

Fall, 2019

## New Outside (Civilian) Volunteers

*In this issue we hear from AVPers who are new to going inside prison to facilitate with AVP. Their fresh perspectives bring Light and Renewal to us who have been in the work for decades or more. Thank you.*



I have always been one to dive into new and intriguing challenges, even those that my friends and colleagues

view with skepticism or trepidation. When I ask myself why, it may be because I have watched people in my community slip through the cracks, perhaps on account of my natural inclination towards empathy, and surely also because there were times in my own life when help did not come, or as a child, I did not even understand that I had a right to intervention...

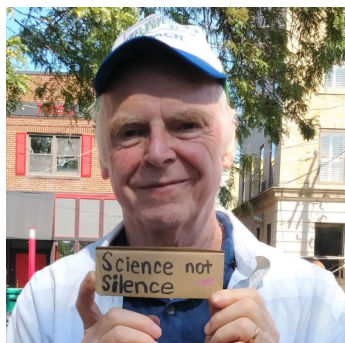
I was introduced to the idea of AVP by a good friend, who will vouch for the fact that after my first weekend of Basic with the men of Woodbourne Correctional Facility, I knew I would be in it for the long haul.

My experience was similar to many others; I watched a group of guarded men slowly open up and learn to laugh again; some of them learned to cry again; and hearts opened up to promise and hope. I don't leave myself out of these revelations, since I too had to dig deep into my own feelings and experiences, which led to a special bond within the group.

I have seen many men come, go, return, and sign up for facilitator training. Others were not ready, but when I see them in the halls, we smile and say hi, and I hold out hope that some TP [transforming power] has stuck to their shoe!

I look forward to every workshop, to meeting new participants, and to working with the in-house facilitators who are extraordinary men, and without whom this program could not thrive.

—Ruta Cole



I was pleased to see a notice for a basic community workshop in Syracuse soon after I

moved back to New York State, since I had one contact with AVP about fifteen years ago.

The instant, caring community that I experienced in the basic workshop was attractive. The diversity outstripped what I had experienced in other movement groups. I was very fortunate to meet Eager Ed Stabler there. Learning history, first-hand, from somebody who was present at the very beginning, gave me respect and admiration for the decades of inspired collaboration between people who are incarcerated and volunteers.

I was glad that an advanced workshop came along soon thereafter. There I was further introduced to the amazing cohort of facilitators AVP develops, all of whom bring unique strengths and perspectives.

Having gotten through the Department of Corrections volunteer application process, I was able to go in and to participate in the Auburn prison Tuesday night AVP meetings. Getting to know more facilitators and feeling the creativity, commitment and indomitability of the inside facilitators convinced me that I wanted to do my Training for Facilitators Workshop inside. And I did.

Facilitating prison workshops has been very rewarding. Seeing participants enjoying camaraderie and aha moments is great. Being on a facilitation team and sharing hesitations I might have and then having more experienced inside facilitators cover for and mentor me has been amazing. After a career as a university administrator charged with being (and looking) in charge, I discovered how much better work I do when I am more authentic.

While I have spent a lot of energy promoting social justice causes for many years and felt I understood mass incarceration, I was not prepared for the abject unbalance of power I have learned. For instance, at the first break of the day, a corrections officer called to me and gruffly told me to sign a form. After I did, a participant said to me, "*Joyful John, he shouldn't treat you like that. Want me to tell him off?*" I said, "*No, I want to be able to come back here and, No. because I don't want you to end up in the box [solitary confinement].*" *Continued p. 2*

### Our volunteers are amazing!!

AVP facilitators inside and out together volunteered more than **23,400 hours in 2018, valued at more than \$700,000 in NYS!**



Retired for a year, I felt ready to volunteer my time but wanted to choose an experience out of my comfort zone and something I felt had meaning to me.

I had met my mentor, Carolyn, several times over the years and I knew she was doing work with prisoners. Her enthusiasm for this work was infectious and I thought the program AVP could be meaningful for me as well. I decided try the first facilitator training to see if the program was right for me. I had never been to a prison and didn't know how I would react to the experience.

As a volunteer at a maximum-security prison, we were always accompanied to our classroom by a Corrections Officer. This provided an opportunity to get a glimpse into their thoughts about working at Green Haven. We talked about the weather, their jobs, their lives and sometimes we didn't speak. I sometimes wondered whether accompanying volunteers was their least favorite task. I am a real novice to our criminal justice system and Carolyn shepherded me through the process of being fingerprinted and through security checkpoints. She demonstrated patience and kindness to everyone she met. When we got to the classroom, it was clear Carolyn had the respect and admiration of the inside facilitators. I felt that I was swept into their confidence by my mere association with her.

