



The

TRANSFORMER

Supporting and Celebrating the Facilitators of AVP Workshops

Appreciation & Gratitude

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A New Experience--a New Appreciation

By Shakkir Talib Mujahid

I have been a part of the AVP family at Jessup Correctional Institute (JCI) for six years. The family has been a mental, emotional and spiritual inspiration.

This group of men is sincere and committed to making a difference in the world. I am proud and honored to have the privilege of working with them. Together, we have created some innovative workshops such as: "Value Clarification" and "Using Transforming Power in Court and Parole Hearings." Now we are developing a new workshop, "What is Man?" The focus is on how the lack of understanding of the qualities needed to be a man has led to violence, anger, self-hate and irresponsibility.



As an aspiring writer, I am very grateful to Larry Bratt, who volunteered JCI-AVP to be responsible for last summer and this summer's issues of *The Transformer*. Working on this issue has been a confidence builder for me, affirming my ability as a writer and providing an opportunity for growth.

I am grateful to *Transformer* editor Pat Hardy for giving us the opportunity to improve our writing and communication skills while reaching out to the AVP family all over the world. This is another way of transforming power and creating equal opportunity for all AVPers to share and participate.

I'm Just Paying My Rent

by Jeffery Emancipated Ebb

Wow! Where do I begin? I guess right where I am... I was introduced to AVP in 1994 when the Maryland Penitentiary was downsizing and I was transferred to the Maryland House of Correction Annex. The "Annex" or "Outback" as it was known was "off the chain" in terms of brutality and violence. It is amazing to have witnessed and survived the violence and to have contributed to the positive transformation of this prison (now named Jessup Correctional Institution).

I've been in the trenches organizing, creating, writing, coordinating and facilitating workshops with love for 20 years. Ongoingly, I have been pursuing my vision of establishing an AVP "Center of Excellence" in this institution and replicating this same model in society. I recognized the value of being equipped with the tools of AVP. I believe if people have the opportunity to see community building at work, they will implement it in their school or workplace, with confidence and assertiveness.

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Paying My Rent...

I am deeply grateful to AVP for providing me with skills that have improved my communication with others. I am thankful for the privilege to be a part of this AVP family. To show my appreciation, I helped co-found several workshops, including "HIPPY" (Help Increase the Peace Project for Youth) and Transforming Power for Court and Parole Hearings. Recently, I have co-authored an apprentice training curriculum for new facilitators.

I'm grateful to my comrade in the trenches, Larry Bodacious Bratt, for recommending me for the opportunity to co-edit this summer issue of *The Transformer*. He has helped my development as a writer and facilitator. I appreciate you, dude! I also want to extend my gratitude to Present Pat Hardy, *Transformer* Editor, for giving us this opportunity to help and gain experience. One of the affirmations I live by is: "The service we render is rent for the air we breathe." Therefore, for all I do, I am just paying my rent! Shalom.

Jeffrey Emancipated Ebb co-created the Help Increase the Peace Project for Youth (HIPPY) Workshop and facilitates training for apprentice facilitators. He is the co-editor of the JCI newsletter, Outback Observer.



R-L Ronnie, Ebb, Woody, Chuck, Pat, Canlu, Ron, Cornel, Turtle

A New Perspective

by Bradford Bass

I learned a few important lessons from my Advanced AVP workshop. I am thankful to the facilitators for introducing me to a different way of seeing life circumstances. It was interesting to learn that perspective and perception--though similar in definition--have distinctly different meanings and affect how a conflict may be resolved.

I appreciate AVP and the facilitators because, as a Christian, it helped to affirm my faith while being flexible enough to respect the life paths of others. Religion can make you dogmatic and judgmental. AVP helped me to search and see the good in others, despite differences in belief. The 12th guide of *Transforming Power: Build community based on honesty, caring and respect,* helped me realize I should watch my words and actions in relation to others. I do not have to change my morals and principles or compromise my integrity, but it is important to understand it takes all kinds of people to make a community. Even if I do not agree with a person's values, that person deserves respect from me.

