

Voices from Inside

Greetings AVP family,

As volunteers inside and out continue to get vaccinated, we await the day when we can re-connect and make the AVP family whole once again.

We are grateful to the facilitation teams that have made Zoom work for online community workshops—giving space for maintaining AVP practices and growing our community of facilitators.

We continue to be grateful for the work of our Volunteer Correspondent, Jo Clayson, who is in email communication with over two hundred inside facilitators across New York State prisons.

This newsletter highlights some of their voices. Amazingly, many have been able to stay positive through more than a year of the triple stressors of incarceration, COVID-19 under particularly difficult circumstances (close quarters, limited PPE etc.) and lack of programming.

As always, we are grateful for the continued support our extended AVP family of donors and those who walk with us in spirit.

In Transforming Power,

The AVP NY Leadership Team:

Funny Valentine Doyle, Stellar Steve Bradley, Charismatic Coralie Joseph, Adventurous Alisha Kohn, Jubilant Jo Clayson, Joyful John Sheridan, Jumpin' Jill McLellan, Contagious CC Carolyn Polikarpus



A Zoom Call with some from the AVP New York Leadership Team
Secure Shirley Way (staff), Jubilant Jo Clayson, Stellar Steve Bradley, Contagious CC Carolyn Polikarpus, Joyful John Sheridan, Jumpin' Jill McLellan, Adventurous Alisha Kohn and Funny Valentine Doyle

Strong Struggle

At this time the AVP workshops and all that we constantly have worked on are a substantial part of our stabilizing force—especially in prison. This past year has been trying. I found myself in a situation where I was attacked and had to defend myself. While attempting not to engage I realized that AVP has honestly changed me. As a participant and a facilitator, I realize that my thought process is completely different from those I am surrounded by. I appreciate it while at the same time I know that we as facilitators must do more to change our atmosphere. People in here tend to rely on violence instead of using their words to convey what the problem is. I say all of this to say that as much as I look forward to my release I feel a need to have more of an impact on those around me. But it is hard, because people are uncomfortable with change.

Perhaps this topic can be a focus of ours so when we do get back together we come back revitalized with a more inclusive game plan. We have to find a way reach those who don't feel a desire or need for AVP. Those are the people who need it the most.

I realize that in this atmosphere it doesn't matter how much you have changed, violence can still find you so we must change the atmosphere.

Enjoy your day and stay safe.

—Strong Struggle, Green Haven Prison

Please support this work!

Our 2021 budget calls for **\$27,000** in direct public support.

To date we have received **\$6,263**

Please do what you can.

Thank you very much!!

Selfless Self

Who Am I?

Someone once told me I was an innocent child
Caught in a guilty world
Hurled into this time zone blind by mankind
Confined to the unknown
Thrown into a poverty stricken home
Alone as harm is inflicted upon me
To disarm each night and everyone of my bones
I'm then shown negativity by my surrounding peers
Keeping me bound more
So preferably this is my downfall
Compact until I'm cracked
Extracting a long list of minor and major setbacks
Certainly sidetracked by all the material things
Because I'm told I come from a long list of imperial kings
Who once ruled over many empires
Commanding and demanding any and all desires
I guess those days are truly expired
Because I was born into a world full of liars
Inspired by convicted felons with priors
Who feed off crack dope buyers
A place where I was taught to judge a man
Not by what he say but based on his attire
And you ask me
Who am I?

How should I know after I been confused
Mind abused, definitely misused
Feeling as if this life is not destined for me
Maybe I was handed the wrong pair of shoes
How is it in this world
The inspection of my complexion
Can grant me automatic rejection
How is it I'm awarded the top profession
Not in society, but in the department of corrections
And in what direction can these schools lead me or my
people
If we are not equal
I ask these questions and many more
Wondering why or how I was dealt this hand
Still the answers are yet to be revealed
So really I can't say
Who I am

So I stand for sure as a black man
Who's mistreated foully
Paid the lowest salary
Going through police brutality
And constantly jailed or killed
Fatality
Really if you ask me who I am
I should answer as if I'm ready to die
But my mind, body and soul tells me
There is more to this life, once I find out
Who am I!

