

Eighteen years of AVP at Walton Central School.

By Florence McNeil

After a shooting in a classroom in 1992, facilitators in our area offered to talk with school administrators about AVP. We were asked to try some workshops in the high school. We invited everyone in the system and began with high school students, principals, janitors, teachers, bus drivers and counselors all volunteering. For a couple of years we did two basic workshops, an advanced workshop and a training for facilitators workshop. But the students told us to move into the middle school, just as the men in prison had said, "You have to do workshops with kids...you shouldn't have to come to prison to hear about this!". Pretty soon the middle school students were talking about their siblings in elementary school who would love AVP.

Eighteen years ago we began doing mini workshops in 5th, 6th and 7th grade classrooms in addition to the three two-day workshops with 8th—12th grade students. This year the schedule started in October with five minis in 6th grade classrooms followed by a basic workshop in November, an advanced in February, six minis in 7th grade classrooms in March, a training for facilitators workshop with fifteen students in May and six minis in 5th grade classrooms in June. Each two-day workshop has two adult and several student facilitators. Each middle and elementary school mini has 15-20 participants—students and teachers, aides etc., and a team of one adult and two students facilitating, with all classes of the same grade done on the same day—tons of supplies and great flexibility!!

A gut-wrenching concern: "cyber-bullying" which is all over the map and really causing havoc.

A favorite innovation: participants working together in teams to cook an Italian meal for lunch. We all love this.

My own experience is that school AVP is much more challenging than prison work because of the unpredictability of everything. There's a need to be VERY agile! But it means the world to me personally because the structured format gives me something I can do with what I believe in. **There's good stuff in each and every one of us!**

peace,
Free Flo

Facilitators, you are invited to:
AVP/NY's Forum Day at Otisville!

Saturday, May 1, 9:00am—2:30pm
lunch included.

A day of community building with inside facilitators. Read articles by two Otisville facilitators—one on page 5 and one on our website: www.avpny.org in our news column.

Register before April 1:

call: 800-909-8920 or e-mail: avpnyso@aol.com



Rainbow Lunch at Walton Central School:

We divide into groups of three. One person can't talk, one is blindfolded, the other can't use his/her hands.

Directions: Have a nice lunch! (Florence McNeil at right.)

Landing Strip needs your help!

Our support groups for men and women who have some AVP experience (or are interested in taking a workshop) and are recently released meet twice monthly in both Manhattan and in Brooklyn.

(Call AVP/NY (1-800-909-8920) for locations and times.)

We provide pizza, soda, a \$4 metro card and a helping hand for all who attend.

Last year our expenses totaled \$3,040.00.

Our funds earmarked for LS have been depleted.

Please consider making a donation to Landing Strip (checks payable to AVP/NY with "Landing Strip" in the memo line).

Thank you!

My AVP Experience—food for the soul at Walton Central School

By Patti W.

As with most other Walton Central School students, my AVP experience began in the fifth grade. The fifth through seventh grade workshops were, for me, somewhat like an appetizer. I may not have been very hungry, but the little bits that I munched on were so gratifying that I later gorged myself with a full course meal. The Basic, Advanced and Training for Facilitators sessions were my first three courses. Each workshop I have facilitated since has been my dessert. Dessert is my favorite course; I love the variety, the flavor, and the unlimited possibility. AVP workshops have all of that.

My recipe for an AVP workshop

Ingredients:

2-3 Adult Facilitators
2-3 Student Facilitators
Goals suited to the workshop
Approx. 15 Willing Students
1 Room
21 Chairs

1 Set of Ground Rules

Optional Ingredients

Include:

Construction Paper
Markers
Newsprint
Tape

1. Begin about two (2) weeks in advance by signing up participants and facilitators. Sometime during the week before the workshop make sure to have a Team Building Session with facilitators to decide on which activities you will do, who will facilitate what, and what your Goals will be. Gather all chosen ingredients and do all other final preparations for the workshop.
2. On the day of the workshops, facilitators arrive at the Room early to review their schedule and remind themselves of the Goals for the AVP workshop. They will also use this time to set up the Chairs and post the Ground Rules.

