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ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

AVP-USA Newsletter

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STANDING TOGETHER

by Marjorie Kerr, Executive Director, AVP-USA

Sometime back, recognizing that I already had an overabundance of objects and things in my life, I asked friends to celebrate my birthday by giving me wishes rather than gifts. The wishes should be sealed so that I could open them slowly over the entire year. It was a wonderful way to celebrate.

At the time I had only recently discovered AVP and had begun taking workshops. I would like to share with you the wish my friend George provided:

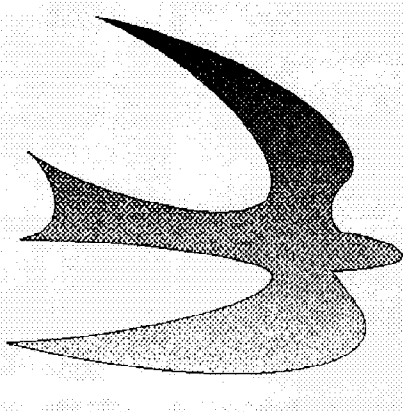
"A violence-free world is a wonderful wish, but unfortunately, a distant reality. My wish for you is that you'd see in an instant the future you're helping to create and see your place in that process.

To realize that what you've done and are doing makes the future - a future that will be better and far less violent. To see at once the line of history and the result, and to know you're a positive part of that result.

For a person's life is more than the time they have lived on the earth (no great surprise to you, I imagine, but too rarely acknowledged).

I wish you to see yourself in the line of those who strive to make life better and to give yourself a pat on the back. You deserve it."

At the time I was quite touched. As I sit at my keyboard in the new national headquarters of AVP, writing this column as Executive Director, I am astounded by his insight into the transformation that had begun to occur within me and continues to occur today, - a transformation that also may be occurring in you, workers, friends, supporters.



AVP is all about our own growth, as individuals, as members of organizations, as citizens. It is also about being part of the future, and determining our own place and contribution to that future. Can we come together as one nationwide community, or even broader world wide community? Can we stand together in a way that empowers the local and regional organizations and enhances the national AVP organization as well? Can we trust each other's wisdom?

Many challenges face us in the days ahead. I know in my heart that we must and will find a way to work together cooperatively with trust and respect, with an attitude of abundance and caring. I know in my heart that each of you, with all of your wisdom, expertise, insight, and caring will help to create the way, the vision for this. I know in my heart that our standing together as an organizational community, as a business and administrative community built around the values of respect, caring trust, cooperation and community, is to be a positive part that makes the future.

Pat yourself on the back. You deserve it. With your help, last year more than 1000 workshops were presented in prisons, schools and communities. More than 15,000 participants attended. More than 93,000 volunteer hours were provided. There are programs in more than forty states and fourteen countries. You have helped to build a program that is strong and vital. With the development of the national office, we have the potential to move into a new era.

Continue to give generously, of your time, of your wisdom, of your resources. Give generously because of what it will mean in your own life to do so, to be part of a greater whole. Take your place in the line of those who strive to make life better, with their thoughts, with their deeds, with their talents, with their funds. And give yourself a pat on the back. You deserve it.

P.S. Call, fax, write. I'd love to hear from you.

Compassion For My Victims

by Warren Jamieson, Moreton Correction Centre,
Australia



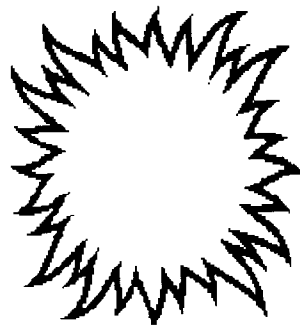
I admit that I have committed some very serious offenses. I have been in boy's homes and prisons since the age of nine. I have done many programs in prison during my lengthy incarcerations. Most recently, and most importantly is what I have gotten out of the AVP program. I have found deep values that have been lacking all my life. Things that I have learned from my participation in the AVP are empathy, the meaning of forgiveness, how to express emotions that have been buried a long time, finding my real inner self and learning how to deal with problems openly and honestly.