—*Selfless Self, Sing Sing Prison*

Note: The AVP exercise, *Who Am I?*, asks participants to describe ourselves with ten words or phrases.

Appreciative AJ

If knew what I know now.

It is said that you have to go through something
in order to learn from it.
If I knew what I know now
I wouldn't be sitting in this eight by ten
wondering if I would get a second chance at life?
If I knew what I know now
then my ways and action
would have been different
and the choices I made would have been better.
I was out there without a care in the world
not caring who I hurt.
I was selfish.
If I knew what I know now
I would have asked for forgiveness.
Now I may not ever get that chance,
but the least I could do is ask for forgiveness
from the one person it would really count.
And that's God.
Lord grant me the serenity to change the things I can
and a chance to know the difference.
It's said that prison can make you or break you.
You can be broken and succumb to the daily rhetoric that
goes on.
Or you can plant your feet and keep your head up
and fight the long road ahead.
If I only knew what I know now
then then this wouldn't be my life
being told when to eat or shower.
But because I did not know
nor did I care to know this is now my life
and I hope that you don't make it yours...
—*Appreciative AJ, Green Haven Prison*

Instrumental Ivié

A Time to Heal

Keep the big heart of George Floyd alive
Let the healing begin & believe with your eyes
Believe what you see
All peoples jumping up & down to the sky
All those who still breathe
With one thing in mind
Leaving our children a better world to find
It's the world George Floyd left behind
Let That Be His Legacy.

—*Instrumental Ivié, Bedford Hills Prison*

Courageous Cancun

If you know that forgiving a person that did you wrong is
going to make matters worse, forgive him anyway. You
know yourself better than he will ever know you. You
know that you are not afraid but trying to go home. Later
on you may have changed his heart in the long run. Can I
really forgive him?

—*Courageous Cancun, Auburn Prison*

Forever Free

AVP has been a life-altering experience for me. It has not only opened up my mind to alternatives to violence, but alternatives to living. Before joining AVP, I was extremely closed off and unwilling to share things about my life, whether past or present. I had learned to remain under a rock of silence, because, honestly, I was comfortable there. I was one of those guys in Basic who sat with his arms crossed and with a tight grip on his thoughts. I felt like that was the safest way to be; even worse, over the years, this method had kind of worked for me. Avoidance became my vehicle, not realizing that that vehicle was prone to crashes or aimless direction.

Now, after becoming an AVP facilitator, I have learned to be more open, to challenge myself and let people in. It hasn't always resulted in the best consequences; but even in those instances, I have learned something about myself, about people, and about life in general. You can't ever take that for granted, because life is about learning, about advancing.

Speaking about advancing, my Advanced workshop, as a participant, was not as "life-changing" as my Basic. I was stuck with a different group than my Basic group, whom I was familiar with, and among people who weren't as "enlightened," for lack of a better word. But even during that workshop, I learned to navigate the negative energy around me, understand why I was there, and not get caught up in why others were there. That, to me, is the best lesson I've learned.

Everything is not always what it seems, and, yet, you must still live and still find meaning in wherever life takes you. Of course, these are lessons one can learn outside of AVP as well, but I'm grateful that AVP is where I've learned these skills. They have helped me as a facilitator and as a growing man. And they are skills that I hope to impart to others when opportunities are presented. AVP has also taught me, ad nauseam at times,

that those opportunities will always present themselves, whether you like it or not. Transforming power is learning how to react, even if "not" precedes "like," which most times is the case—of course, whether you like it or not.

—*Forever Free, Green Haven Prison*

Handsome Sampson

If I had to explain what AVP is all about I would start with Love because that is what is shared through so many hearts and souls around the world. Then I would share what Transforming Power did for me and how it works in each and every one of us every day!