I shortly found myself in the company of more than a dozen men I didn't know performing a series of exercises designed to share laughter, build trust and create community. I found that attempting to remember each person's name was particularly stressful for me as I don't usually find I recall names easily. By the end of the first day, I began to realize that I had begun to face my own inadequacies

with recognition and humor, supported by the group. I have rarely felt such acceptance in such a short period of time.

Throughout the long days, I began to see the evolution of a group who slowly began to remove their facades and to share deep thoughts and experiences. By the end of the weekend, I was physically exhausted but intellectually stimulated. In the days that followed, I couldn't stop thinking about the men I had met. Thoughts of justice, injustice, freedom, redemption, punishment, incarceration and the humanity of all people filled my thoughts. I found I needed quiet and space to absorb these new experiences. In a surprisingly short time I was ready to plan my return to Green Haven.

—Patricia McKeon



I have been involved in AVP for a couple of years. My primary focus is to offer AVP to Syracuse resi-

dents. When the opportunity to facilitate AVP with the women of Albion Correctional Facility arose though, I didn't hesitate long. Combining AVP with my desire to share opportunities for personal growth and building healthy relationship skills with women seemed a logical step for me.

In community groups, people often ask "How is it different in the prison workshops?" I saw the same exercises, the same planning and facilitator teamwork, the same issues: boundaries, self-respect, concern for family, lack of affirmation, desire to find different ways to handle anger and conflict.

There are differences, and one I am aware of is that this workshop is located in a system with its own set of rules. I was aware that, although we

made our own schedule, a larger force could supersede what we planned at any moment. I was careful of the rules and aware that they are less flexible than in my everyday world.

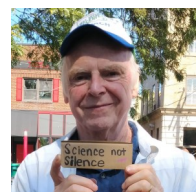
At first, I felt very much an outsider in the group, but as we shared in the exercises, the women let me know they appreciated I was there. I was conscious that when we went to chow, people who are incarcerated and the correctional officers saw us in line and eating as part of the group. I hoped it communicated something of what AVP is about.

Being at Albion takes me out of my everyday world and gives me a different visceral perspective on things. It makes me think – there has got to be a better system to help women find better ways to live their lives, one that is not predicated on violence or the threat of violence as our prison system is. I stayed home from one of my workshops because of a painfully troublesome knee, and it made me wonder about what it is like to be ill while incarcerated. It also reminds me that although I am pretty limited in how I can impact this system, it makes a difference to just show up sometimes.

I am grateful each time I go to Albion that I can have this experience.

—Rosey Oaks-Lee

*Continued from p. 1*



To get to be involved in a project I so much benefit from and can contribute to is one more privilege I have happened on. My son recently told me that he knows I worked well at my jobs for many years but, when he hears me speak about AVP, he thinks that I have found my calling. I do, too.

I have been fortunate to facilitate in community and school workshops as well but that story will have to wait for another time.

—John Sheridan



I have been participating in AVP for about five years in Cayuga Correctional Facility. It has been a most rewarding experience for me.

The weekends are long, and may be physically tiring and emotionally draining, however they are also usually filled with sharing of personal stories. For me, these stories and the willingness to share them with one another, are extremely precious. Whether I am inside or outside, anytime someone is willing to share deeply from their personal experience with me, that is a powerful gift.

When I started participating in AVP, I wondered if my relatively ordinary life experiences would be acceptable 'currency' in such sharing circles. Really what do I have to share? But I soon found that my willingness to dig deep and share something of my life struggles, seemed to allow me to make better connections and build more genuine relationships with the men. I have also found that not infrequently, an empathetic response to one of my concerns has made me feel deeply heard and cared for. We look at one another and discover all that we have in common.

At some point during my first year with AVP, I heard a remarkable story testifying to the power of the program. A participant whom I had met once before explained that he had narrowly escaped a trip to the box. When he was frustrated with a guard, he felt like reaching out and hitting the man, something he had done more than once in the past. But he found himself pausing and remembering the role play from the previous workshop. That pause was all he needed to walk away and start praying for strength. He then found himself considering the consequences for himself and his family if he continued his old ways. He was changed, he paused long enough to think before reacting. It made a difference. He told the story with pride.

The teamwork of the outside and inside facilitators means so much. We all have our particular strengths, we all have our needs and certainly we all need to be supported by a team who has our back. With very few exceptions over the years, we all have been supported. We are much stronger as a program because of the commitment, the dedication and the consistent hard work of preparation of the inside facilitators.

