

## AVP's Beginnings at Green Haven

By Eddie Ellis



Andre Ward and Eddie Ellis

In September, 1971, several incarcerated men at Attica Prison led an uprising to protest inhumane treatment and overcrowding. After four days of negotiation

state troopers were called in and the Attica Prison rebellion ended with nine hostages and twenty-eight incarcerated men dead. The insurrection changed the entire dynamic within prisons and initiated a national discussion about prison policy and practices.

New York State prisons had very few programs at that time. Friends (Quaker) worship groups were among the very few. There were no educational programs or counseling so the worship groups attracted those seeking opportunities for in-depth discussion.

The men involved in the rebellion at Attica were transferred to prisons around the state. Many arrived at Green Haven. New programs were initiated with the idea that if we can keep the men busy, they will not want to rebel again. Carl Berry, a progressive administrator, was appointed Deputy Superintendent for Programs at Green Haven. Among the innovations he instituted was a first of its kind survey of the population asking the men themselves to make recommendations and design programs that would meet their needs. College-level educational programs and the ability to call families were high on the list.

During this period, Green Haven was poorly supervised and dangerous. Loan-sharking, open drug markets and gambling were common. These resulted in violent attacks almost daily. To avoid attack from behind, men were forced to stand in the yard with their backs against

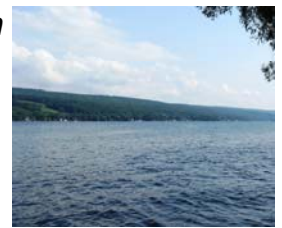
*Continued on page 2.*

## AVP/NY's Annual Gathering!

at Long Point Camp  
on beautiful Seneca Lake in western NYS

October 9-11, Columbus Day weekend. (Friday to Sunday)

See details and **registration materials** in the enclosed flyer. Be sure to fill-out the **survey** (also enclosed) to tell us your preferences regarding the gathering.



Pamela Hawkins

**Advanced Multigenerational Community Workshop, Alfred, NY, Dec, 2008. Facilitators: Jubilant Janna Buckwalter, Magnamously Miguel Quintana, Nonchalant Nick Dosch, Novel Nadine Hoover, Mysterious Mary Beth Gamba and Dependable Dave Urban.**

## We need your financial support!

Our operating and program expenses for our 2009 budget are \$35,120.

To date in 2009 we have received \$15,698.20.

We greatly appreciate all contributions that have been made, particularly in this challenging economic environment.

We remain far short of what we will need to stay afloat. Please do what you can. *Thank you!*

*Continued from page 1.*

the wall. Most there were concerned about their physical safety in such an environment. Many were just beginning long sentences of 25 years to life or more and wondered how they might make the prison safer.

Around 1968, a small group of men at Green Haven formed a Think Tank. Under the guidance of Rev. Ed Muller, senior chaplain, they studied to make sense of their incarceration and to prepare for their eventual return to the community. Their task was to develop programs and services of significance to themselves and, equally important, to the communities to which they would return. Larry White was one of the founders and its leader. I arrived at Green Haven in 1972.

Key among the discussions was the question of violence both in the prison and in the community. The Think Tank reached out to Larry Apsey and the Quaker Worship Group for assistance, as Quakers had a long history of non-violent resistance, pacifism and civil disobedience. Quakers recommended consulting Bernard Lafayette, an aid to Dr. Martin Luther King. Lafayette had led non-violent training workshops for those planning to participate in civil rights demonstrations and non-violent civil disobedience. He synthesized the training into three days and in the fall of 1975 brought it to Green Haven. I was skeptical about the non-violent movement and Dr. King's approach. Being born and raised in Harlem New York, I had been greatly influenced by the teaching of Malcolm X, but I decided to participate anyway. It was one of the most powerful experiences of my life.

***By insisting on being called "people" we reaffirm our right to be recognized as human beings, not animals, inmates, prisoners or offenders.***

The workshop was about alternatives to violence, rather than "non-violence" and featured methods for reaching consensus and compromise, for resolving conflicts rather than simply reacting and it provided the tools needed to deescalate potentially violent and dangerous confrontations. Most of the men who participated, including me, went on to take an advanced workshop and training for facilitators with Lafayette.

Larry Apsey, a magnet and a ball of energy, was the driving force that made it all happen. In discussions with the prison administration about how the workshop would run, the power of his ideas and his thinking were difficult to refute. Deputy Superintendent Berry agreed to allow him to operate this workshop all day, 9:00 am until 9:00 pm, three consecutive days, to permit men to be counted outside their cells and to serve meals in the workshop

area, all unheard of measures at the time. The Green Haven AVP Project established the model for all future workshops.

AVP set the tone for the rest of my time at Green Haven. I took a basic workshop and with other Think Tank members helped design the advanced and training for facilitators workshops. Larry Apsey took our ideas and suggestions and together with other Quakers, shaped the curriculum and developed a training manual.