I love to see things grow and people grow. Planting seeds that may look dead but they bring forth life. That's how it is even with people. We plant seeds of Love, Hope and SOO-SOOOO MUCH MORE. And sometimes we see people change right before are eyes. They begin to take hold of transforming power and begin to grow. And sometimes they don't know what happened but they know something is happening in them.

I don't know if I told you but I just started doing ART [Aggression Replacement Therapy] in the Mental Health Unit. I AM LOVING IT !!! And doing AVP for so long I use a lot of what I learned in AVP to facilitate. One of the first things I use is the Bag Exercise and then I utilize check-ins to make sure minds are clear and if someone is down or going through something we can help him get past it.

So continue to Love and share how and when you can.

—*Handsome Sampson, Wende Prison*

Laughing Lenny

I am very grateful to AVP for everything it has taught me. I have used transforming power several times during the pandemic, everyone was on edge with all the "what if's" as well as the unknowns.

I'm thankful that everything worked out.

—*Laughing Lenny, Attica Prison*

Zealous Zabeeda

Thank you all for remembering us.

My prayer is that one day we will reach again. I miss AVP and all good times we had and to know AVP is a blessing to many lives and to my life too.

Well you have a blessed day. Thank you again.

—*Zealous Zabeeda, Bedford Hills Prison*

Loyal Lawrence

Howdy to you, Jubilant Jo and an AV-Praise to the Wonderful AVP family. I appreciate and thank you for the support and the encouraging words regarding my parole board. I definitely can't wait for the opportunity to assist in the facilitation of AVP workshop within the communities, embracing more people into the AVP Family. The pandemic may have slowed down the tangible aspect of AVP Workshop within the prison facility, but it hasn't stopped the pure "ESSENCE", (the basic nature), of AVP. As we all know and remember the beloved Transformational Experience of AVP is a process of seeking and sharing and we are all in a constant process of learning each other.

That is why all the facilitators here at Woodbourne are in constant contact with each other, whether it's passing one another in the hallways, recreational areas or during the daytime programs we may share with each other. We continue to lift one another up in spirit while allowing our AVP light to shine and illuminate. Shine so the essence can draw all those who aren't familiar with the AVP Experience / Lifestyle to a new found Joy. We are also re-affirming the special spirit of AVP with those who have taken workshop before.

Continue to stay Jubilant.

—*Loyal Lawrence, Woodbourne Prison*

Builder Bruce

I was sitting here thinking about my life up to this moment of time, all of the trails, errors and poor choices I made have brought me to this moment in time. As I sit here preparing to leave prison after all of this time, it occurred to me that the one positive experience that I am taking with me is the life changing events of my adventure in AVP. Without it, I would find myself plagued with doubt, and fears, like will the people give me a chance? Will they notice that I am not the person I was twenty-nine years ago? What will it take for me to be accepted back into society? No one will believe the tears and pain that it took for me to even begin to heal myself within.

I remember doing my first trauma and resilience workshop, and how I even messed that up :-). Instead of myself in the chair, I pictured my victim sitting there listening to my apology. I broke down and cried like a baby and I swear that it felt like all of the pain that I was feeling was lifted off of my shoulders.

Since that workshop I have been able to move forward a little easier. This was about three years ago now and since then I have had the pleasure of facilitating with many other great facilitators.

AVP will work for you if you give it a chance like I did. All you have to do is be willing to let go of your doubts and open up to positive feedback.

Like the mandala says: "Respect for Self." This one was a tough one for me because I wasn't able to forgive myself for the crime that I had committed. All of the shame and guilt that I had built up in me would surface and pull me down again. "Think before Reacting." I was always the guy that did things on a dare without even thinking about who it might hurt. There was no right or wrong. I only wanted the attention it got for me. I felt alone even when surrounded by other people, I only wanted to belong, to fit in with normal people.

