

# Peaceful relationships...

Conflict is part of daily life.....

but violence doesn't have to be.



The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a multicultural organization of volunteers offering experiential workshops that empower individuals to lead nonviolent lives through affirmation, respect for all, community building, cooperation, and trust.

Our fundamental belief is that there is a power for peace and good in everyone, and that this power has the ability to transform violence.

AVP builds on a spiritual base of respect and caring for self and others, working both in prisons and with groups in the community.

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**Creating a  
Better World  
For Ourselves and  
Our Children!**

## **What others say about AVP Workshops**

“If life were a pool I’ve been swimming in the shallow end. Time has come to jump in the deep end.” *Inmate after Basic AVP Workshop*

Dennis Bilden, Superintendent of the Ulster Correctional Facility in Napanoch, New York, writes, “While I was Deputy Superintendent for Program Services at Green Haven..., I observed the **positive effects that the AVP program had on inmates and on the overall climate of the facility**. Inmates involved in the program were able not only to lead more conflict-free lives themselves, but were able to lead others in this direction. Morale of graduates was often high, which had a ‘ripple effect’ in the institution.”

### ***Inmates’ comments about the effect of the AVP workshop in their lives:***

*“That like it or not, I am part of a bigger community. It’s not all about me.”*

*“I’ve learned not to be so quick to judge.”*

Stan Taylor, Commissioner of Corrections, State of Delaware, writes, “Over the 12 years AVP has been active in Delaware prisons, almost 4,000 inmate participants have been involved. When I was warden of one of our prisons, I saw AVP facilitate a **dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates in what had been a difficult maximum-security unit**. As the program continued to run and graduate more and more inmates, the overall climate improved to a point where inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively affect their living environment. As Commissioner of Corrections for Delaware, I have seen similar results in each of the prisons that have implemented AVP.”

### ***Inmates’ comments on what they have learned about themselves in an AVP Workshop:***

*“I’ve always known I’ve had the ability to change. Being here has helped me to see the different ways to handle the changes I may make in my life.”*

*“I need more people skills.”*

*“I see that there are so many ways out of my problems. That non-violence does not mean being weak or passive. It’s a power that can be transferred and be used to defuse any violent situation.”*

Commissioner Taylor continues, “One of the reasons the program has been so successful is that **inmates are trained to co-facilitate the workshops along with outside community trainers**. This allows for more workshops to be offered and greater credibility among the inmate population. Further the workshops are more effective, because the inmate trainers understand the prison culture much better than the outside trainers.”

### ***Prisoner observations of what they learned in general during the AVP Workshop:***

*“That we are all the same beneath all that life has given us to experience. That no matter what persona or mask we wear, we can be reached, loved, and healed. Only a group of this nature can provide us with the safe environment to remove this mask or persona.”*

Christine Walrath of Johns Hopkins University completed an *Evaluation of an Inmate-Run Alternatives to Violence Project: The Impact of Inmate-to-Inmate Intervention*, surveying AVP in a Maryland medium-security corrections facility. She reports that inmate-AVP- participants, compared to non-participants, had **significantly lower levels of expressed/experienced anger, lower rates of confrontations, and were more optimistic six months after the workshop.**

***Inmates' Comments:***

*"I can touch someone's life just by listening to someone. That nonviolence is the only real solution to violence."*

*"Learning that my perceptions of people or events may not truly be right, so, I must take a moment to learn more before I act."*

**Delaware Research on Recidivism/Return to prison**

**Recidivism after one year:**

**Life Skills class – 17.8%**

**AVP – 9.9%**

**Control group – 25%**

**AVP graduates re-offending after 3 years, 32.9% (cumulative). Usual rate is 60-80%.**

**With no AVP, returning to prison for any reason:**

**3 years 48.1% (cumulative)**

**With AVP: within 3 years with only Basic Workshop: 37%**

**with Basic plus Advanced, Trainer, etc: 27%**

Stan Sloane completed *A Study of the Effectiveness of Alternatives to Violence Workshops in a Prison System*, in the Delaware Correction Center, August 2002, where inmate facilitators functioned on the facilitation teams. His research shows there is a "decrease in infractions by AVP participants over non-participants" and that **"AVP is a useful step in helping inmates who lack normal social skills development develop a foundation upon which they could more effectively operate outside in the world...** The data shows that AVP is [most] effective in younger inmates and those with a high school education (or greater), irrespective of race

***Comments from the incarcerated on the most valuable aspects of an AVP workshop:***

*"That I need not any longer discard a lost soul simply because they act or talk evil or violent... "Because I know that underneath the veil there is truly a scared hand reaching out to me...violent or not."*

*"Honesty comes a lot easier than one might think."*

Dr. Harvey E. Shrum, Re-Entry Coordinator, Folsom State Prison in California, writes, **"Peer instructors and workshop facilitators give a feeling to the general prison population that the program has been embraced by their peers and gives some sense of credibility.** In Humaita Prison in Brazil, for example, all academic, vocational and character-building programs are peer facilitated, the rate of recidivism is approximately four percent....Those who are peer facilitators are also very unlikely to recidivate. This has proven true in my research of those who peer-facilitated at this institution and then paroled."

**That we are all the same beneath all that life has given us to experience. That no matter what persona or mask we wear, we can be reached, loved, and healed. Only a group of this nature can provide us with the safe environment to remove this mask. Inmate AVP graduate**

## AVP- HOW IT BEGAN

The Alternatives to Violence Project began in 1975. An inmate group at Green Haven Prison in New York was working with youth gangs and teenagers at risk, but they were having difficulty communicating their message about the consequences of violence. They sought help from the Quakers, who have a tradition of working on restorative justice, to create and conduct a workshop with them.

### AVP- What it is today

The initial program, bringing together community volunteers with inmate volunteers on facilitation teams, was so successful that requests were received for more, and AVP was born and quickly grew. AVP currently offers thousands of workshops each year in 44 states and 24 other countries.

It soon became evident that the program designed for prison inmates could be useful for everyone. Community people now seek the AVP training, and workshops for the general public are offered in schools, churches, and a variety of community groups.

It is a totally experiential program, helping people change their lives.

It is a community program, offering a new approach for community groups, social service agencies, youth organizations, and all who would like to participate.

It is a prison program, helping inmates learn new skills and attitudes that lead to fulfilling and crime-free lives.

It is a program for everybody. Though founded by Quakers, based upon their belief in an inborn power for peace in everyone, this secular workshop draws its participants and its trainers from all religions, races, and walks of life.

It is an intensive learning experience, offering three-day workshops on three levels: a Basic Workshop, an Advanced or Second Level Workshop, and a Training for Facilitators.

How you can be involved

- **Workshops** are open to whoever wishes to attend - the only requirement is that the participant attends voluntarily. Fees are modest and scholarships are available.

Each of the three levels of AVP workshops runs 18-21 hours and is facilitated by a team of volunteers. Common workshop configurations are a three-day block or a series of two-day chunks. Mini-workshops for demonstration purposes are also available.

- **Sponsor a workshop in your community**
- Introduce AVP to your local organization with a mini-workshop.
- **Support an AVP prison program**
- Offer overnight hospitality for facilitators leading a workshop in your community.
- Provide food for facilitators, community or inmate participants at workshops.
- Make available a site for holding workshops.
- **Contribute financially** toward scholarships or to the support of AVP workshop materials, travel expenses, or promotion.

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