

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT WA INC

Annual Report of the Chair for 2021

Introduction

2021 was the 27th year of the Alternatives to Violence Project in WA. We had some challenges, but overall it was a busy and most successful year. In summary some of our achievements are listed below:

- Have run 44 workshops.
- Held training session in and out of prison
- Have trained inmate and outmate facilitators
- Have run workshops in the Pilbara
- Helped run workshops in Alice Springs
- Have had regular committee meetings
- Maintained a current website
- Maintained an active Facebook page
- Circulated regular newsletters to facilitators and supporters
- Considered and responded to last year's ECU report
- Wrestled with prison clearances and decided not to charge for prison workshops
- A treasurer managing several different accounts
- A part time administrator
- Had a facilitated committee Health Check
- Have helped organise and participated in national and international gatherings
- Written concise manuals for training
- Produced written policies and procedures
- Sat on national and international committees

Workshops

We held a total of forty four workshops during the year in prisons and the community. Twenty nine of our community facilitators were involved in at least one of these workshops. Details can be found in the administrators report.

We also tried to activate the program in South Hedland but found it difficult to attract participants from the general public so all our workshops have been held during work time with participants who have been paid to attend. It also means that trained facilitators move according to work commitments. Currently we have just 2 facilitators there. After the cyclone season we also hope to arrange a series in Newman where we have a facilitator who trained in Perth many years ago then ran workshops at Bidydanga.

One of our facilitators travelled to Alice Springs to help with workshops there. They held one training for facilitators in the men's prison, one basic in the women's prison (with 9 indigenous women), one basic in the community over two Saturdays and one basic over six half day sessions with the Alternatives to Custody Programme.

Prisons Clearances (from the administrator's report)

From June 2020, we have had difficulties with prison clearances. The Department of Justice (Corrective Services) changed their process for clearance and we were not notified of this. Despite regular correspondence with the Department on this issue, there was no resolution. In July this year, I began corresponding with the

Superintendent Administration, Adult Male Prisons who informed me that AVP was not a contracted service and yet because we were charging fees from the prisons, we would need to be reclassified. A Committee decision was made to cease charging fees and therefore remain a non-contracted service. A new clearance form was designed, and then retracted, leaving no further avenue of obtaining new clearances for facilitators. In practice, this has limited the number of facilitators able to attend prison workshops.

New Facilitators

This year we have interviewed and accepted twenty nine inmate facilitators to help us run the program in prison. We also accepted seven new community facilitators.

Training Sessions

Our training sessions were held four times on a Saturday for community facilitators. These sessions included catered lunches and were valuable learning opportunities as well as a chance for facilitators to get to know one another. We also held a training day in Acacia prison with the inmate facilitators.

Facebook/Newsletter/Website

One of our challenges is getting information out to the general public as well as our own facilitators and supporters. I would like to thank Selene Moonbeams for her work with Facebook. We have daily inspiring and informative posts which have attracted the page a large following. We also boost various posts to target audiences and ensure that our community workshops are well organised. Selene has also produced several newsletters throughout the year. Thanks to Mark Newhouse for maintaining our website. This site is a font of information for the general public but also for AVP facilitators who can log into the members only area and access manuals and other training tools.

AVP Australia

This group which connects AVP people around Australia, has Zoom meetings on the second Wednesday of each month. We ensure that at least one of our committee attend each time. AVPWA largely organised and participated in a virtual Zoom conference in May and we are currently considering how to organise a similar conference for 2022. We hope to have a “hybrid” event where people gathering in person within their states and connect with each other via Zoom

AVP International

In late August AVP International held a virtual world gathering in which several AVPWA facilitators presented and participated. This was a wonderful example of how AVP has reacted to the challenges of the COVID pandemic. An excerpt from the report of that event:

Amid these challenges, AVP has adapted. Facilitators developed effective online workshops, allowing us to continue sharing the AVP program outside of our traditional in-person circles. In an amazing technical feat worthy of the United Nations, AVPI produced a 4-day World Gathering online in which 293 facilitators participated from 47 countries with simultaneous translation in 14 languages. The 2021 AVP World Gathering featured plenaries, workshops and world cafés ... over 75 opportunities for facilitators to share their AVP work and experience!

Many thanks to our local facilitator Sally Herzfeld who serves on several International committees:

- **International Co-ordinating Committee:** All sub committees report to this one.
- **International Research Committee:** collecting comments from AVP groups around the World about new ideas on the way AVP is run – when and how to cover the requirements for a certain level of workshop - The pros and cons of doing two hours one night each week for ten weeks and similar ideas.
- **International Education Committee:** working on a condensed manual which will cover the Basic, Advanced and T4F. They have our WA examples of condensed manuals. Facilitators are invited to join the Education Advisory Council, to share ideas.

The Committee

As AVPWA grows, the responsibilities of the committee increase. We try to operate by consensus, this being one of AVP fundamental values, which can be time consuming and frustrating.

Together we participated in a facilitated “Health Check” session in order to explore ways in which we work together and ways in which we may be able to improve our operation. As a result we agreed upon a set of operational guidelines centred round the AVP Mandala which we now have on display at committee meetings.

We also changed the way in which we present our agendas.

Our committee during the year was:

Jim Thom (Chairperson)
Bheena Sewnarian (Deputy Chairperson)
Collette Chester (Treasurer)
Nikola Maclennan (Minute Taker)
Selene Moonbeams (Ordinary Member)
Sally Herzfeld (Deputy Treasurer)
Sue Mulholland (Ordinary Member)
Mark Newhouse (Ordinary Member)

I would like to thank the 2021 committee for their hard work and commitment during the year.

The Future

The COVID 19 virus has been challenging at times and the Department of Justice requires that all those entering prison be fully vaccinated. We at AVPWA have also introduced a policy that all facilitators and participants in community workshops be vaccinated. It is likely that with the opening of WA's borders in February that we will be hit with the Omicron variant for a few months. It is difficult to predict the effect this will have on our workshops.

Something we are thinking about is how best to keep facilitators not on the committee engaged with the group. We will trial a new format to our training sessions this year in the hope of increasing attendance. We are working on holding a hybrid national conference later in the year and will encourage all facilitators to participate using Zoom.

In essence AVPWA continues to have a positive effect in Western Australia, particularly within the prison system. I am grateful to all our volunteer facilitators, both inmates and community, who put in the enthusiasm, energy and time to make the workshops happen.