We consistently hear from the insiders how much they value the weekends. They say that it brings them a space to relax and let their mask down, a place to talk and share freely, to smile and to laugh, and they recognize that in AVP each of them is cared about and respected for who they are. I am very grateful to be a part of a program that can bring these little things that mean so much!

—Larry Buffam



As a new apprentice facilitator, I wasn't quite sure what to expect but, given my wonderful experiences at the

three outside workshops I attended, I was sure it [going into Taconic prison] would be positive. In addition to another apprentice and a seasoned facilitator, I spent the day with four incredible women. I was struck by their confidence, maturity, and commitment to AVP. They are clearly the kind of people AVP seeks as facilitators.

Throughout the day, as we discussed many aspects of setting up a workshop for the first time in the Taconic Correctional Facility, they demonstrated the skills they have learned — respect for each member of the group; active listening; a focus on finding positive solutions to any obstacles or challenges that came up. Each woman displayed these skills in ways that

reflected their unique personalities, with intelligence, humor, and a spirit of cooperation.

They were so welcoming to me, and it will be a real privilege for me to learn from them and to collaborate with them on conducting an AVP workshop at Taconic C.F.

—Betty Lynch

In 2019 I participated in the three levels of trainings offered by AVP to become an apprentice facilitator by travel-

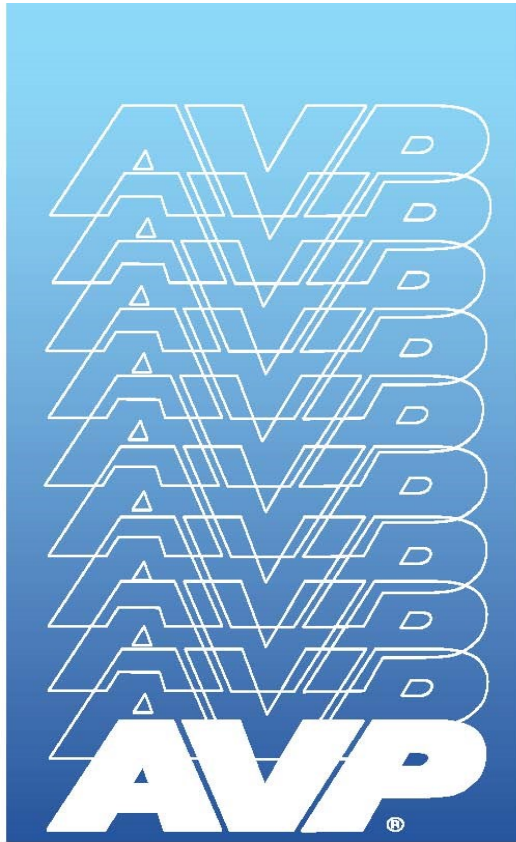


ing to offerings across the state. This has been the least costly and most enlightening training that I've ever attended. One day I hope to travel the United States volunteering with AVP. I just finished my second experience co-facilitating inside.

In spite of being reminded at every gate where we are, and what people might have done before to get there, my intention heading in the door is to demonstrate how we can operate as a community of equals to practice skills like: active listening, assertiveness, consent seeking, consensus building, and other nonviolent communication tools for positive change. I look for the good in everything as much as I can. I intend to treat everyone as equal and valuable.

I am grateful for the opportunity to connect on a human level, and for the gems of wisdom that come out in the workshop experience. I'm glad to gain co-facilitator's insights through debriefing after workshops, and ongoing work with the whole facilitation team at regular support meetings. I'm also grateful to the generous families who have hosted me overnight. I've enjoyed getting to know a variety of people both in prison and outside, and I'm looking forward to co-facilitating again soon!

—Alison Rawlins



ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

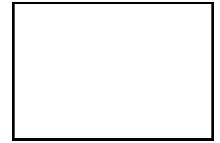
***We have started AVP in four new prisons this year!!!***

**Clinton Annex** (maximum B security men's)  
**Clinton Main** (maximum A security men's)  
**Fishkill** (medium security men's)  
**Taconic** (medium security women's)

