

**2009**

# Alternatives To Violence Project

**AVP**



**AVP USA, Inc.**

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# The Alternatives to Violence Project USA

## (AVP/USA)

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a multi-cultural organization that is dedicated to reducing violence in our society

*Founded in and developed from the real life experiences of prisoners and others and building on a spiritual base, AVP encourages every person's innate power to transform themselves and the world.*

*AVP/USA is an association of community and prison-based groups offering experiential workshops in personal growth and creative conflict management. The national organization provides support for the work of these local groups*

### AVP History

The AVP program began in 1975 when a group of inmates at Green Haven Prison (New York) was working with youth coming into conflict with the law. They collaborated with the Quaker Project on Community Conflict to devise a prison workshop. The success of this workshop quickly generated requests for more, and AVP was born. The program spread rapidly to many other prisons. In addition to prisons, workshops are now offered extensively in communities and schools. Workshops have been held for businesses, church groups, community associations, street gangs, residents of halfway houses and women's shelters, returning veterans, and many others.

### AVP Program

The AVP program offers experiential workshops that empower people to lead nonviolent lives through affirmation, respect for all, community and trust building, and cooperation. Local AVP groups exist for the sole purpose of carrying out these workshops.

**The AVP workshop model** is grounded in the understanding that each of us can learn from others and that experience is an effective teacher. While there are a few short presentations in the program, the program is primarily experiential. Intellectual knowledge is generally not very helpful in the midst of conflict, but repeating nonviolent behavior that has been previously practiced is helpful. The workshops consist of a series of structured exercises, discussions, and games. Role-plays are a key learning tool. They help participants discover new ways of dealing with conflict and give them an opportunity to practice new behavior.

**An AVP belief** is that there is a power for good within everyone and that with this power we all have the ability to transform violent situations. AVP workshops create mechanisms for us to connect with the power within us that is transformative and healing while developing our skills to engage in conflict nonviolently. We believe that this spiritual basis, which we call Transforming Power, is what sets us apart from other conflict-management workshops.

**AVP workshops** are generally held over a weekend beginning Friday evening and extending through Sunday evening. Some local organizations vary this format (e.g. daily workshops over three weekends). National standards recommend that each workshop last for a minimum of twenty-two hours but there is flexibility within this depending on the needs of the group.

There are three levels of workshops in the AVP program: The BASIC workshop introduces key concepts and foundational experiences; the ADVANCED workshop deepens this work by focusing on a theme that participants choose--often using consensus decision-making. Typically the topic will represent an

underlying cause of violence, for example anger, grief or fear. In our TRAINING FOR FACILITATORS workshop, participants continue to explore the beliefs and skills of nonviolence and learn to present exercises, draw lessons from participants, and to experience AVP-style leadership, feedback, teamwork, and group facilitation.

### **Structure of AVP/USA**

The AVP organization exists solely for the purpose of offering the workshop experience to communities, inside and outside of prison. Workshops are arranged, administered and conducted by local AVP groups, under the guidance of AVP/USA. While our prison workshop coordinators work closely with Departments of Correction and other prison institutions, the AVP program is independent and not under the control of the Department of Correction in any state. Like our prison workshop facilitators, incarcerated participants are also volunteers. That is, they are never mandated to attend and they receive no benefit (e.g. good time) other than the inherent benefits of workshop participation.

AVP locals are loosely organized into geographic regions. Locals and regions are supported by a small national structure of regional representatives, national committees, and national officers. Locals report workshop activity and any concerns to regional representatives; regional representatives and national committees work to improve the quality of the workshops and program across the US.

Such concerns and national initiatives in support of program maintenance and improvement are addressed by the community at an annual national gathering. It is at these gatherings that committees meet and officers are duly elected. Decisions are made by consensus methods. The annual national gathering of facilitators also allows for additional facilitator enrichment and support.

AVP USA supports local efforts with manuals, education, start-up grants, marketing and annual conferences. Like our prison facilitators, our officers and representatives and the vast majority of program coordinators are all volunteers. The volunteer nature of our work empowers community members. This assures that AVP remains an extremely cost-effective program.

### **AVP EFFECTIVENESS**

The success of AVP USA has been demonstrated in prisons across the United States and in other communities (see Accumulated Research on our website: [www.avpusa.org](http://www.avpusa.org)).

The dynamic success of AVP is also clearly seen in the work and growth of AVP internationally. AVP volunteers continue to support, sustain, and evolve this model in places as diverse as Canada, England and Ireland, Eastern and Western Europe, New Zealand and Australia, Central America, Peru and Cuba, Israel and Jordan, Russia, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and other countries on the African continent, India, and Nepal, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. This remarkable program is currently provided in 50 countries and is active on every continent except Antarctica.

## *In Their Own Words...*

**Through the program I learned communication with my family and friends that I never thought existed....I learned to trust again.**

**AVP Youth Graduate**

*"I saw AVP facilitate a dramatic reduction in the number of assaults between inmates...and the overall climate improved to a point where the inmates were actually seeking out ways to positively effect their living environments."* **Stan Taylor, Commissioner, Department of Correction, Delaware**

*AVP has reinforced my recently learned values, such as respect, discipline, and concern for others. I am finding these values are very useful out in the free world. I am now free and involved with AVP. I am looking forward to participating in workshops in the community, helping others to learn new ways of dealing with problems and resolving conflicts with nonviolence. Nonviolence is important to me because God created us to treat each other to be a family, with respect, peace, justice, equality and love. May Peace be with you all.* **Former Inmate, Faribault Prison, Minnesota**