I enjoyed the boxing ring exercise, which was entertaining, yet realistic. I appreciated the facilitators doing this exercise. I learned that just because I am sincere in my intention to bring peace, it doesn't mean the other person or persons in the conflict has the same intention. Having the tools of AVP, we remain determined to resolve conflicts in a "Win-Win" way, opening our hearts to Transforming Power

Understanding the differences in my perspective and perception with regard to others has made me better equipped to resolve conflict. Thanks to AVP, I understand if a negative person does not change and I do not change the way I interact with them, there always will be misunderstanding and conflict. What is most important is what I do, not what they do.

How AVP Changed My Life

By Charming Chelsea Corpening

There is something to be said about AVP. It is the only program I have experienced that creates a community of support and healing for breaking the vicious cycle of violence amongst incarcerated men and society. I participated in two workshops at JCI. I admit my anxiety got the best of me because I had never been in a prison. The security check and orientation were intimidating; being a woman added to the anxiety. I came with no expectations--just an open mind and spirit. Sure, I was getting credit hours for active community service from my AmeriCorps internship. Little did I know my life would be transformed.

I experienced a bond with the men. The facilitators welcomed me warmly. They were committed to creating community amongst their brethren. I, like many, thought prison to be filled with only thugs who would scare me. I was taken aback by the love, support and caring they showed to each other. I was grateful for the experience of seeing men leaning on and supporting each other to heal. I learned that AVP creates a safe space for healing where a sense of family is manifested.

My fascination continued in my Advanced Workshop, where I allowed myself to dig deep and emotionally confront my personal issues with my family. I had no idea how angry I was. I was able to confront these emotions, come to a place of forgiveness and let go. I also realized that "freedom" is a state of mind and that I allowed myself to be held hostage mentally and emotionally by the bitterness I inflicted on myself. At that moment, I was becoming free.

To my AVP family--brothers, uncles, cousins, fathers, husbands and grandfathers--thank you. You have shown me you are advocates for change and that at any age you can begin a journey to heal and break the strangleholds that have left you in mental and emotional captivity. You have shown me

you are willing to do the work to stop the cycle of violence and come to peace with your realities without inflicting pain. I offer you a sister, a daughter and a friend in me. I am a part of you, and you are a part of me. You are also a part of a community and, because of your honesty and despite your circumstance, you are truly free.

Charming Chelsea is an AmeriCorps intern, a teacher in training and an excited new AVP member, looking forward to becoming a facilitator.



JCI Basic Workshop

Power Transformed

By Brilliant Bobby 'Twist' Coleman

I'm a full blown twista;
I hurricane change when my big wind blowz
Exposed, exposing all them,
I mean those in my circle ...

Everyone gathered in thiz gathering equally;
No big I'z and little U'z
I meticulously run through my agenda review
Expounding and dropping jewelz in my ground
Rulez ...

Affirming one another and all of their good pointz;
Careful not to put down otherz az well az myself;
Recognizing that it helpz and Iz to the benefit
Of the group; but I also reserved the right to pass ...

I lead by example so Itz only natural
That I volunteer myself. ..
I'm aware of the traumatic experiencez
And emotionz being shared and uncovered ...
See in A VP ourz Iz a process of seeking and sharing.

Emotionz may come in wavez
Leaving me "lost at sea". With no
Warning frustration and anger
Can escalate to rage and fury
Possibly leaving me to be tried and
Convicted by jury of my peerz ...

So I "speak-out!!!",
"where do we go from here?"
Forever forward, never forgetting
Forgiveness Iz the best gift given ...

Letting completely go of my addiction to grudgez,
Laying aside my habitual assumptionz, that
Violent and destruction solutionz
Are the only onez possible.
Some may think that'z impossible
But "impossible Iz a word only
Found in the dictionary of foolz ..."