When the participants arrive, show them the schedule for the session and have them read the ground rules. The rest of the day will be filled with activities, some very jovial, and others very serious. The participants should put themselves wholly into the exercises although sometimes you may have to remind them of the ground rules: Be sure not to use put-downs or threats, they are harmful to reaching the Goals. Instead, instill confidence in the participants by encouraging them to take part in discussion. If things are still not working out, perhaps you should review your own behavior. Are you letting the students speak? “The Wisdom is in The Group.” Are you maintaining equality throughout the group? Are you boring them? **Remember, “It’s not about Me, It’s about We.”**

4. Finish the workshop with encouragement. The students can take what they have learned from the sessions and apply it to their lives! Show them how much they have grown, together! It is important to illustrate that the AVP spirit does not have to die after this workshop.

Yield: Approximately fifteen (15) students with heightened decision making skills. Students will have a firm ability to reason even when under great deals of pressure from peers, family or school staff. They will have a better understanding of their emotions and how to use them positively.

Yes, my recipe is intentionally vague. The ambiguity helps one understand that each workshop is unique. And it is the individuality of each session that makes the program so great. By allowing the participants to control which topics we discuss, we can get to the things that really matter to a particular group. For example, we may begin a discussion on put downs and why they are harmful, and end up with a conversations about the pressure put on the students to use drugs and how they can say no. Rather than forcing the participants to focus on a topic they may not feel comfortable talking about, we let them steer the conversation, and let them work out their problems with the wisdom in the group.

The Alternatives to Violence Project, is not a “Disband the NRA [National Rifle Association]” or “End WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment]” project. AVP is about empowering youth to find the answers to problems in themselves. They already have the knowledge; we just show them that they can access it. We stop saying, you’re wrong, and start saying, tell us more. **I guess that is the perfect summation to AVP. It’s: “Tell us more.”**

Patti W. was a sophomore at Walton Central Schools in 2003 when she wrote this article.



Trying to Be the Change I Wish to See in the World A student's thoughts on AVP

By Winsome Z.

You're walking down the hall—it's empty. You turn the corner and notice that at the end of the hallway two peers are having an argument. The closer you get the more heated it becomes and then when you're a few feet away from them, one peer pushes the other.

A normal reaction might be to walk around them, and forget about it. Lucky for them you are a member of AVP and this is what you were trained to do, so you step in and try to defuse the situation. You will use skills like mediation and humor. Hopefully, you will have thwarted the situation and let everyone get along with their day unharmed.

This is what AVP is all about. AVP is designed to teach you how to end conflicts and help everyone from being caught in a stressful situation. AVP has been around since the 1970's. It was first offered to inmates in Green Haven Prison. The program gave the inmates the tools to express their frustration and anger in a constructive manner. These prisoners urged the AVP facilitators to expand their programs to the youth outside, stating that they wished that they had learned more skills and alternatives when they were younger. They believed had they had the skill, they could have possibly led non-violent lives through affirmation, respect and conflict resolution.

At Delaware Academy we have been blessed with an AVP program for many years. Volunteers make the program work. AVP facilitators come from all walks of life—they are butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. Some are teachers, nurses and even students. Each year the school hosts 3 or 4 sessions for AVP. The sessions are held off campus and last 2-3 days depending

on the three levels: Basic, Advanced and Facilitator Training. The school has been incredibly supportive and has allowed students to participate in this program over the years. The program does not only benefit the school but the community as well by giving us tools to choose non-violence over violence. We encourage all students and community members to participate.

AVP could be for anyone from any walk of life. Sadly people think that you have to be violent to be part of AVP. AVP members are not violent people. They are just concerned community members who want to see change come about in a non-violent manner. I often wonder what it would be like if five people from our community stepped in and stopped a situation using things they learned from an AVP workshop. Would we hear less about violent acts in our neighborhoods?