I didn't know how to ask for help. Now with the help of my AVP family I feel as if I can keep building, striving forward with each new chapter in my life with a purpose. The tools that I use now can't build a house yet, until I make my foundation strong.

—*Forever Building Builder Bruce :-)*

Laughing Ladybugg

When I witnessed the assault on George Floyd's life, it stirred something deep in my soul. The witnessing of such an act awakened the reality of cruelty among the human race. I have also witnessed acts of kindness, such as the firefighter who went inside a burning building to save my neighbors. I witnessed him perform CPR to restore the breath that was consumed by smoke. I was affected more by giving of life than the taking of life. I'm happy to say that I have witnessed acts of kindness and not just acts of violence. I can't wait til the day I can be a "witness" to the end of hatred, bigotry, prejudice and stigmatism.

—*Laughing Ladybugg, Bedford Hills*

Practical Pete

I hope this finds you well and coping with the challenges of this last year. Between the limited return to programs the end of last summer and the lockdown in December, ten or so of us managed to meet regularly on Monday evenings. Terrific Tex will have told you about our mini-workshop in November. One Monday, I tried a new exercise —What is COVID violence? It went well, the men in the group enjoyed brainstorming this question and its corollary —What is COVID nonviolence? It was so timely as we went into lockdown — over 60 days — not long after. We might have organized a mini-workshop around COVID and TP [Transforming Power] if the lockdown had not happened.

We hope to return soon to evening programs that will allow our weekly meetings until we can resume workshops here. In the meantime we are keeping TP in our lives.

—*Practical Pete, Woodbourne Prison*

Carlos Caliente

The Covid 19 pandemic produced an environment where we had to halt our duties as facilitators but we still continued our work outside the workshop. The Covid 19 pandemic showed us who actually walked the walk and lived by AVP values from the way I started my life in prison to the way I am leaving prison I am a different person. I owe this to my AVP "family" the amazing Contagious CC, the funniest man I know, Easy Eddie, plus the inside members especially the Spanish facilitators who brought workshops to the Hispanic community of Green Haven. The members of this family are Joy Jay, our inside coordinator, Peace Pablo, Blessed Buddha, Positive Pana, Bony Bonito, Fantastic Franco, Super Shotz, Analytical Lamar, True Tre, Glorious Glory, Strong Struggle, Forever Free, Baez Bonito, José Juventud, and the few I didn't mention that also had a part of my life while I was a facilitator at Green Haven.

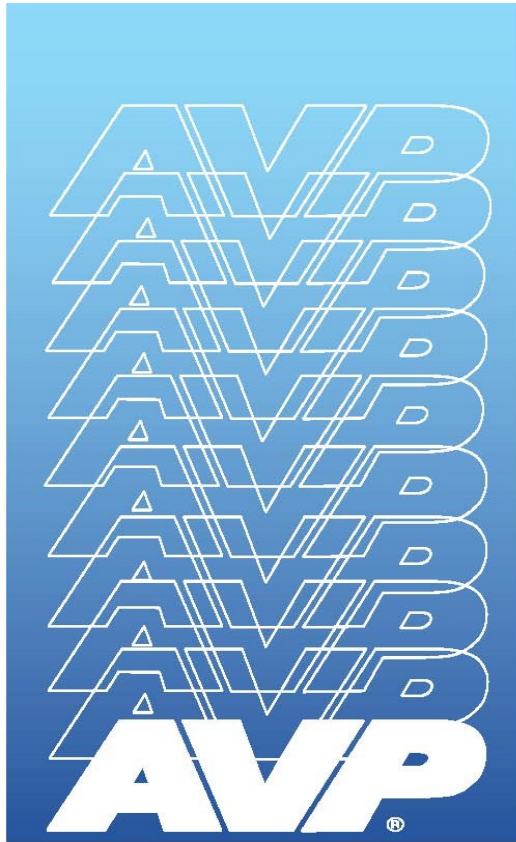
The fact is that I will continue to facilitate when I step into the "outside world" on April 7/21 to share the experiences of my path. I believe that being part of AVP made me a better person and I want to share this person with the world.