Yoo may see a criminal.

From Thug to AVP Facilitator

By Robert Pittman (Abdul Mateen)

Being a juvenile offender allowed me to see firsthand the blindfold to reality placed upon our youth. Most of our youth do not know the value they possess within themselves. I was in the same boat until I experienced AVP. Through that experience, I learned how to affirm my self worth. I began to observe how other youth did not see value in themselves. What they knew was value through violence and negative behaviors. Because of what I observed, I spoke to other facilitators at a facilitators retreat, wanting to address this problem. In turn, they encouraged me to create a youth workshop.

The facilitators gave me encouraging advice. One facilitator gave me a youth manual in which I saw a name for an AVP workshop--H.I.P.P. (Help Increase the Peace Project). Already calling myself a neo-hippie and keeping the AVP vibe, I named the new Project H.I.P.P.Y. (Help Increase the Peace Project 4 Youth). Just think... a workshop with a hippy feel, with peace signs, brightly-colored shirts and a mission for peace.

The workshops have an intense focus on

affirmation,
goal
setting and
cooperation.
I was proud,
honored and
humbled by its
success. So far,
we have a 90%
infracton-free
success rate of
the H.I.P.P.Y.
participants.
It was my
own AVP
experience
that led me to
make better
decisions. I
now pass these
same life-



changing skills on to others. I thank AVP for allowing me the opportunity to be an innovator in finding a creative way to help people become better people. Peace...

Robert Awesome Abdul Mateen Pittman is the co-creator of "H.I.P.P.Y." and "Hip-Hop," an offshoot of H.I.P.P.Y.

Appreciation-- a Two-Way Street

By Phantastic Phyllis

The key to the success of any volunteer program is the sense of appreciation and satisfaction felt by the volunteers. The AVP volunteer facilitators are no exception. While I would like to believe my efforts are self motivated and not for self glorification, I have to admit that the words of praise and appreciation are a huge component of what "hooked me" and keeps me going! I still show several of my first "affirmation posters" to my husband and friends.

Affirmation and appreciation motivated me to become a facilitator. However, what really inspired me were the impressive facilitating skills of the JCI men. As one who received professional training for leadership development and group facilitation, I quickly realized these men could teach me a lot. Many of them could be highly paid professionals in various areas if given the chance. I am humbled by them and appreciate and admire the tremendous effort they have made in transforming their lives and

their dedication to helping others.

I appreciate their acceptance of diverse ideas, which has made me aware of my tendency to pre-judge and has taught me that demonstrating acceptance translates to feelings of appreciation and validation for one's unique contributions and capabilities. I learned from the non-judgmental approach that everyone is worthy of acceptance. These men "reach for something good" in every person, nurture their strengths and tactfully point out areas which need to improve. I applaud them.

What I appreciate the most is they do not give up on me! No matter how defensive I might get, these men patiently find ways to offer me constructive feedback. It gives me the sense of having a second "family." It brings me joy when my team members say I have improved!

I appreciate the moral and spiritual support my JCI-AVP family gives me. Currently, I am dealing with a health crisis, the fact of

which I shared with both facilitators and participants. Since the word spread, I've felt nothing but warmth, love and concern. It is wonderful. Thank you, all. It is great to know my presence and contributions are appreciated.

"Phantastic" Phyllis Turner Lawrence is a five-year AVP'er. She is a capital case mitigation specialist, sentencing advocate, professional editor and substitute teacher.



Alternatives to Violence Graduation

My Path to AVP

by Severino Spiritual Sino Alcantara

In 1996, at age 23, I was in the prison's weight room, destroying a paper towel dispenser so I could fashion the metal into a knife. Everyone knew, but no one said anything except one courageous older dude who said, "Shorty, what you scared of?" Immediately something in me asked the same question. I owed no debts and had no conflicts with anyone!