I believe change starts with one person and that many people will learn by example. I decided 4 years ago to make the commitment to my community and joined AVP. I try to live by its principles on a daily basis. What change have you made for your community? Why not try AVP and see how it can work for you? You might be surprised at what you will learn. If it isn't for you that is okay, I hope at least that the next time you see someone having a tough time in the hallway, the office or even at home that you remember that there are people out there trying alternatives to violence. Please consider investing your time for the bettering of our community.

Winsome Z. is a student and an AVP facilitator at Delhi Central Schools. This article was originally published in the October, 2009 school newsletter.

The plush read carpet is not
Rolled out.

The lottery for the day is typed in
All of you trickle through the
slamming gates, some
saunter some stroll.

The knit and purl connecting hope
With love, with life.
The blanket of altruism
Keeping hopes and dreams for
tomorrow warm and safe for
another day.

The web of ideas that turn into
action
That become unique and tangible
Humanity that can not be measured
You see the hope in me.

Walls that go on forever
We are hidden, but not forgotten
Unfazed by the color green,
You see the light in me.

Time loses value when hands are in
motion
The clock gathers translucent flecks
Yet your dedication is concrete
I marvel at your devotion to change.
An abundance of knowledge and
wisdom,
Liberating connections that bridge
the gap between
Past and present.

Your back a cusp of orange
One arm splayed on imposture wood
A hand on a 10 cent bic, or fingers
intertwined and grasping
wisps of hair
Windows to valleys of information
focused on the paper, the
person, the problem.
The gift of ideas swells into the
monuments of change.

Your payment is a smile, a nod, a
tear.
The Eureka moment of recognition.
Hues of gratitude
Each color radiates on its own.
And I thank you.

—Adorable Amanda Dzierson,
AVP facilitator, Bedford Hills Prison

From AVP New York Board Council Co-Presidents:



In our group at Green Haven, the men often talk about “walking the walk”. You can’t just talk AVP talk in the workshop once a month or in the sup-

port group circle. You need to be practicing AVP in the blocks and in the halls and in the yard. AVP needs to be how you live your life.

And this is so right for all of us whether struggling with life and conflict and difficulty within the prison walls or out on the street. When we forget AVP process, when we forget Transforming Power in the dealings of our daily lives, then the amazing practice we have been blessed with in our lives, becomes a shell without a center.

I remember years ago, early in my time in AVP, there was a facilitator who was getting ready to fight over some slight from the food line. So I pulled out my TP card and said, “Use your TP skills!” and he looked at me and said, “No time for TP man, this is real!”

I think it’s so easy to lose sight of what it is about AVP that works. But I have seen time and again that when we stick to our ground rules, when we use AVP process and exercises, when we keep asking ourselves, “Which TP guide can I use here?” the process always works. Always.

AVP and TP are gifts in the lives of all of us. Let’s keep practicing, sharing with others and making our circle bigger and stronger, wherever that circle is.

—Carolyn Polikarpus, a.k.a. Courageous Carolyn



We just came off an AVP retreat here in New York City. It was the first of a few retreats, this year, across the state to gather, fellowship, and to

share (Brainstorm) the direction of our AVP program in our own hometowns over the course of the next few years. To say the least, there are many wonderful, thoughtful, passionate, and heated discussions, about speaking to “Our” vision of AVP.

AVP’s leadership is listening, and is committed to visiting with our AVP family across the state. So please stop by our website www.avpny.org for dates and information about our statewide retreat weekends. Your feedback and participation is more than welcome, and remember that our power is the circle.

We have some very difficult topics to discuss, and some can really challenge us to use AVP in our own circles. (Compensation has been one.) Nevertheless it is just one of MANY topics being discussed. So in all fairness of the process, please attend a circle near you, to be open to all of the topics that have been raised by our AVP family. We are seeking our truth within our AVP community, and the only way to do this is to participate. So come and sit, fellowship, eat, do something silly, and help plan our AVP future together.

Please enjoy our newsletter on youth in schools.

