge the generation gap better than older AVP-ers.

Skits or role-playing highlight the second workshop. The group is split into three groups, each with a facilitator coach, and given time to devise a skit, assign roles, and rehearse prior to presenting a skit on the theme of alternatives to violence to the larger group. In one skit, a man is let out of prison and returns to find his girl friend living with another man. A violent confrontation is avoided (thanks to AVP training) by the ex-inmate in an angry doorstep conversation between the two men. In my group's skit, kids are locked out of a Korean grocery after an incident with the store keeper the previous day. Now they are asked by mom to go to store to get bread and milk. They don't want to tell mom what happened. The conflict between the boys and the storekeeper is mediated by a third party.

Affirmation posters and a graduation ceremony end the second workshop. People are interested in seeing what other people wrote on their posters. It is a chance to say something positive about someone in a safe manner.

Facilitators ask for positive and negative feedback on the workshop. As a guest, I find it difficult to give negative feedback as I fear I would seem too critical. In my mind I note that I was sometimes bored waiting for the facilitators to caucus prior to going on with the next exercise. I also recalled my upset with an inexperienced facilitator in my small group who tried to assign roles and direct the skit

instead of acting as a resource and letting us participants do it.

CONCLUSIONS

I was impressed with the skills of the facilitators in moving the workshop from session to session, directing the small group exercises, and in soliciting feedback from participants. Inmates expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak in candid ways to each other about important topics. Most evaluation comments at the end of the workshops were positive.

I was also impressed with seriousness and candor of the participants. I asked one participant if the men in the workshop were representative of the inmate population or a selected group. I explained that many of the men I spoke with said there were involved in an education or other self-help program. He answered that AVP workshops are open to all inmates but that men are not likely to sign up for a workshop until they start to develop a positive attitude. He said many young inmates serving long sentences are not interested in education or other programs. He said that he was not interested until about 5 years had passed of the 14 years he had served. A facilitator later told me he had observed the same tendency--that for some young inmates, a change in point of view happens after about 5 years.

AVP was well established at this prison. It trained numerous facilitators and offered workshops at frequent intervals. By one estimate about 300 men had participated in at least one workshop over the last several years of whom approximately 150 were /still in the facility. This was about 10% of the inmate population. Some of the men believe AVP had a positive impact on the atmosphere of the prison.

In the workshop sessions I was surprised by the focus on individual or personal change as opposed to railing against the "system." The workshops did NOT turn into general bitch sessions. I noticed very little "mau-mauing." For example, when a facilitator asked for examples of violence during a brainstorming session, one participant said "the judge sending me here." A facilitator disagreed but added that injustice or a miscarriage of justice could be an example of violence.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The positive messages of individual responsibility, growth, and behavioral change encountered in these AVP workshops are similar to those which, hopefully, would be the result of a professionally run rehabilitation program. In that sense, they make a positive contribution. In fact, the workshops may be more successful than professionally run groups by virtue of the fact that messages are coming from inmates or volunteers rather than paid professionals identified with the prison administration.

In this time of budget cutbacks and tenuous public support for rehabilitation, a largely inmate run rehabilitation program has obvious appeal. In this prison, the program required a considerable outside volunteer effort in the beginning during the late 1980's. It took several years to get off the ground. Eventually the administration was won over regarding the value of the program.

Administration support is necessary for the program to succeed. Support includes allocating space for the workshops, a small budget for incidental expenses, and staff to check the inmates and volunteers in and out of the workshop area. If corrections policy makers or managers want to expand AVP programs, the dependence of the program on volunteers may be a weak point. It is not easy to find outside volunteers willing to give up 3-day weekends to participate or facilitate AVP workshops. Inmate facilitators are a great asset in this case. It remains an open question whether the program can be implemented with paid staff or through official channels. The experience of other inmate self-help programs at other prisons would be helpful on this point.

AVP places a heavy emphasis on training. Three workshops are offered: basic, advanced, and training for trainers. Manuals from AVP/USA are available and are periodically updated. The manuals contain much information on how to conduct workshops including sample agendas, group exercises, and games. If there is no other benefit, some inmates who become AVP facilitators learn marketable skills--how to communicate better and how to facilitate groups. These skills are transferable to human service occupations after release from prison.