A few days later, I ran into the older dude. Come to find out this "dude" was an AVP facilitator. He introduced himself; we talked as though we were old friends. He spoke to me about his past and being on death row. That experience changed his life. Being grateful for his new lease on life, he dedicated his life to saving others.

Shortly after our conversation, I found myself in a Basic AVP Workshop. He was one of the co-facilitators. At the conclusion of the workshop, I was overwhelmed with emotions.

I did not want the workshop to end. It was like being with family. At that moment, I realized I did not have to live in fear or carry a knife. All I needed was to contribute by building a community based on honesty, respect and caring.

I grew to love AVP and its principles, and I became a facilitator. I am proud to be the first Hispanic AVP facilitator in JCI. When I became a facilitator,

I envisioned conducting an all-Spanish workshop. I brainstormed the idea with others who supported utilizing my bilingual skills and AVP experience to reach out to the Hispanic community.

It is an exciting milestone that all began with a dream. Currently other Hispanic facilitators and I are going through the apprenticeship training. I trust additional Hispanic facilitators will be joining the AVP family.

My release date is fast approaching. It has been a great pleasure to know these men at JCI. My heart is overwhelmingly joyous in knowing there will still be a bilingual AVP workshop carrying on the legacy that I dreamed of 17 years ago. A legacy that began when a courageous older dude said to me, "Hey, Shorty, what you scared of?" I thank you, Grateful

Gregory, and I thank my AVP family.

Severino Spiritual Sino Alcantara is a trailblazer for the first Hispanic workshop at JCI. He dreams of introducing AVP to his home in the Dominican Republic upon release.



JCI Basic Workshop

Farewell to "The General"

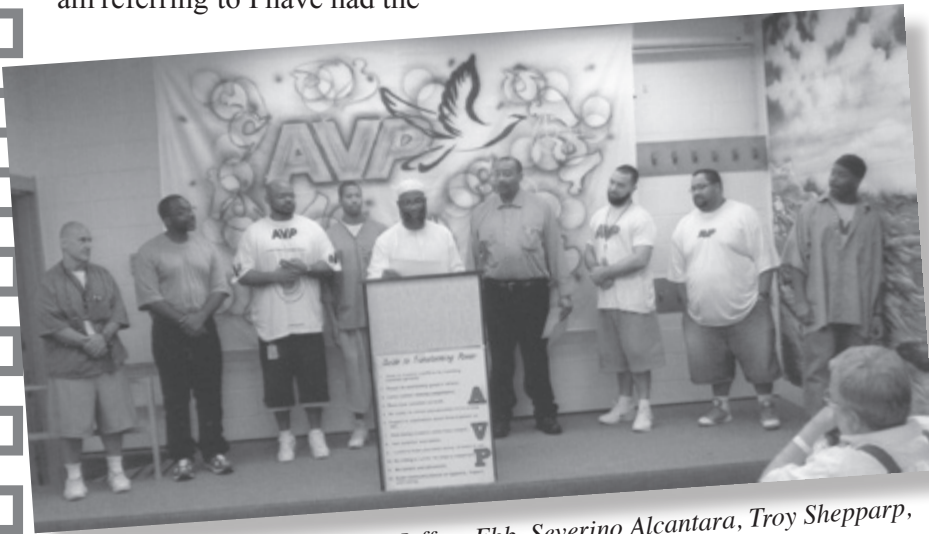
By Shakkir Talib Mujahid

There is a man among the AVP Team of JCI we call "The General." When you hear the term, you think of someone boastfully and arrogantly giving orders to people. You may think of someone who is forceful and demanding. "The General" I am referring to I have had the

"perfecting his skills and getting the job done." These are some of the qualities I admire about him. I also admire that he is a visionary, a team player and a caring person who respects and desires to help people better their lives in every way.

I believe the foundation of these qualities is his faith. He is the "message that he brings"-love, truth, freedom and justice. The JCI-AVP family appreciates his leadership and friendship. It has been an honor to know you, Dwight Dedicated Davis-Bey. May Allah guide you and reward you with the best in life.