—Ray Rios, a.k.a. Radical Ray

Photos at right: AVP New York Retreat at The Castle, January 29-30



Young Men's Workshop at Otisville CF

by *Marvelous / Motivated Marlon Peterson*

"Jack in the BOX! Jack in the BOX! I do it like this. I do it like that. I balance WELL. I balance WELL."

I can still hear Brilliant Born, one of the weekend's facilitators, chanting that Light and Lively in the middle of a circle with about fifteen of his thirty-something-year-old peers. Otisville held a Thematic Advanced workshop during the weekend of October 16-18, 2009. Otisville's creative concept of thematic workshops has been a staple here for years because of the small and disparate population. Many of the men here have spent fifteen or more years in prison and have taken AVP many times over their incarceration. The inside and outside coordinators at Otisville have been using the concept of thematic workshops to maintain interest in AVP.

The Young Men's workshops began in December, 2008 as a Basic / Thematic workshop. Proudly, two of the men from that first basic workshop, Awesome A-rocks and Challenging Charzell have progressed to apprentices in this workshop. Also facilitating this workshop were Responsible Rob, Evolving El-Sun, Merciful Mary Ann and myself.

I was more impressed to see how the facilitating team negotiated scheduling conflicts with ease. The Friday afternoon session could have proved problematic because several of the facilitators have other obligations within the facility. Challenging Charzell and myself had to facilitate the Two Communities Bridging the Gap class with the Vassar College students; Evolving El-Sun was committed to running his class at the Transitional Services Center, and, Awesome A-rocks and Brilliant Born were scheduled to attend the Nation of Islam's Holy Day of Atonement. What could have resulted in a disaster was easily smoothed out with Brilliant Born leading by example during our team building session on Thursday night. The cohesiveness of the team trickled down to the workshop participants.

It is a challenge to get young men to let their hair down and this workshop was no different. We had an

average participant age of about thirty and decided that the theme of the weekend would be "From Maleness to Manhood," a borrowed concept from the author and educator Na'im Akbar. This theme was relevant to the demographics of the workshop because most of the men came to prison as teenagers, including Born, Charzell and myself. Moreover, many of us were conditioned to warped characterizations of manhood like senseless machismo. As such, the conversations initiated in the workshop led to substantive dialogue on the issue of Manhood.

In an exercise introduced by Merciful Mary Ann on Friday evening entitled, "Scar Wars," we were asked in small groups to speak about the physical and emotional scars that impacted our lives. Participating in AVP since 2003, I have never felt so comfortable expressing personal information. As a result, I was able to disclose an experience that I have only told two people in my life; an experience that definitely set a tone for the negative direction my life took during my mid-teens.

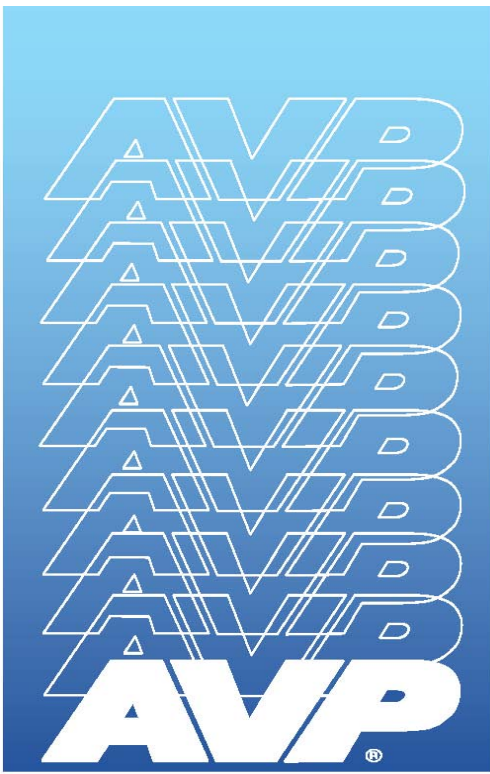
By Sunday afternoon, the disgruntled and sleepy faces from Friday morning morphed into eager and energized smiles. One of those disgruntled faces from Friday, Jazzy Jay, said, "I want to go to another one of these [workshops] before I go home in January."