Until recently I can honestly say that I didn't have any consideration for people that I walked over and were victims of violent acts that I forced on them. You could say that I was emotionally numb. AVP really opened my eyes to the widespread pain I have caused over the years to innocent people. Instead of watching shows that display the anguish of victims of violence and not being able to relate to them, I now find myself watching them and feeling sympathy for them. Relating this to my own experiences has made me want to take stock of what I have been doing to other people.

It is very hard to describe the feelings that now possess me as they are foreign to me. I feel shame, remorse, guilt at the thought of my past, but there are also new feelings. It is as if a lead weight has been removed from my shoulders. I can now see light at the end of the tunnel, and I want to reach it.

For the first time in my life I now know what I want and it is the exact opposite to what I have been heading for. There is an inner glow in me that is better than the feeling that inspired me though my violent acts. The guilt I have inside over my past actions will always be with me but no longer will I put anyone through the pain like that I caused before.

It would be greatly appreciated by myself and other inmates if the AVP program would become widely accepted by Corrective Services and used a lot more than it is now. I believe that it will be the single most important rehabilitation tool to ever be used.



Write It Down!

by John Booth



The standard AVP workshop achieves its purpose in part through the intensity of a full three-day interactive experience. This often provides inmates with new capabilities for avoiding violence - or at least in some part taming its consequences - and new dimensions of self awareness and understanding. But, it was reasoned at the Westchester Council's Sing Sing C.F. unit, *writing down one's views and feelings about AVP principles* might be a further way of developing deep convictions. There might also be a way to extend or encapsulate the weekend experience in a form which would reach a larger number of inmates. It was reasoned, furthermore, that a new program might be a vehicle for improving inmates' expression and writing skills, while at the same time advancing AVP principles through the ordering of one's thoughts for writing, and otherwise benefitting from the particular disciplines and insights of the process of writing.

The experiment was launched in September 1994 under the title AVP *In Writing*, with the cooperation of Brant Kehn, Deputy Superintendent of Programs at Sing Sing. The program is now in its second year.

In order to meet a spectrum of Sing Sing inmates needs, AVP *In Writing* consists of both a Basic Class and an Advanced Class, each of ten weekly sessions. The Basic Class concentrates on the rudiments of written expression. At the heart of each session of the Advanced Class is a paper each participant writes based on one of the AVP exercises used in the weekend workshops. The exercises are usually on such traditional AVP subjects as *empathy, conflict resolution, assertiveness, affirmation, and stereotyping*. In addition, weekly assignments may be based on exercises devised especially to stretch writing capabilities. The papers are read by each participant at the weekly sessions, and then given to an outside facilitator to be returned at the following session with suggestions on structure, modes of expression, and English usage.

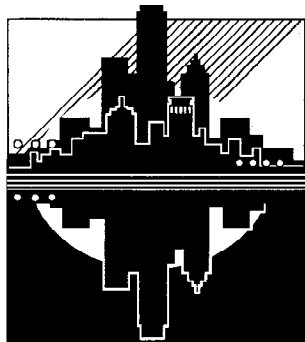
The depth of understanding and feelings expressed in these writings has been remarkable. Humor, anger, and hope were mixed with profound insights born of traumatic experiences. Another important part of each session in the writing program is the discussions based on the readings of the participants' papers, usually revolving around various viewpoints and facets of AVP concern. Diversity of views has been strong and very illuminating. Writing it down does help!

Applying AVP In The Workplace

by Joanne Hillman

published in the "the Gathering" of the Texas AVP

I recently became aware of a serious morale problem among my employees and spent all day one Saturday



counseling with two of them who were seriously threatening to quit. Managing to pacify them, I still felt that was not enough. Something positive was needed, something like the wonderful feeling of community that is achieved in AVP workshops. Searching for the 'recipe' for that community, I decided to begin at the beginning with

AVP groundrules and an 'affirmation exercise.'

I designated rotating teams of two to have lunch together once during the week. During the meal, we were both to spend time sharing (1) something about ourselves (non job related) that we felt good about; (2) a personal dream or goal; and (3) something job related that we do very well and we felt good about.