To change our thinking, we must first change the language we use as language dictates our thoughts and actions. It is through language we communicate our ideas which govern our behavior. As such, we began to discuss ways to humanize ourselves, to redefine who we are from inmates, convicts and offenders to simply people who had made terrible mistakes and poor life choices which resulted in our imprisonment. In this context we reasoned that we would no longer accept being called "inmates" or other terms devoid of humanness, but rather refer to ourselves as people in prison or people on parole, with the emphasis on our humanity.

We believe we have the right to be called by a name we choose, rather than one someone else decides to use. We think that by insisting on being called "*people*" we reaffirm our right to be recognized as human beings, not animals, inmates, prisoners or offenders. We also firmly believe that if we cannot persuade you to refer to us, and think of us, as people, then all our other efforts at reform and change are seriously compromised. Accordingly, please talk with your friends and colleagues about this initiative. If you agree with our approach encourage others to join us. Use positive language in your writing, speeches, publications, web sites and literature. Let's agree to no longer use the terms "inmate," "convict," "offender," or other negative terms when describing people currently or formerly in prison.

The Think Tank, started at Green Haven Prison in the late 1960's and the AVP it spawned, evolved into a social service organization: the Community Justice Center in Harlem in the early 1990's, which later became the NuLeadership Policy Group, a legislative and public policy research group. This policy group developed into the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions at Medgar Evers College in the City University of New York, the first and only academic center in any major university whose entire staff is composed of formerly incarcerated professional men and women.

*Eddie Ellis a.k.a Easy Eddie is the host and executive producer of "On The Count" broadcast over radio station WBAI in New York ([www.wbai.org](http://www.wbai.org)). He is currently an adjunct instructor and executive director of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions at Medgar Evers College, CUNY.*



## One of the original Think Tank—continues the work of prison reform

By Larry White

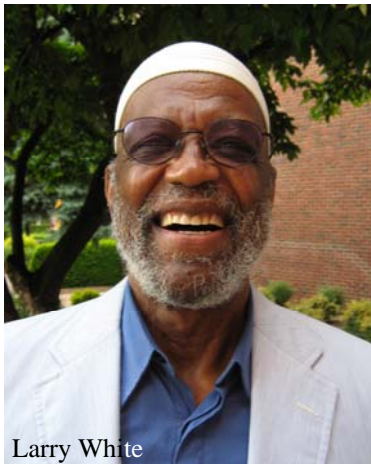
In the late 1960's, a group of men incarcerated at Green Haven prison established the Think Tank. The mission of the original Green Haven Think Tank was to establish connections with community organizations in an effort to jointly develop programs and services that

1. would address and reverse criminal behavior in people and
2. improve their chances of being released.

The Think Tank initiated a discussion with outside Quakers around addressing the violence at Green Haven. AVP grew out of that discussion and was formed and shaped by the Think Tank (see Eddie Ellis article pgs. 1 and 2 for more detail).

It is crucial that *both* the reversal of criminal behavior *and* improving the chances of release be goals of the prison programs offered by community organizations. All too often community organizations focus their entire efforts on achieving only the first goal and seem to be unaware of the need to address the second.

In judging the success of their program, community organizations must evaluate the role that the services they provide play in gaining release for their participants. AVP addresses a key component of criminal behavior—violence. AVP must pay attention to whether the state release apparatus—the Parole Board—is sufficiently evaluating the effectiveness of its program when considering the release prospects of AVP graduates.



Larry White

But in order to hold the Parole Board accountable, AVP must first establish statistically-based evidence of the effectiveness of the program.

*Larry White, a.k.a. Loyal Larry was one of the founders of the Think Tank in Green Haven prison. Larry continues to advocate for prison reform and is currently involved in the development of a community-sponsored re-integration program: the Reconnections Reintegration Project, a collaboration between the Riverside Church Prison Ministry and Harlem Men Stand Up organizations.*



## From AVP/NY's Board Council President:

Well, New York, I am proud of all the hard work that you have put in to making 2009 one of our more fruitful and inspired times in the past few years. We have printed our Newsletters, launched our

New York website, expanded Landing Strip to Brooklyn, hosted the AVP national conference and met with DOCS. It has been a time of adventure and spirited dialogue.

We have some more projects on the table in the upcoming months, such as expanding our AVP network in New York City, becoming part of a large national agenda, coordinating workshops with the American Friends Service Committee at the Healing and Transformative Justice Center, working with DOCS Re-entry camps, expanding our prison programs, and expanding the Landing Strip program. Many of you are involved in this work, but an open invitation is extended to all for the continuing success of AVP.

Like most non-for-profits, AVP has been impacted by the economy. Increased expenses and decreased donations have led us to tighten our belt and streamline our budget.