Shakkir is a coordinator/supervisor for JCI Literacy/Reading Academy. He has been involved with AVP since 2008 and is an active facilitator in several Conflict Resolution and At-Risk Youth Programs.



JCI Facilitators R-L Larry Bratt, Jeffrey Ebb, Severino Alcantara, Troy Sheppard, Shakkir, Ron Ellis, Robert Gerhold, Mike Thomas, David-Bey.

pleasure of knowing for six years.

He is a great organizer and has a talent of feeling the needs of people without imposing himself on them. His leadership ability is firm and determined, with a quiet certainty and confidence. He earns the trust and respect of all those who have had the experience of working with him. He is a hard worker and believes in



Our very much appreciated, outside JCI AVP Facilitators. R-L Mr. John Knight, Mr. Adelphi Alexander, Ms. Ursula Daniels, Mr. Ed Sabin.

I STAND FOR YOU ...

By Renaissance Ren

I stand for you, my co-facilitators. I have been fortunate to be among many men and a few women who came together and formed a tight-knit circle...creating an environment where transforming power can be present...moving forward toward a better future. What it takes is 2, 3, or 4 of us working together as a team to formulate an agenda--a blend of ideas and thoughts that come from the depths of our souls and our imaginations, using the Basic and Advanced Manuals as our guide.

Throughout our group's history, many have analyzed the relationship between life and AVP. I see a great symmetry. To me, there is no mystery. The answers we seek lay buried in the same place the questions come from--deep within.

We bequeath to the participants all the tools we have been given to use for their growth and understanding so they can live in peace and harmony with each other. We find ourselves harnessing that power--the light that dwells within everyone--from which a sense of community emerges.

Shelving the illusion of separateness brings us to a state of unity. We are forming a sphere with no beginning or ending. Constantly evolving,

we grow as we go, solving mysteries and riddles written on our unanswered question sheets. As we continue, co-facilitators, I stand for you; we can face any challenge.

Warren Renaissance Ren Hynson is a creative spiritual being having a human experience who is an airbrush artist and a poet.



R-L Top to bottom. Analyzing Antonie, Sincere Shakkia, Justice Joe, Wonderful Woody, Dedicated Dwight Davis-Bey, Cooperative Chuck, Joyful James, Cartell Can, Spiritual Sino, Wise Woody, Brilliant Bobby Coleman, King Knowledge, Reddy Ronnie, Renaissance Ren, Caring Cornel, Jeffrey Emancipated Ebbs.

What AVP Has Done for Me

By Cecil Muhammad

AVP has been an avenue by which I have found a beautiful pathway to mental, emotional and spiritual relief. It's funny how I came in contact with the program because, if it were left up to me, I never would have gone to AVP and would have missed the blessing and lessons of this program.

I was referred to the AVP program as a condition of my parole release. I was thinking: let me get this certificate, and then I will be "Out of Here!" However, I got the surprise of a lifetime. The facilitators were first class. I was amazed at the many life lessons I learned in the workshop. They not only shared valuable lessons of life, but made it fun and enjoyable. I felt safe to open up about myself in ways that I haven't shared with some of my closest friends. It was a caring and nurturing experience, which allowed me to express myself without feeling compelled to do so.

I loved the experience and the preparation of the facilitators. It helped me open some doors in my emotional life that I had sealed tight. It was refreshing and illuminating. I look forward to using my new AVP tools in my journey toward success and in society. Thank you. Trust the Process!

Cecil Muhammad is due to be released from prison soon. He intends to work with At-Risk Youth and continue higher education.