Later, we were to show this partner one aspect of our job that we do especially well which he might not know. Also, we were to share with at least one other member one of the good things we learned about that partner.

The response has been amazing. Even the most cynical told me, "I am so glad you started this. We were all getting too negative, and there was too much back-biting going on." There is a new positive spirit among us that you can hear and feel. The work still gets done, but we take time to be friends.

law (who is 'Mom' to me) had become involved in shortly after her retirement. But it wasn't until late Sunday, August 20th, in Dublin, Ireland, as a participant in a basic workshop, however, that I was able to say, "so this is what Mom has been talking about all this time - now I understand!"

Some of the things I learned were that conflict and violence are not necessarily obvious. Nor are they always physical reactions. Also, the potential for misunderstandings can play a tremendous part in the development of conflict. I became aware of the importance of listening to and clarifying another person's point of view before reacting. It seems that so much conflict and resultant violence could be avoided by really listening to others.

Building community and transforming power were another part of AVP's impact for me. Finding common good in any group of people and uniting what are sometimes total strangers to work together and to respect each other is accomplished in the workshop through often subtle exercises. The results of these exercises show that the individual and community strength that is developed can be used to resolve conflict without violence. I learned what Mom meant when she said, "AVP plants a seed." If one person emerges from the basic workshop with a desire and some new skills enabling him to resolve a conflict and avoid violence, then a seed of success has been planted.

AVP Trainers in Nicaragua Speak: *reproduced from "Pro-Nica, News from Nicaragua"*

Oscar Escobar Ex-EPS (Sandinista Army), *El Centre de los Amigos, Managua*: "In Nicaragua we are living in a post-war, politically polarized context with open wounds left from the war. In addition, there is a severe economic crisis and high levels of unemployment. All of this has led to tensions and social deterioration which is manifest in the dramatic increase in random violence, prostitution, and drug traffic. In this context, AVP is of great value. AVP reminds people that we are important; that we can transform this whole state of things. AVP gives us tools to find solutions to conflicts and to avoid this spiral of violence which is capable of running away with us all."

Olive Hayman, *FADANIC, Association of Afro-Caribbean Women, Bluefiels, RAAS*: "This was the most wonderful experience I have ever participated in. It was like one big united family despite our many differences. In these workshops we learn that we can help in difficult situations of conflict if we know how to approach them. I personally feel that AVP will be of great benefit in my region and I will take every opportunity I have to share it. I thank God that He had given me the opportunity to meet people like this."

* * *



by Michele Zybas, Punta Gorda, Florida

"AVP" is an acronym I've heard spoken at least several times a month for over eighteen years. I knew from the beginning that it stood for "Alternatives to Violence Program," and that it was a program that my mother-in-

Finding My Way Out

by Anthony Diaz

reprinted from the AVP Aotearoa, New Zealand



his will probably be the most difficult letter I've ever written in the sense that there are no words to describe exactly what becoming an AVP person has done to my life. Let me start at why I took my first AVP seminar.

Because of all the physical, mental and sexual abuse I endured during my life and growing up in the ghetto, my whole outlook on life was distorted. Although some people and family still cared about me, I was just an empty shell not trusting anyone, anywhere. I even tried running away from my biggest problem. My alcohol and drug abuse was rampant and I had no control over my emotions or actions.

I've been arrested more times than I wish to remember either for assaults or DWIs. It all came to a boil in the fall of '92 when as a result of my uncontrolled anger I broke the jaw and shattered 12 teeth of the woman I was living with. It wasn't because I didn't love her, the reason was substance abuse, no self esteem, and unbridled anger. She knew there was a good person in me somewhere and decided to stick it out. So after I got clean and sober I was still full of resentments and anger so I signed up for my first AVP Basic workshop. My life has not been the same since - thank God. The concepts of AVP have opened an unbreakable shell helping me to search inward for my own happiness.