It was another great AVP weekend! Thanks to the support team members: Honorable Hakeem and Youthful Yusuf; the inside coordinators Lovable Louis and Looking Lou, and our outside coordinator, Merciful Mary Ann. We implore other facilities and community groups to involve younger people in their workshops as participants and facilitators. The younger people need the experience, and AVP needs their vibrancy. With that experience, they will qualify to continue and expand the AVP legacy.

I will sign off with the chant that some of the participants still shout around the facility.

"Jack in the BOX. Jack in the BOX. I do it like this. I do it like that. I balance WELL. I balance WELL."





ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

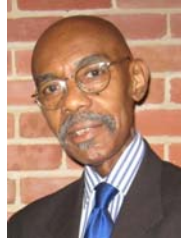
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2010 Annual AVP-USA Gathering

May 27 to 31 in Minnesota

Transforming Power: AVP & Diversity in the 21st Century



Keynote address by Eddie Ellis (featured in AVP/NY's Fall 2009 newsletter)

Advanced facilitators workshop on Expanding Diversity (all day Friday).

Early bird registration ends April 1 and scholarship applications due as soon as possible. www.avpusaconference.org

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Final 2009 Workshop Summary Report

ALBION Prison (Women's) Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 24	GREEN HAVEN Prison Workshop count: 25 Participant count: 356 Apprentices trained: 32 Facilitator seminar days: 5	WENDE Prison Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 21	NEW YORK CITY AC Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 9 Mini Workshop count: 1 Mini Participant count: 8
ARTHUR KILL Prison Workshop count: 4 Participant count: 46	GREENE Prison Workshop count: 5 Participant count: 61	WOODBOURNE Prison English lang. wrkp count: 4 Spanish lang. wrkp count: 4 Participant count: 81	NIAGARA FRONTIER AC Workshop count: 5 Participant count: 59 Apprentices trained: 8
ATTICA Prison Workshop count: 4 Participant count: 50	GROVELAND Prison Workshop count: 11 Participant count: 103 Apprentices trained: 5	ALBANY Area Council Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 19	WESTCHESTER Area Council Workshop count: 6 Participant count: 69
AUBURN Prison Workshop count: 12 Participant count: 150 Apprentices trained: 8 Facilitator seminar days: 3	MID-ORANGE Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 11	CATSKILL Area Council Workshop count: 4 Participant count: 57 Apprentices trained: 10 Mini Workshop count: 24 Mini Participant count: 449	2009 PRISON WORKSHOPS: Prisons served: 16 Prison workshops: 126 Participant count: 1,540 Apprentices trained: 106 Mini Workshops: 2 Mini Participant count: 18 Inside facilitators: 197
BEDFORD HILLS Prison (W's) Workshop count: 11 Participant count: 118 Apprentices trained: 7	OTISVILLE Prison English lang. wrkp count: 4 Spanish lang. wrkp count: 2 Participant count: 81 Apprentices trained: 14	CENTRAL NY Area Council Mini Workshop count: 2 Mini Participant count: 42	2009 COMMUNITY WKSHPS: Community workshops: 27 Participant count: 342 Mini Workshops: 27 Mini Participant count: 499 Apprentices trained: 63 Outside facilitators: 112
EASTERN Prison Workshop count: 5 Participant count: 48	SING SING Prison English lang. wrkp count: 15 Spanish lang. wrkp. count: 7 Participant count: 289 Apprentices trained: 17 Facilitator recognition day: 1	ELMIRA Area Council Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 7	
ELMIRA Prison Workshop count: 4 Participant count: 57 Apprentices trained: 12	SULLIVAN Prison English lang. wrkp count: 1 Spanish lang. wrkp count: 3 Participant count: 44	GENESEEE VALLEY AC Workshop count: 3 Participant count: 29	
		MID-HUDSON Area Council Workshop count: 5 Participant count: 93 Apprentices trained: 45	