Appreciation/Depreciation

By Michael Tenacious Thomas

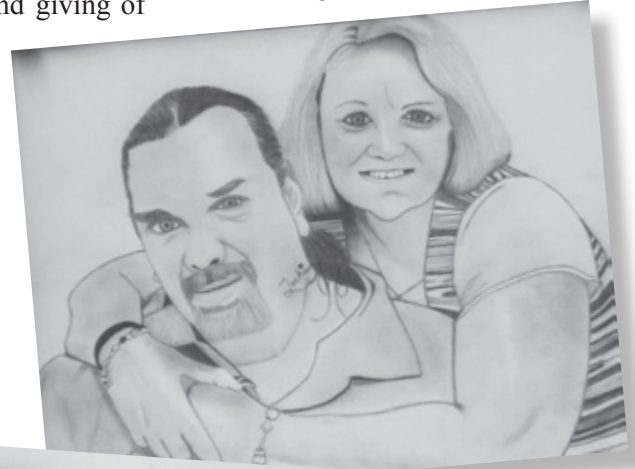
When I came to AVP as a participant, I was disgruntled, angry, anti-social and messed up inside. I didn't know what to do with myself. Nevertheless, some men in AVP suggested I take the Basic, and I did. I appreciated it. AVP is more than a "program." It is a belief and commitment to living a peaceful life with yourself and others around you. It has been a lifesaver for me; I am living proof that AVP can help you to change.

Today, as a facilitator, I appreciate the young and older men who participate in the workshops. "Building community" in a world that is so selfish and disunited is hard work, but inspiring. I want to make a positive difference in this world. However, there are times we as facilitators feel unappreciated. I have had the honor to work with some very sincere and dedicated men who put their hearts and souls into preparing for and giving of

themselves in these workshops.

Sometimes we meet some surprising obstacles in the institution. But we still push on because we understand the importance of the AVP mission. We have seen the results of the work that has been accomplished here. JCI was one of the most violent prisons in Maryland; it's now one of the most peaceful! We understand AVP played an important part in this reversal. I believe in the principles of AVP and stand on them. Therefore, we refuse to let any obstacles stop us. My fellow facilitators and I subscribe to the quote by Ralph Martson: **"There are plenty of obstacles on your path; don't allow yourself to be one of them."**

Michael Thomas is a hardworking, transformed man who wants to give to his community and take AVP to new heights.



Artwork by Michael "Tenacious" Thomas

Transforming Power in Parole and Court Hearings

by Larry Bodacious Bratt

While conducting a one-day workshop at Maryland's Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI), the facilitation team asked participants to role play representing themselves before a parole commissioner and a judge. Soon it was obvious to all that participants were not knowledgeable about conducting themselves at such hearings. They were nervous, did not know how to speak on their own behalf, had little idea what a portfolio of their record was and the importance of speaking formally before the court. The participants were timid, unprepared and openly scared--and these were AVP facilitators!

We saw a need and discussed how best to prepare these younger men for such potentially life-altering

hearings. In keeping with the JCI facilitators' creed that all workshops must represent AVP philosophy, we decided to use Transforming Power in guiding young incarcerated men in how to prepare for parole and court hearings.

Before the facilitation team, Sincere Shakkir and Emancipated Ebb (seasoned facilitators with legal knowledge), and I could do a workshop along these lines, we had to get the approval of other AVP facilitators. We ran a rehearsal workshop. We were rewarded by comments and constructive criticism from the participating facilitators. From the first exercise to the last, the facilitators testified to their own need for this kind of workshop and wanted

to be included as participants in future Transforming Power for Parole and Court Hearing Workshops.

JCI facilitators provided suggestions that transformed the blueprint for the two-day workshop into a final agenda. Truly, the review process for the new agenda established by the JCI facilitators' cadre was a visionary process that provided ideas and suggestions to transform good work into great work. Today, the two-day workshop is one of the most sought after AVP workshops at JCI. Everyone appreciates the team effort of facilitators and participants. *Larry Bodacious Bratt is an AVP participant and facilitator since 1995. He is a devotee of Sai Baba who teaches to "Love All; Serve All."*

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