What is nice is that our community continues to request AVP workshops, both on the outside and within prisons. We have started attending local community fairs in New York City to build more interest in our community and we are committed to sending teams to the new re-entry HUBs in DOCS.

As we continue to expand we need your help in supporting AVP in any manner possible. It all makes a positive difference to someone. And maybe that someone will be the future of our AVP. See you soon by the lake....

— Ray Rios, a.k.a. Radical Ray

### AVP Tee-shirts are available!!

**Designed by women at Bedford Hills Prison:**

*Text reads: Alternatives to Violence Project, Inc. Line drawing includes a woman's face and hand with gold butterflies.*

*For a donation of \$15 or more to AVP/NY and a request, we can send you a tee-shirt.*



# AVP/NY's Annual Gathering!

## Reaching Outside the Circle: Growing AVP in NYS

at Long Point Camp  
on beautiful Seneca Lake in  
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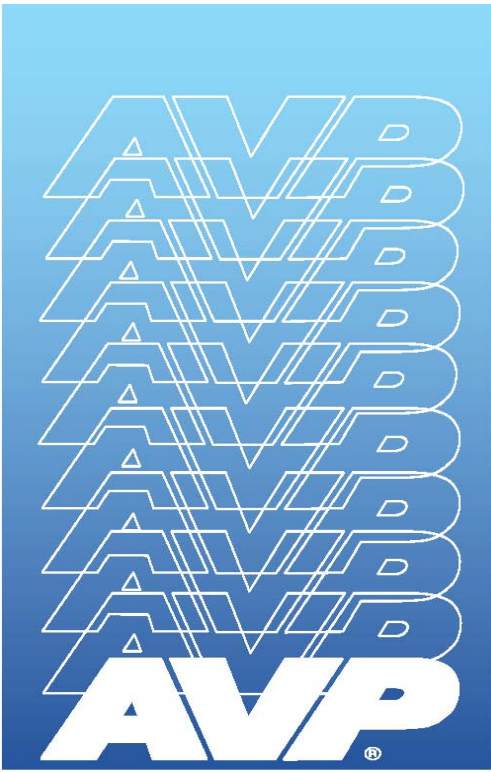
October 9-11, Columbus Day  
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**Registration materials and  
survey enclosed.**



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ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

AVP/NY  
P.O. Box 54  
Poplar Ridge, NY 13139

Note: Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

ALBION Prison (Women's)	1	Workshop count:	1	WOODBOURNE Prison	6	English lang. wrkp count:	1	NIAGARA FRONTIER AC	3	Workshop count:	3
	10	Participant count:	2		77	Spanish lang. wrkp count:	36		8	Apprentices trained:	8
ARTHUR KILL Prison	3	Workshop count:	1	GROVELAND Prison	5	Participant count:	1	WESTCHESTER Area Council	2	Workshop count:	2
	34	Participant count:	5		52	Mini Participant count:	5		20	Participant count:	20
	11	Apprentices trained:	11	ALBANY Area Council	2	Workshop count:	1				
AUBURN Prison	8	Workshop count:	3	MID-ORANGE Prison	3	Participant count:	11				
	99	Participant count:	1		27	Mini Workshop count:	1	YTD 2009 PRISON			
	8	Apprentices trained:	1	CENTRAL NY Area Council	4	Participant count:	1	<b>WORKSHOP TOTALS:</b>			
	8	Apprentices trained:	18		27	Participant count:	18		14	Prisons served:	14
BEDFORD HILLS Prison (W's)	6	Workshop count:	1	ELMIRA Area Council	2	Multi-gen workshop count:	1		74	Prison workshops:	74
	58	Participant count:	7		41	Participant count:	7		68	Apprentices trained:	68
	7	Apprentices trained:	2	GENESEE VALLEY AC	14	Workshop count:	2		2	Mini Workshops:	2
	7	Apprentices trained:	19		14	Participant count:	19	YTD 2009 COMMUNITY	18	Mini Participant count:	18
ELMIRA Prison	2	Workshop count:	2	MID-HUDSON Area Council	4	Multi-gen. workshop count:	2	<b>WORKSHOP TOTALS:</b>			
	28	Participant count:	1		213	Participant count:	2		11	Community workshops:	11
	12	Apprentices trained:	58		10	Adult workshop count:	1		3	Multi-generational:	3
GREEN HAVEN Prison	16	Workshop count:	2	SULLIVAN Prison	2	Participant count:	2		8	Adult workshops:	8
	226	Participant count:	1		26	Workshop count:	1		133	Participant count:	133
	1	Mini Workshop count:	9	NEW YORK CITY AC	2	Workshop count:	9		2	Mini Workshops:	2
	13	Mini Participant count:	1		2	Participant count:	1		26	Mini Participant count:	26
	3	Facilitator seminar days:	8		21	Mini Participant count:	8		8	Apprentices trained:	8

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT / NEW YORK  
Year-to-date 2009 Workshop Summary Report \*