I went on to my Advanced and Training for Facilitators workshops and in 10 short months have been to the International Conference to meet other people who care enough to make a difference in this world. Before AVP I would not have cared how another person went through life. Now I will go any where in the world that AVP wants me to go. I've seen people in a workshop go from convicted killers to becoming caring, loving human beings again. I've so far facilitated 5 workshops: 3 community and 2 in prison. There are no words to describe the feeling I get when I leave a workshop knowing I've made a difference in another's life and knowing somewhere down the line I have saved a life.

Even though I've had a rough life up till now, it became clear in a workshop that this is what I'm to do for the rest of my life. It's made a difference in the way I view other people and life as a whole. Because of AVP my 19 month old son will have a much better start in life. If you have any doubt about the AVP program, please feel free to talk to my wife, the same woman I mentioned above.

You Listened To Me

by Joann Pagan Feliciano, Taconic C.F., New York

You listened to me
like I listened to you.
You made me understand,
and gave me wisdom, too.

You showed me another way
to go about my problems.
You came from the same streets,
and you helped me solve them.

I didn't know I could be different,
but you taught me another way
to stand firm in what I believe,
and always say what I need to say.

I thank you
from the bottom of my heart
for teaching me what you learned,
and giving me a brand new start.

GRIM STATISTICS

from "Throwing Away the Key," by Charles King

In addition to over a million people in U.S. prisons, another half million fill the nation's jails. Another 600,000 are on parole and three million more are on probation. Finally, another 100,000 are in juvenile facilities.

Aikido Within AVP

AVP continues to learn about and adapt techniques for its workshops. The art of Aikido is an ancient method from the Far East for coping with physical violence by a non-violent physical response. After several years of development, a special Second Level AVP workshop that incorporates Aikido techniques has been approved by the Board of AVP New York. For further information, contact Bill Leicht (212) 228 0980 or Jay Lieske (315) 449 0845.



by Eric Reitan
 abstracted from the "Pathways to Peace," Seattle WA



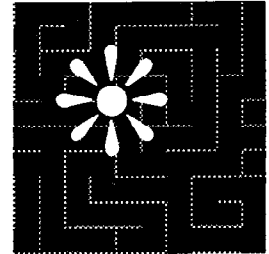
Another way to understand Transforming Power is in terms of an analogy, one which I think captures an important truth about what it means to be human. At the core of every human being is a jewel, a blazing spark of the divine. This is the true core of every person, the foundation, the center. And when that brilliant core shines in its full glory it reaches out beyond the person to shed its light on everything around it, to connect with everything and everyone. When two people come together, the natural and true reaction is a linking of those jewels - two sparks coming together and forming between them a bridge of light. Community and connectedness is the natural state among human beings, not some unnatural and unattainable ideal.

Unfortunately, in every human being, that jewel of light is covered in many layers of crud. Our fears and insecurities cover the jewel and dim its brilliance. Our pain, and our defensive walls against pain, stifle the flow. Our prejudices and preoccupations are like swaths of filth upon the jewel. Our pride and self-absorption will not let the light shine forth. We are fond of our crud. Our narrow egos define themselves in terms of that crud, and therefore cling to the crud possessively.

But it is important to remember that however many layers of crud cover the jewel, the jewel itself is never dimmed. Incased in shells of darkness, it still shines as brightly as ever, and every now and then it blazes through a crack to warm the world. The crud can hide the light, but can never extinguish it.

Transforming Power is that force in the universe which can burn away the crud. And it always begins within. I cannot burn away the crud that hides your jewel. What I can do is allow Transforming Power to do its work within me, to burn away the layers of fear and prejudice and pain which hide my shining core, and then let my light shine forth as an invitation for you to do the same. That invitation which comes with an exposed soul, with the warm brilliance of uncovered goodness, is difficult to resist. When I free my soul of

the layers of crud which cover it (which I must continually do, day after day - for the business of living in this world has a tendency to lay down new layers by the hour), and I let the light shine forth, that light stretches out to those around me and reaches for its mirror in their soul: reaches - and with that reaching the jewel in the soul of the other stirs, no matter how well it is hidden, and reaches back.