AVP programs have been evaluated by a number of researchers. Delahanty provides an excellent

summary of the results of AVP evaluations to date. The evaluations generally focus on the self-reported impact of the participants as a result of the workshops. The evaluations showed usually positive responses on the part of workshop participants. It is more difficult to gauge the impact of the program upon the institution in which the workshops are held. Miller and Shuford (2005) quote officials in two prisons who report improvements in inmate behavior and in the general level of violence in the institution. Sloan (2002) looked at inmate behavioral write-ups before and after participation in AVP using an experimental and a control group. He found that the experimental group experienced a 60% drop in write-ups compared to the control group. Miller and Shuford (2005) undertook an ambitious three-year post-release study of recidivism of AVP participants and non-participants using the Delaware Criminal Justice Information System. In their study AVP participants had a substantially lower rate of recidivism and return to prison.

AVP is a worthwhile program that has much to commend it. It is based on sound psychological and group process principles which have evolved over the years. For outside volunteers, the program builds bridges and reduces the psychological distance between "us" and "them." For inmates the program offers leadership training, constructive values and has the potential to contribute to a more positive atmosphere in prison. For inmates who return to the community, the program provides tools for dealing with people and conflict in the wider world and, hopefully, a better prospect for not returning to the criminal justice system.

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Process of Community Building By Carefree Kathy

Community building begins the moment we take on our adjective names in a Basic Workshop and continues as part of our process of building trust in the individuals that comprise our community. A sense of community is developed through trust, empathy, encouragement and play. The context of community is also reinforced by the egalitarian way in which we set up and conduct the workshop (e.g., setting up the chairs in a circle and, as exercise presenters, sitting as much as possible with the participants (rather than standing to lead an exercise)).

We can also bring our artistic talents to use when we “Imagine a Better Community.” (Basic Manual, E-28) This time we are creating community within our small groups of four to five participants by envisioning a world where much is possible. This is followed by making real that which was just envisioned in our artwork as we take the next step of commitment. The facilitator passes out index cards on which we individually create a positive goal and develop steps to achieve it. When we exchange our commitment cards with one another, we have added the strength we get from each other to create this new community.

All we need is to find that brother or sister who can encourage us on this journey of self discovery in building (as Martin Luther King Jr. once said) “the beloved community.”

Kathy Smith is an “outside” facilitator from the San Diego Hands of Peace/AVP Program. She volunteers in Donovan State Prison and Centinela State Prison.

AVP IN JORDAN

In September, in place of our usual Area Council meeting, Rebecca Walkley and Carol Ann and Ray Boucher talked about and showed slides of their time in Jordan this summer doing AVP workshops with refugees in Amman. A group of about 20 people assembled at Purchase Meeting House to hear the talk, both AVP facilitators and others.

Ann Ward, an AVP-USA facilitator living in Amman, had conducted several workshops in 2008, and is working towards establishing an ongoing program. The workshops were underwritten by a grant from Relief International, so the other facilitators who came needed to pay only their transportation expenses. Relief International has an office there, and wanted their staff trained in AVP. Carol Ann said that she hoped that RI will find AVP a useful tool for them in their work with refugees.

In all, there were seven facilitators, mostly from the US, who led the workshops. Some of the team building was done during sightseeing near Amman, including a visit to Roman ruins that are the best preserved outside of Italy.

Rebecca had slides of several exercises done in the workshops. In the Basic, they did a fishbowl on the question, "Is violence ever justified?" Rebecca was surprised that their comments revealed very little difference from the responses she had received here. She said that the participants seemed to be familiar with *I Messages* as a way of speaking, and found it easy to create ones that would help resolve the conflicts. In the Advanced, they had an in-depth discussion of consensus. The topic chosen for the workshop was anger and its relation to Transforming Power.

Carol Ann also had pictures of her experience in youth workshops and a Training for Facilitators. She noted that Jordanian youth are polite – very different from what she had encountered here! Some of the Muslim women have not had experience with expressing their thoughts and feelings, especially in a mixed group. Carol Ann felt that as they practice their role as AVP facilitators they will gain confidence and have a great deal to offer.

All three found the experience rewarding. They felt they had brought an AVP perspective to a new area, as well as having a taste of a different culture. Rebecca said that one of the participants said to her after the workshop, "You are the new face of America. Before, Americans were only occupiers."

Bill Leicht, one of the people who came to hear the presentation, said that he has contacts in Amman. He has combined AVP and Aikido, adding a physical alternative to violent conflicts. He will get Ann Ward's email address to explore the opportunity for adding Aikido to AVP in Jordan.