*When I viewed AVP through the (prison) windows, I thought it was a joke. I didn't understand it and I didn't care to either.*

*After I went through the AVP program the first two days, I respected it to a point. The people around me in the workshop made me feel it was something a person could really believe in. You could let your guard down, express yourself and not be criticized or threatened in any way. This was the first time I had experienced this. Every time I would talk to someone there was some kind of threat coming back, except with AVP. This was one program that made me look at myself and at another person without disrespecting them.*

*That is how it has affected me."*

**Delaware inmate**

*"I learned to use the tools that AVP taught me in my everyday life. I am a new man and I love it. Transforming Power really works. I have begun life anew."*

**AVP Community Workshop Participant**

## Workshop Activity this Reporting Period

The following level of activity was reported at the May 2009 National Gathering of AVP USA. In 2008 AVP volunteers conducted more than 941 workshops across the United States serving a minimum of 12,500 people. This represents a 12% increase in the number of workshops conducted over the 2007 figures and a 56% increase in the number of participants.

\* Here is the breakdown:

	Prison	Prison	Community	Community
Totals for 2008	No. of Workshops across the US	No. of people participating	No. of Workshops across the US	No. of people participating
Basic Workshop	484	6778	81	996
Advanced	230	3211	34	486
Facilitator Training	90	990	22	169

These workshops were led by 947 inside facilitators (prisoners) and 622 outside facilitators for a total of 1569, an increase of 49% on last year. Workshops were held in 107 state and federal prisons and jails and 43 community locations such as churches, community centers, schools and other locations. Thirty-five of the 50 states (70%) report active, on-going AVP programs – an increase from thirty-two states last year.

The program has enjoyed growth 25 to 30 percent in overall percentages each year since 1975 and has continued to grow this reporting period. There are currently almost 2000 volunteer AVP facilitators in the USA.

**AVP/USA Income and Expense**  
**April 1, 2008-March 31, 2009**

**INCOME**

Donations	\$ 21,969
Amazon.com donation	6
Administrative Fees	300
Sales of Manuals	21,848
Conference Registration	19,325
Transformer Subscription fees	2,804
Dividend/Interest Inc/(loss)	<u>(9,946)</u>
<b>TOTAL INCOME:</b>	<b>\$ 56,775</b>

**EXPENSE**

Seed grants to Locals	\$ 2,100
Conference	27,576
Bank/Credit card charges	2,549
Committee Expense	2,428
Cost of Manuals, etc.	8,824
Office/Misc. expense	962
Transformer Expense	7,230
AVP Int'l Assist/Donations	<u>17,853</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSE:</b>	<b>\$ 69,522</b>
<b>Net Income:</b>	<b>(\$ 12,747)</b>

## **The National Committees of AVP/USA**

The work of AVP/USA is done by National Committees which meet during the year by conference call and annually at the National Conference. A brief description of each committee is given below.

### **Committee of Local and Regional Groups (CLARG)**

This committee provides a direct link for communication and service among our regions and between the national officers and local groups volunteers. CLARG compiles data for a comprehensive annual reporting, disseminates funds for seed grants and established new grants to strengthen and improve existing programs.

### **Communications Committee**

Serves the larger AVP community in part by maintaining our website, and by publishing The Transformer, our newsletter for facilitators. This year the committee distributed four editions of The Transformer and now makes available an electronic version. The Committee coordinates distribution of training manuals, books, brochures, video recordings and other educational materials.

### **Conference Committee**

Supports various local groups that agree to host the AVP/USA Annual Gathering. The AVP National Conference was held in New York State in 2009 and the 2010 conference will be held in Minnesota.

### **Education Committee**

Is responsible for production and update revisions of all three levels of workshop training manuals and a wide variety of educational materials. A new Training for Facilitators manual is under development.

### **Re-entry Committee**

Gathers information and documents existing AVP/re-entry programs and is developing a structure to assist local AVP groups that are involved in re-entry programs.

### **Finance Committee**

Guides us in maintaining our financial health. This year the Committee issued a fundraising letter which raised \$22,000 in donations. The status of subordinate 501© 3 groups was reviewed, the annual budget was presented and approved, and work was initiated on a brochure for local groups to use.

### **International Committee**

Links the AVP/USA with international programs and provides support to developing programs outside the United States. The International Group has reorganized and launched a new website ([www.avpinternational.org](http://www.avpinternational.org)). The international gathering in 2010 will be in Nepal.

### **Youth Committee**

This year the committee transitioned from functioning as an AVP-HIP study group to focusing on the development of intentional and sustainable youth programming within AVP. A youth track was offered at the National Conference and a youth issue of the Transformer will be published in Fall 2009.

### **Committee of Committees**

Is comprised of AVP/USA national officers, and all committee clerks. It is charged with coordinating and supporting the work of all committees and assuring the overall health of the AVP/USA organization.

## AVP/USA Officers

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**OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION**

***For those who have come before.** We express sincere gratitude and appreciation to the many contributions of time, talent and money of those who founded, developed and supported the years and decades AVP's emergence and growth.*

***Thank you to all of our individual donors.** During the period under review, we especially acknowledge the valuable support in the form of individual and Friends (Quaker) Meeting donations and we are grateful to each and every one of you. As a volunteer organization, AVP depends upon your gifts of time, energy and financial support.*

***Thank you also...**to all of our facilitators (inside the walls and outside), for their extraordinary contributions, without these AVP does not exist. **And for our many other volunteers**, our board and committee members. Together you are the heart of AVP. You are the AVP family here in the United States and we are blessed to have your participation.*