This analogy captures, I believe, a fundamental truth about human nature. Connectedness is our true state, and the reality of alienation is, though real, a kind of lie. It is a rejection of the fundamental truth of what it means to be human. Transforming Power is that force in the universe which exposes the lie, which inspires us to grasp for the truth, and in so doing grasp for reconciliation and hence completeness.

Healing

by Therman and Peggy Kaldahl, North Dakota



At a recent workshop, we all shared another experience of Transforming Power. One of the inmate participants was eight when the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam. The son of a U.S. serviceman and a Vietnamese woman, he was completely alone - mother killed, father gone, no other family. He became a street child. Somehow, he got to the U.S., where he was also a street person. He learned English on his own; very articulate; very bright. We learned he is awaiting deportation from prison to Vietnam. Friday we found him very angry, non cooperative and often a distraction to the others. None of us expected him to stay the entire weekend, and in our wearier moments probably harbored some desires that he would not show up for another session. However, he did persevere and stay. On the third day, Sunday, in a torrent of tears he told us his story and especially how he had always resented never having a family. He said he now thought he knew what it felt like to be part of a family and would hold us in his memory in the same place other Vietnamese hold family in theirs. Each of us wept. One of the younger inmates suggested, "I think it is time for a hug!" It was so spontaneous, so natural, and so powerful. One of the crustier outside participants said to me, "I think I just saw a miracle."



AVP Spreads Around The World

by Stephen L. Angell



It seemed like an impossible dream, but the improbable happened, and in March I left New York for the West Coast on my way to circumnavigating the globe to share AVP with those on the other sides of the planet. In Los Angeles I was joined by Ben Norris, a long time peace activist who had had the AVP training, and we travelled on to **Hawaii**. Ben's son, who lives there, was eager to hear about AVP and is now eager to get it introduced on the Islands. In **Sydney, Australia**, we were joined by Elaine Dyer who comes from New Zealand and has been shepherding AVP there since 1992.

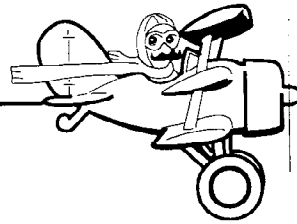
In Sydney, we facilitated an advanced workshop for facilitators. AVP has been active and growing in Australia, also since 1992. In **Western Australia** we did the first ever workshop in one of their prisons where they mixed the participants between those in the general population and those in protective custody (PC). Men are placed in PC at their own request or by prison authorities if it is anticipated that they would not be safe in the general population. The group got along just fine and friendships were formed across this barrier.

In **South Africa** the situation was quite different. Here is a nation where for many years blacks have been oppressed by whites. Yes, with the miracle of the free elections Apartheid was eliminated, but the emphasis for so many years had been focused on the elimination of institutional violence that little or no attention had been directed at interpersonal violence. South African

society right now is very violent, particularly between the haves and the have-nots.

The first workshop we held in Johannesburg was quite diverse but not as diverse as we would have liked. There were 13 blacks and three whites in the group. There were poor blacks, unemployed blacks, middle class blacks, Christians, Muslims, professional people and non-professionals. They all, however, had a common desire. They wanted to find ways to move from where they were to a more peaceful and less violent society. They had cooperated in getting rid of Apartheid, but they did not know what to do now. There was guilt, there was dismay at what the release of tight authoritarian rule had wrought, low levels of trust, and lingering doubts about self, coming from many years of oppression.

The response to the AVP workshop was dramatic and ecstatic. They were able to see a new vision of the tasks to be done to bring about a more equitable and peaceful society and a way to do it. It wasn't so much that the workshop taught them techniques, but that it helped them to see inside themselves, and see that the power was there to make peaceful change, and that this power was in everyone if they could reach out and share the gift of AVP with others. The power of the Spirit as expressed in Transforming Power was everywhere and merely needed to be tapped. They saw that this was a goal within reach because AVP is a self generating program. Training of facilitators could take place as they go along. They 'demanded' that we return and give
(continued on page 8)



by Gary R. Emry, Groveland Correctional Facility, NY

AVP is an experience that allows the boundaries of the mind and heart to employ a particular concept of inner peace and a better way of life. In my opinion, we need to open more avenues of communication and education concerning AVP. I would like to see more outside interest in people who would be willing to come into a community workshop or into a correctional facility setting and just experience one workshop.