—*Carlos Caliente, formerly Green Haven Prison, released 04.07.21*

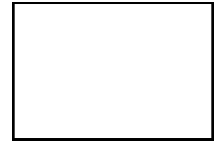
Panama Parker

I have been a facilitator since 2011. A person that I became friends with in here asked me to take the basic workshop. He was a facilitator already. I told him that I would only do the basic and that's it, but I have to admit that I fell in love with it because it helped me heal wounds that I didn't know were still open. I changed a lot and it was because I was open to it as much as it hurt at times. I was happy that my wife and kids saw the change in me and the way that I started handling things. I had some great outside facilitators that helped and continue to help me grow in AVP.

—*Panama Parker, Sing Sing Prison*



Save the Date!
AVP New York
Annual Gathering



September 3-5, 2021

Powell House Quaker Retreat Center

We are super –hopeful that we can be together in-person! this year.

See www.avpny.org for details and upcoming workshops!

Return Service Requested

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

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

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT / NEW YORK

2020 Workshop Summary Report

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

ALBION Prison (Women's) Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 27	GREEN HAVEN Prison English lang. workshop ct: 2 Spanish lang. workshop ct: 2 Participant count: 59	CATSKILL Area Council Youth short wksp count: 1 Youth short part't count: 18 Youth mini wksp count: 4 Youth mini part't count: 78	AVP/NY PRISON WKSPs: Prisons served: 14 Workshop count: 29 Participant count: 348 Apprentices trained: 0 Inside facilitators: 105 Outside adult facilitators: 30
ATTICA Prison No Workshops	GREENE Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 11	CENTRAL NEW YORK AC Teen+yng adt wksp count: 1 Teen+yng adt part't count: 8 Adult workshop count: 1 Adult participant count: 7 Adult mini wksp count: 1 Adult mini part't count: 2	AVP/NY COMMUNITY WKSPs: Community workshops: 7 Participant count: Adult part't count: 56 Teen+yng adult count: 8 Apprentices trained: 20 Short workshops: 2 Youth part't count: 34 Mini workshops: 7 Adult part't count: 8 Youth part't count: 78 Facilitator Days: 1 Outside adult facilitators: 25 Teen facilitators (under 18): 8
AUBURN Prison No Workshops	GROVELAND Prison No Workshops	NEW YORK CITY & LONG ISLAND Area Council Adult mini wksp count: 1 Adult mini part't count: 2 Adult workshop count: 3 Adult participant count: 36 Adult apprentices trained: 13	<i>Note:</i> All volunteer programs inside NYS prisons were suspended in March, 2020. Some of the community workshops listed here were held on Zoom. We are very grateful for the continued support we have received! Thank you!!
BEDFORD HILLS Prison (W's) No Workshops	OTISVILLE Prison Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 28	WESTCHESTER Area Council Adult workshop count: 2 Adult participant count: 13 Adult apprentices trained: 7 Youth short wksp count: 1 Youth short part't count: 16 Adult mini wksp count: 1 Adult mini part't count: 4 Facilitator Days: 1 Facilitator Day part't count: 8	
CAYUGA Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 6	SING SING Prison English lang. wksp count: 6 Participant count: 51	WESTCHESTER CTY JAIL Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 18	
CLINTON ANNEX Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 13	TACONIC Prison (Women's) Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 31	WOODBOURNE Prison Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 37	
CLINTON MAIN Prison Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 23	WENDE Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 11		
EASTERN Prison No Workshops	WESTCHESTER CTY JAIL Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 18		
ELMIRA Prison Workshop count: 1 Participant count: 6			
FCI RAY BROOK (Fed'l Prison) No Workshops			
FISHKILL Prison Workshop count: 2 Participant count: 27			