***Please support this work!***

**Our budget for direct public support in 2019 is \$25,450. To date we have received \$10,513.**

**Please do what you can. Thank you very much!!**



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

**ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT / NEW YORK**

**2018 Workshop Summary Report**

*Note: These statistics represent the workshops reported to the AVP/NY office.*

<p><b>ALBION Prison</b> (Women's)                      Workshop count: 5                      Participant count: 72                      Apprentices trained: 15</p> <p><b>ATTICA Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 3                      Participant count: 35</p> <p><b>AUBURN Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 13                      Participant count: 180                      Facilitator Day count: 1                      Facilitator Day participants: 14                      Apprentices trained: 7</p> <p><b>BEDFORD HILLS Prison</b> (Wmn's)                      Workshop count: 8                      All-Facilitator wksp count: 1                      Participant count: 82                      Apprentices trained: 4</p> <p><b>CAYUGA Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 8                      Participant count: 96                      Apprentices trained: 15</p> <p><b>ELMIRA Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 7                      Participant count: 90</p> <p><b>FCI RAY BROOK</b> (Federal Prison)                      Workshop count: 7                      Participant count: 112                      Apprentices trained: 16</p> <p><b>GREEN HAVEN Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 24                      Participant count: 356                      Apprentices trained: 56</p>	<p><b>GREENE Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 4                      Participant count: 42                      Apprentices trained: 5</p> <p><b>GROVELAND Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 8                      Participant count: 90                      Apprentices trained: 18</p> <p><b>OTISVILLE Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 7                      Participant count: 103                      Apprentices trained: 12</p> <p><b>SING SING Prison</b>                      English lang. wksp count: 23                      Spanish + biligual. wksp ct: 4                      Participant count: 298                      Apprentices trained: 12</p> <p><b>WENDE Prison</b>                      Short workshop count: 4                      Full workshop count: 1                      Participant count: 69</p> <p><b>WOODBOURNE Prison</b>                      Workshop count: 8                      Participant count: 141                      Apprentices trained: 37</p> <p><b>ALBANY Area Council</b>                      Workshop count: 1                      Participant count: 2</p> <p><b>BRONX Area Council</b>                      Teen + young adult wksp ct: 4                      Teen + young adult part't ct: 50                      Adult workshop count: 1                      Adult short wksp count: 1                      Adult short wksp part't: 5                      Teen + adult apprentices tr'd: 21</p>	<p><b>BROOKLYN (NYC Area Council)</b>                      Workshop count: 1                      Participant count: 8</p> <p><b>CATSKILL Area Council</b>                      Youth short workshop count: 1                      Youth short participant count: 26                      Youth mini workshop count: 11                      Youth mini part't count: 180</p> <p><b>CENTRAL NEW YORK AC</b>                      Youth workshop count: 1                      Youth participant count: 6                      Adult workshop count: 2                      Adult participant count: 16                      Youth mini workshop count: 6                      Youth mini part't count: 59                      Adult apprentices trained: 6</p> <p><b>ELMIRA Area Council</b>                      Teen + adult mini wksp count: 1                      Teen + adult mini part't count: 10</p> <p><b>GENESEE VALLEY Area Council</b>                      Workshop count: 1                      Participant count: 4                      Youth + adult mini wksp ct: 1                      Youth + adult mini part't ct: 9                      Facilitator Day count: 1                      Facilitator Day part't count: 6</p> <p><b>MID-HUDSON Area Council</b>                      Introduction to AVP count: 1                      Introduction participant count: 6</p> <p><b>NIAGARA FRONTIER AC</b>                      Adult short workshop count: 5                      Adult short wksp part't count: 43                      Youth short workshop count: 2                      Youth short wksp part't count: 8</p>	<p><b>WESTCHESTER Area Council</b>                      Adult workshop count: 6                      Adult participant count: 62                      Youth workshop count: 1                      Youth participant count: 6                      Facilitator Days: 2                      Facilitator Day participants: 22                      Apprentices trained: 4</p> <p><b>AVP/NY PRISON WKSPs:</b>  <u>Prisons served:</u> 14  <b>Workshop count:</b> 134  <b>Participant count:</b> 1,766  <b>Apprentices trained:</b> 197                      Facilitator Day (mini): 1                      Facilitator Day part't count: 14  <b>Inside facilitators:</b> 212  <b>Outside adult facilitators:</b> 106</p> <p><b>AVP/NY COMMUNITY WKSPs:</b>  <u>Community workshops:</u> 27  <b>Participant count:</b> 246                      Adult part't count: 150                      Teen + yg adult ct: 50                      Youth part't count: 46  <b>Apprentices trained:</b> 31                      Adult apprentices: 20                      Teen apprentices: 11  <b>Mini Adt + multi-gen wksp:</b> 2  <b>Mini Adt + multi-gen part't:</b> 19  <b>Mini Youth workshops:</b> 17  <b>Mini Youth part't count:</b> 239  <b>Facilitator Days:</b> 3  <b>Facilitator Day part't count:</b> 28  <b>Outside adult facilitators:</b> 108  <b>Teen facilitators (under 18):</b> 5</p>
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