People in places like this prison need and want AVP. We need the support from others who are willing to share some time and to explore and deal with

nonviolent ways to resolve conflicts. AVP is one of the ways to help others from returning to prison. It is also one of the ways to help others change before it is too late, and they end up in prison.

I would like to encourage those who have a genuine, sincere desire to learn more about AVP to get in touch with their local AVP office, or with someone who has participated in an AVP workshop, and become a part of AVP. Please don't just sit there and talk about it. Do it!



Love is considered primarily to be the willingness to foster the healthy growth of community. Thus, love is oriented not just to one's self or just to others, but to self and others.

William F. Kraft in J. Correctional Education



Join us with your support and help this work where it is so desperately needed. Your contributions are what enable the hundreds of AVP volunteers across the USA, who give so much so generously.

I would like to encourage and support the people and programs of AVP-USA, so please accept my deductible contribution:

_____ Just to help transform violence in my community and around the world, General Fund

_____ Help to provide training materials to AVP Facilitators

_____ Help to sponsor the placement of "NONVIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY" and other AVP materials into institutional and community libraries.

_____ Help to sponsor the growth of AVP by providing for facilitator travel into new and developing areas and to Board meetings and Conferences..

_____ \$10.00 to help cover the costs of an annual subscription to the AVP-USA Newsletter

My name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

A friend who would be interested in AVP and should be sent a copy of the AVP/USA Newsletter is:

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

**AVP Spreads
Around The World**

(continued from page 6)

them the remaining workshops (Advanced and Training for Facilitators) so that they could get started. One of our team had the opportunity to demonstrate AVP at a nationwide conference and by popular acclaim had to repeat her presentation for those who had missed it the first time around. We were able to make adjustments in our schedule so that Elaine could return and give the other two workshops. South Africa is on its way with AVP!

In Kenya and Uganda we faced yet a different set of circumstances. Here were fairly homogeneous groups of people. Yet even within these homogeneous groups there are strong divisive forces emanating principally from tribal ties and traditions the colonial rulers encouraged, maybe even promoted (divide and conquer). The colonial rulers have gone but the indigenous people do not easily break with some long established customs that are not supportive of consensus decision making.

The newness, the freedom, the supportive community, the light enjoyment and the spiritual parts of the AVP program seemed to be just what these folks were waiting to find. They saw its broader applications to countering the kinds of dreadful disturbances that were present in Kenya just a few years ago and have recently been exploding in even more dreadful dimensions in Rwanda and Burundi.

It was arranged for two of the participants in the Kenya workshop to come to Uganda and take the Facilitator's workshop there. This was somewhat of a breakthrough since there is not that much mixing between Kenyans and Ugandans. In fact, strands of suspicion and distrust were made evident. The two Kenyans who came to Uganda, therefore, came with some uncertainty as to how they would be received, but all these uncertainties were quickly forgotten and the Kenyans felt very welcome and at ease.

It was also possible while on the African Continent for the three of us to be part of the seven member Quaker team attending the *United Nations Congress on Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders* held in Cairo, Egypt. There we were able on several occasions to present aspects of the AVP program and thereby give it worldwide recognition.

In the U.K. we were warmly welcomed with two prison workshop groups awaiting us as we stepped off the plane. A major event during our stay in England was the *National AVP Annual Gathering held in Oxford*. We heard with much interest about the way AVP has taken hold in that country and a period of exponential growth that they are entering into. AVP-UK is doing interesting and creative things with AVP as are many of the other nations where it has taken hold.

The next International AVP Gathering in 1996 promises to be an inspiring event with all the marvelous experiences that will be shared from around the planet and the wonderful learning opportunities we will all have in our sharing with one another.



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