

The Alternatives to Violence Project

Our organisation:

The Alternatives to Violence Project, Britain is a national network of volunteers running workshops for anyone who wants to find ways of resolving conflict without resorting to violence. We currently work in the community and in prisons throughout Britain.

Our philosophy:

AVP understands that conflict is a natural and normal part of life, and that it is possible to learn new ways of handling it. Our workshops draw on everyday experiences helping us to move away from violent or abusive behaviour by developing other ways of dealing with conflict.

Our track record:

AVP started work in British Prisons in 1992 and has worked in 28 prisons across the UK. During this time we have run workshops for diverse groups including prisoners, prison staff, young offenders, the police, domestic violence workers, homeless groups and many individuals in the community who wanted to address the violence in their lives. In 2006, we ran workshops for HMPs Kilmarnock, Shepton Mallet, Brixton and Glen Parva Youth Offenders Institute.

Our partners:

We have worked in partnership with Mind, St Mungo's, Sure Start and with a variety of local community groups.

Comments about our work from Prison Service Staff:

'I have seen a real change in many of the men who have undertaken the project. It seems to give them better understanding of self and an ability to help other people deal with issues and problems. The AVP programme fits well with accredited offending behaviour courses and offers opportunities for participants to practice and develop skills taught on accredited thinking skills programmes. The AVP programme has been a major contributor to the success of HMP Wymott and its' rebuilding in the past few years'

Jon Parkin, Governor, HMP Wymott

'After an AVP workshop prisoners are enthusiastic about skills and the experience of fellowship. They realise they have the capacity to manage situations much better than they thought in the past'

Tim Newell, Former Governor

'The Alternatives to Violence Programme provides a well structured and accessible experience for prisoners to learn how to communicate and express their feelings, without losing control and in a way that they can be heard and acknowledged by others. AVP can demonstrate success in many establishments and most importantly feedback from prisoners demonstrates personal success and satisfaction with the new skills gained'

Gill Brigden, Head of Violence Reduction, Safer Custory Group

AVP Britain

Address: The Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London, N1 6HT **Tel:** 0207 324 4757
Email: prisonworkshops@avpbritain.org.uk **Registered Charity No.**1085709

Key Benefits of AVP workshops

For Prisoners:

- Develops their ability to resolve conflict without resorting to violence
- Improves self esteem, confidence and self awareness
- Encourages participation in group work and a sense of personal responsibility in the prison community
- Helps prisoners to accept responsibility for their behaviour and consider the effect they have on others
- All inclusive workshop with very little reading or writing involved, no barriers to participation
- AVP provides opportunities for the development of leadership through workshop participation, training to become a facilitator and subsequent involvement in and outside the prison.

For Staff:

- The change in behaviour of prisoners improves relations with staff and amongst prisoners
- Enhanced wing management through leadership in resolving conflict situations
- Provides professional development opportunities.

For Prison establishments:

- The format of the workshops is flexible and requires minimal time
- Very few resources are needed from the prison
- Low cost as facilitators are volunteers
- Enhances Anti – Bullying programmes
- Contributes to restorative justice initiatives
- Changes the culture of a wing that has become negative or prone to violence
- Assists in reducing assaults
- Encourages take up of further learning opportunities and personal development through a reintroduction to the learning environment and increased confidence
- Provides opportunities for resettlement and support beyond prison.

Participant comments about their experiences of AVP workshops:

'I have been in prison 17 years, and have completed all the different programmes available and AVP is the only one that has created a change in me.'

'Before I went to AVP I felt that it was going to do nothing for me...it was just going to make me worse, but when I got there I felt that this might just do something for me and it DID. I don't get angry anymore...I sit down and talk about the problem and it is so much easier and that was because of AVP...'

'During my three day workshop I discovered that violence can be in us all – it need not be physical; that a vitriolic tongue can often have the same effect as a well placed punch and both can leave a mark on another.'

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The logistics of running an AVP workshop

Length of workshops:

In prisons, sessions can be tailored to the requirements and regulations of the particular prison. However, at least 16 hours are required for satisfactory delivery of the core 'curriculum'. Currently prisons run workshops over 3 days either consecutively or on a weekly basis to meet this requirement. However, a combination of sessions may be held over a number of days to suit a specific client group requirement.

Number of participants:

AVP recommends between 8 - 12 participants.

