

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

W.A. Inc.

peaceful pathways

ANNUAL REPORT

2007

**presented to AVP's Annual General Meeting
22.03.07**

INTRODUCTION

AVP/WA has had a good year of consolidation, offering workshops in the community and in Acacia prison, increasing our list of facilitators in both areas. An innovation this year was the employment of a project officer to assist in extending our community activities.

Our core business is offering workshops which give participants the opportunity to acknowledge the power of nonviolence from within their own experiences. This is a powerful programme, which committed facilitators enjoy making available, because we are confident of its value to the wider community, and to ourselves.

WORKSHOPS

We conducted nine workshops in Acacia Prison this year – our most successful area of operation. We also ran six workshops in a diverse community settings, and several HIPP (Help Increase the Peace Project) workshops in schools.

ACACIA PRISON WORKSHOPS:

A dedicated team of inmate and outmate facilitators worked between mainstream and protection areas, with overlapping workshops occurring at the Training for Facilitators level. This is truly AVP at work, breaking down barriers within the highly structured prison culture, demonstrating that there is goodness everywhere, and that most people can work together harmoniously if they put their minds to it. We had a first this year with a non-custodial member of staff (psychologist) being included as a participant in a basic workshop. This was of course with approval from SERCO Administration and with the consent of all participants. This experiment worked very well.

There is generally very good acceptance of AVP within the Acacia community, and there is often a waiting list of participants. This is largely due to the positive efforts of our much-valued inmate facilitators. There seems to be less emphasis now on doing the workshops just to get a certificate to look good for parole, and more on doing the workshops for personal empowerment.

We continue to have positive support from the Administration, despite one glitch when several outmate facilitators were refused admission on one occasion. This was for one of our two training days, when the agenda is set by inmate facilitators who benefit from the extra professional development time with outmates who are not regularly part of the prison teams. Of course, the benefit is mutual! It is an

important way for inmate facilitators to not only enhance their skills, but to feel more included in the AVP/WA community.

The Training for Facilitators workshop resulted in eleven inmates being interviewed. Ten were accepted as apprentices, which was highly encouraging. Several of those inmates were shortly to be released, so did not proceed to facilitating workshops within Acacia. Of those who remained, six are active, and much appreciated additions to the team.

Quite a number of our long-serving facilitators were either released or transferred, so we were especially pleased that newer facilitators are stepping up to the mark, and doing wonderful work.

We have not had as much success as we would like in integrating inmates to the community AVP group upon release. We understand the pressures and difficulties which face many ex-prisoners, but we offer inclusion to our group, either for participating in more workshops, or as facilitators, if they are already experienced.

Over the year, we had about ninety new participants doing basic level workshops, and twenty doing either the Advanced or T4F levels, or participating as facilitators.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS:

These workshops, at all three levels, ranged from a new group in the Bicton area, to an activist group in Subiaco, to the Hills, Midland and Leederville. The latter was a new venue, trialed with a small group (T4F), which was successful. Not so successful were plans for a workshop at the Loftus Community Centre, also in Leederville – cancelled due to lack of registrations. One other workshop was also cancelled, but it was programmed for end of the first week in January – a little optimistic!

HIPP WORKSHOPS:

Successful workshops were held at Swan View Senior High School (Year 9) and at Helena College Junior School (Basic with each of Years 5 & 6, and an Advanced with Year 6). There was some experimentation with the timetabling of these workshops. Flexibility is required to fit in with busy school schedules.

PROJECT OFFICER

After some deliberation, we decided to use some of our donor funds to experiment with having a project officer, whose main job would be to create more community interest in our programme. We were clear that we did not want to Project Officer to become a general office worker, doing the already existing jobs, which are the responsibility of the Committee.

We advertised for a part-time worker, and after short-listing applicants, and interviewing four candidates, we offered the position to Anna Alderson, an experienced community networker and facilitator. The position was to run from July to November, but was extended until February, because Anna experienced many delays as she tried to communicate with mostly volunteer organisations.

Anna has worked hard setting up “tasters” and interviews, so that AVP is now better known in the community. Some publicity was generated, and many new links have been established, some of which will bear fruit in the following months, when we will be fully evaluating the project.

