

Alternatives to Violence Project W.A. Inc.

aka

Peaceful Pathways

2006 ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION:

AVP has had another interesting year – our eleventh since workshops began. Our Management Committee met monthly and managed the affairs of the organisation smoothly, working very well together, whilst a wonderful group of facilitators offered workshops in various venues.

We had three firsts this year – a workshop in Bridgetown, an Interfaith workshop, and a weekend facilitators' training session.

As usual our core business is offering workshops which give participants the opportunity to acknowledge, understand and internalise the power of nonviolence from their own experiences and by sharing stories with others. This can be very powerful.

WORKSHOPS:

We held a total of fifteen workshops during the year, nine in prisons, six in the community.

ACACIA PRISON: the programme is working well in Acacia. We have a dedicated band of inmate facilitators, who enrich the experience for all concerned. Most of the workshops this year were conducted in the protected area. Early in the year a Training for Facilitators was held in that unit, resulting in five new inmate facilitators joining our ranks. It was back to the mainstream division for the final workshop of the year – and AVP has already conducted its first workshop for 2006.

As well as the workshops, two training days for facilitators have happened in Acacia. On these occasions, outmate facilitators are invited to participate, giving the inmates a further sense of integration, and being part of our community. Inmates choose the agendas for these sessions which are immensely useful for all involved. Sometimes, new outmate facilitators sample the prison situation, and feel clearer about whether they choose to volunteer for prison workshops, or not.

Finally, we held an end-of-year gathering at Acacia, open to anyone who has done a workshop with us. This was a well attended lively occasion, which is good for general public relations, and provides an opportunity for inmate participants to link again with each other, and with community members of the AVP group. It has the feel of reunion about it, and is a very positive way to end the AVP year.

Liaison with the prison administration continues to run smoothly.

BANDYUP & BORONIA: The women's prison programme was not quite so smooth this year. Two workshops were successfully completed in Boronia, one in Bandyup. Mostly due to smaller numbers to draw from, with more frequent turnovers in the prison population, and with venue problems, it seems difficult to establish AVP strongly in either prison. It may be necessary to be more creative about the length of workshops we offer, in order to fit in more easily with the arrangements, in both places.

Some useful liaison was carried out by our diligent facilitators, which may bear fruit in future.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS: We had two firsts in this department.

1. Bridgetown: a successful Basic workshop was held in May. Unfortunately, a follow-up workshop had to be cancelled due to illness in the family of our main contact person. But we hope to resume the programme there during the coming year.
2. An Interfaith workshop was held during November, after a great deal of groundwork was done by the facilitator in charge of that area. We felt that it is so important during these troubled times, for people of different faiths to get together to create understanding and respect. We based our hopes on the successful programmes in New South Wales, and were fortunate to have special training sessions in adapting the general AVP format to the interfaith situation from a Sydney facilitator. The ensuing workshop was very successful, and we hope to continue with this initiative.

Other community workshops occurred at Subiaco's Outback Centre, now a regular and comfortable venue for us, and at the Hills Community Support Group.

FACILITATORS:

We welcomed five new inmate facilitators at Acacia (already mentioned) and three new facilitators in the community. Ongoing training has been offered at our monthly sessions, covering a wide range of topics, including challenging behaviours, processing of exercises, and transforming power.

This year we ran a weekend training workshop which was useful for building community between facilitators, and which dealt with substantial issues of role plays (why we do them; how we do them) and peer review. For the latter activity, we teamed into small groups of three, and first of all suggested points of self-awareness about our roles as facilitators, then invited feedback from our two colleagues. This produced some interesting learning edges, delivered in friendly and respectful terms, and is something to which we intend to give attention on an annual basis.

Two facilitators attended the National Gathering in Sydney during the summer, where there was lively interest in the Interfaith workshops. This cross-fertilization is valuable for the continuing health of the organisation. We are pleased that three facilitators will be attending the International Gathering in Africa in September. We are able to give limited financial support to them, and also to the organising committee to assist facilitators from African countries to participate.

PRESENTATIONS:

There were numerous requests for information sessions about AVP/Peaceful Pathways. These “tasters” are conducted like mini workshops i.e. they are experiential sessions, rather than just talks about our programme. They generate interest in the programme, and sometimes result in a group requesting a purpose-built workshop for their organisation (as happened over the last eighteen months with the Hills Community Support Group). We always model the team approach, and usually manage to have a gathering, one substantial exercise, a light and lively, followed by a question session.. They vary in numbers of people and time available. The most recent of these “tasters” occurred at Dove on Fire, a weekend workshop on nonviolence conducted by the W.A. Council of Churches.

HIPP – Help Increase the Peace:

It has been a challenging year for this part of our program which is offered to schools. It has been difficult to focus attention on this area of activity, so have not been able to work in as many schools as we had hoped. Workshops have been focussed mainly on Helena College Junior School, where the programme has been most successful. This provides a good model of positive outcomes when a large percentage of a

school population has participated in a workshop, with the strong support of the staff.

OFFICE MATTERS:

There were several working bees to organise the filing system (again!) and to streamline phone accessibility, especially in the run-up to workshops when registrations need to be processed.

We have had two issues of a very smart newsletter – a valuable means of informing our members and facilitators of upcoming events, and an important avenue for publishing comments/poems from participants. This provides a wonderful link between our community and inmate participants, and is also useful for interstate and international contact. Much of this communication is via websites and email, but some people still prefer to have a well presented document to browse and digest without being in front of the ubiquitous small screen.

FINANCES:

Thanks to our very generous anonymous donor, we are in a relatively comfortable financial position, hence our funding support for facilitators in poorer countries to attend the international gathering.

The new treasurer is on track with streamlining our accounts, receipts and bill payments.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY:

As well as the acacia end-of-year gathering, we have a community dinner, to which we invite families and partners of facilitators and members. It's held at the Quaker Meeting House in Mt. Lawley, where our office is located. This provides a friendly venue, suitable for indoor/outdoor eating, and a space big enough for the "light and livelies" which we all enjoy. There is good camaraderie amongst the active team, further enhanced this year by the weekend together at Guilderton, during which we tried out a new activities, – one called Toxic Waste was a great challenge!

CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

With the current level of energy and expertise in the group, we can look forward to another successful AVP year. Of course, we'd welcome greater input by greater numbers. We have a strong committee, but fresh energy is always desirable.

We know that AVP is a good package. We feel committed to it, but also to freshening up our approach to it, and particularly to finding ways to attract more people to actually participate. Over the years, we have noticed an increasing reluctance among the general public to spending three day weekends on any workshops. In women's prisons, the three days in a row seems to cause difficulties. So we need to be more flexible in the packages we can offer.... Perhaps shorter time frames, or one day a week over several weeks. We are looking at ways of changing our format without losing the impact of the AVP experience.

Our hope still remains that AVP can extend further into rural areas. Unfortunately, our South-West group has been severely depleted by two experienced facilitators moving interstate. However, we hope to re-ignite interest in Bridgetown, and perhaps other major towns as well.

Links to the Aboriginal community is another area of interest for the future. Beginnings have been made with "tasters" at the Moorditj school in Midvale and a basic training workshop with the organisers of the Kutta Kutta group. We are reminded that a special workshop for Aboriginal social workers some years ago was received very positively, with no recommendations for special changes – the sharing of stories in circles was especially noted as culturally appropriate.

With gratitude to all those who work so diligently to make AVP a happy and effective programme –

Jo Vallentine
Chairperson
22/3/06