Space required:

Workshops require a room large enough to take a circle of chairs (size dependant on numbers in the group) and where privacy is maintained.

Other requirements:

White board or flip chart stand
Security clearance for facilitators and materials
Tea and coffee facilities
Prompt arrival of participants for each session

Costs:

The workshops are run by volunteers therefore the costs are kept to a minimum. The average cost for a three day workshop, involving an external facilitation team of 3 or 4 people is £1000. The cost depends on the circumstances of each prison and is subject to negotiation.

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Content of AVP Workshops Programme

The full AVP programme involves participants taking part in a Level one (core curriculum) and a Level two workshop with the option, if appropriate, to continue to a "Training for Facilitators" workshop. The learning method is experiential - participants work together on exercises, fun activities, discussions and role-plays.

Level one workshops: Introduction to AVP

These workshops aim to build a community within a group of people. This community develops trust and the confidence to share experiences, feelings and concerns and to explore different ways of handling situations to manage or resolve conflicts in a constructive way. By the end of the workshops participants should be starting to:

- Affirm themselves and look for good points in others
- Begin to empathise with others
- Demonstrate improved listening skills
- Find ways of communicating non-aggressively - perhaps able to give and receive non-blame statements
- Take responsibility for their feelings and actions
- Demonstrate a more reflective approach to situations
- Develop strategies for dealing with difficult situations
- Use a problem-solving approach to conflict.

The workshops build on the four themes of AVP:

1. Affirmation/Self-Esteem
2. Communication Skills
3. Building Community and Trust
4. Conflict Resolution/Management.

Key components of each Level One workshop would be:

- The philosophy and themes of AVP
- Listening skills
- Affirmation and Group Building
- Exploration of violence and its opposite
- Working together co-operatively
- Introducing the concept of Transforming Power
- 'You' messages and 'I' messages
- Seeing a conflict from another's point of view and exploring other outcomes
- And finally, preparing the ground so that undertaking a Level Two workshop will be productive.

Level two workshops: Advanced Problem Solving and Consensus

A Level Two AVP workshop follows a standard format of:

- Part 1: Building Community, Setting Goals and Group Decision
- Part 2: Focus on Subject Chosen by the Group
- Part 3: Unfinished Business and Closure.

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Part 1: Building community, setting goals and group decision

- AVP workshops depend greatly on building a community within the group; Level Two workshop participants may not have met before and need to gel. There also needs to be an opportunity to recapture thoughts and experiences from the Level One workshop.
- The Transforming Power concept is introduced again and opportunities for expanding understanding of this important AVP concept are provided.
- Individual goals will be explored and then these will be combined with other participants' goals. This leads to a group decision regarding the subject matter for the weekend. The process leading towards this decision is seen as an important learning experience for the group.

At times the focus will have been decided prior to the group meeting - if this is so the facilitators will encourage participants to explore their goals within this focus.

Part 2: Focus on subject chosen by the group

The group will choose a topic that is an issue that blocks the way of non-violence; it will be a topic that has meaning and creates challenges for the group. Examples include anger, fear, gender relationships, power. This topic will then be the basis for about three sessions of the workshop.

Part 3: Unfinished business and closure

By this point the facilitators will be clearer about the issues the whole group needs to work on. The remaining sessions of the workshop are then devoted to fulfilling these needs and ensuring a useful closure.

Level three : Training for Facilitators ("T for F") workshops:

The theme of "T for F" workshops is empowerment. Our goal is to empower individuals as leaders and facilitators. The main aims of these workshops are to:

- Learn to work as part of a team
- Learn to give and receive feedback
- Practice skills as a facilitator: preparing workshop agendas, presenting and processing
- Develop insight into transforming our own potential for violence
- Learn to personally communicate the concept of "Transforming Power"
- Develop skills in facilitating and debriefing role plays
- Learn to build a sense of community in a workshop
- Develop self-confidence as a facilitator.

After the initial workshop a new prisoner facilitator will serve as an apprentice on a series of workshops. They will receive a log-book to record their progress. It is hoped that ongoing support group meetings will be established in the prison to involve previous participants of workshops and apprentice facilitators. These meetings will provide a space for developing the skills learnt on workshops and give apprentices an opportunity to facilitate simple exercises to develop their facilitation skills.

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