During her time with us, Anna completed the three levels of workshops, so she is now becoming an experienced facilitator – this hands-on approach being very important for one promoting the programme.

FACILITATORS

We have had five more facilitators added to the team this year. We look forward to them integrating into existing line-ups, so that we all benefit from fresh ideas. We continue to encourage more facilitators to be active, so that we have variety in our teams, and so that the regulars are not doing too much.

Meanwhile, the training sessions continue on a monthly basis, with Peter Prisgrove as our resident adviser. These sessions are now open to anyone who has done an AVP workshop, although in reality, it is mostly the regular facilitators and committee members who attend. Inmate facilitation days are listed in the Acacia section of this report. We have covered a wide range of topics relating to workshop presentation, report-writing and improving our skills. We also had some outside stimulation when Dorsett-Campbell Ross presented an open workshop for us and the wider community on nonviolent communication.

Three facilitators attended the International AVP Gathering in South Africa, and AVP/WA also supported the inclusion of facilitators from

nearby countries who may otherwise have been unable to attend. We heard extensive feedback reports, picked up some new ideas, and felt deep compassion for those AVPers in other countries who struggle with life and death issues with grace and dignity, putting the notion of transforming power into practice in extremely difficult circumstances.

OFFICE MATTERS

Our diligent editor has produced four newsletters this year, giving us an excellent tool for communication within our WA and interstate networks. Our thanks to Senator Rachel Siewert's office for printing. A camera has been purchased – useful for our record-keeping and also for newsletter copy.

The office computer system has been upgraded to better suit our needs. We are now linked by email to the worldwide network of AVP. The website (www.avpwa.org) is up and running, largely thanks to Rob PO' – another useful tool for networking and outreach.

FINANCES

The Treasurer's report gives the detail – suffice to say that our financial dealings are in good hands. It cost AVP/WA \$23,000 to run the programme this year, but the bank balance stands at a healthy \$17,667.06.

We are grateful to regular donors who value our work enough to continue funding our operations. Of course, community workshops pay for themselves, but we would be much more constrained in our efforts if we did not have generous anonymous beneficiaries.

It is important for us to remain essentially a volunteer organisation: this is something well noted by inmate participants. Our departure from this position this year, in paying a Project Officer, has been a worthwhile initiative, which will be evaluated in the coming months, in light of our own experience and bearing in mind AVP experiences elsewhere.

SOCIAL CLIMATE

The general goodwill, strongly felt in AVP/WA, is due largely to our commitment to a good product, and to the willingness of individuals to offer their services. There is a feeling of concern for others' well-being, largely due to our check-in sessions at the beginning of each meeting. We are more than a collection of individuals with a job to do. Unfortunately, we have had to grant leave-of-absence to three

committee members whose health or family circumstances have made it difficult for them to contribute as much as they would have liked.

At the end of the year, we had our usual gatherings in Acacia and at our Quaker Meeting House headquarters.

CONCLUSION

We had an inspiring full day planning workshop at the beginning of 2007, where evaluations occurred, fresh ideas were canvassed, timetables drawn up, and enthusiasm generated for another busy year.

Reflecting on last year's comments, when it was noted that people in the wider community find it difficult to set aside large chunks of time for workshops, we have tried offering different formats, but it is too soon to say whether this has been successful. As always, we evaluate carefully, to ensure that in making workshops shorter, or running one night a week, or any other format, that we do not lose the essence of the AVP experience.

We are hopeful that the Midland Project – offering support to Aboriginal groups in that area – will come to fruition in the coming year.

First steps have been taken towards offering AVP to the East Timorese community in Perth, with the possible view of training locals to take the programme back to their homeland. This was in response to a heartfelt plea for help, as violence escalated in the fledgling country to our north.

Grateful acknowledgment to the 2006 Committee:

Deputy Convenor & Newsletter Editor - Shane Bailey
Secretary - Jim Thom
Minutes Secretary – Brenda Roy
Treasurer - Sally Herzfeld
Acacia Liaison - Kelli Featherstone

Other Committee Members (currently on leave): Robyn Williams,
David Nourish, Elizabeth PO'

Jo Vallentine
2006 Chairperson

22/3/07