

AVP in Western Australia

25 years of AVP in Western Australia

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AVP in Western Australia

A brief history of AVPWA

Perth in Western Australia (WA), with a population of over 2 million, is often described as the most remote capital city in the world. Here in 1994 AVP started to take hold. The beginnings of AVP are well described by Sally Herzfeld in her 2015 Backhouse Lecture “This We Can Do.” In WA the very first AVP workshops were run in 1994 by trained women facilitators from Queensland. Then in May 1995 Steve Angell, Ben Norris and Elaine Dyer helped Western Australia to do its first workshop in Casuarina Prison with local facilitators who had been trained by AVP Queensland



Jo Vallentine (WA), David Tehr (WA), Stephen Angell (USA), Louise Dyer (Aotearoa), Ben Norris (USA) and Merrill Stokes (WA). The first team to facilitate a workshop in a West Australian prison



Merril, David and Jo 25 years later

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Table - Tracking the establishment of AVP in WA

3.9.1992	Letter from Marion Leach, Manager Support Services, Outcare (WA), to Topsy Evans, Quaker Yearly Meeting Secretary requesting information about AVP and in which states it was operating.
8.9.192	Topsy Evans responds, advising of contacts in the eastern states as well as Ruth Watson, Clerk of WA Quaker meeting. Topsy is a supporter of AVP and hopes programme can begin in WA.
14.9.1992	Letter from Ruth Watson to Marion Leach advising that she intends to raise the possibility of AVP in WA at the Quaker Meeting for Business.
??	Correspondence has taken place to see if people from WA could go to Hobart to participate in AVP training.
9.2.1993	Letter from Ruth Watson to Terry Walker (Tasmania) advising decision to bring trainers from Eastern States to WA and that Gary Phillips is co-ordinating inquiries.
9.3.1993	Letter from Gary Phillips to Ruth Watson re AVP. Gary had attended an AVP workshop in Hobart.
3.4.1993	Letter from Gary Phillips to Ruth Watson advising that a group of Quakers had met on 1 st April 1993 to hear of his experience and discuss future possibilities.
28.6.1993	Letter from Jo Vallentine to Ruth Watson advising that she was happy to be the contact person between Quakers and Groundswell (Cheryl Lange) who were also interested in AVP.
27.1.1994	Letter from Ron Smith to Jo Vallentine discussing the issues when setting up an AVP programme.
7.2.1994	Letter from Ruth Watson to Louise Hunter inquiring if she would be available to travel to Perth to run workshops and develop facilitators for AVPWA.
No date	Letter from Louise Hunter to Ruth Watson indicating her willingness to travel to WA to conduct workshops.
Feb 1994	Article from Jo Vallentine in Quaker News discussing the value of AVP and asking for those interested to contact her.
Mar '94	Poster from Cheryl Lange to various social justice newsletters advising that an information session on AVP will be held at the Christian Centre for Social Action, 44 Denis St, Subiaco, on 24 th May 1994. Jo V. also sent it to Friends for distribution.
12.4.1994	Letter from Ruth Watson to Louise Hunter requesting confirmation in writing of her willingness to come to WA.
5.5.1994 Merril Stokes,	Inaugural meeting of Co-ordinating group for AVPWA (Jo Vallentine, Adrian Stevens, David Tehr, John Taplin)
9.5.1994	Letter from David Grodsky to Ron Smith expressing his delight at AVP in Australia.
24.5.1994	Meeting of co-ordinating group
15.6.1994	Meeting of co-ordinating group
25.7.1994	Meeting of co-ordinating group
24.8.1994	Meeting of co-ordinating group
9-11.9.1994	First AVP Basic workshop Louise Hunter and Jenny Miano
13-15.9.1994	Second AVP Basic workshop Louise Hunter and Jenny Miano
22.9.1994	Meeting of co-ordinating group

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Oct 1994 AVP Advanced and T4F workshops conducted Louise Hunter and Margaret Van Breemen

May 1995 First Basic workshop in Casuarina Prison (mainstream and protected prisoners) Stephen Angell, Elaine Dyer, Jo Vallentine, David Tehr, Merrill Stokes and Ben Norris

After Elaine and Steve we had further assistance from more experienced Eastern States facilitators to run community workshops and build up a pool of facilitators. For the first few years we held only a few workshops usually about eight. These early workshops were intense and long. We took them very seriously with thorough team preps and debrief sessions. We were, and still are, conscientious about adhering to AVP principles with regard to the team contract and feedback. Because everything was new it was exciting, but also exhausting. As we gained strength workshop numbers increased and for the past ten years we have held about 50 workshops a year. We run these workshops in various prisons, in schools and for the general community. One of our current tensions is how to balance efficiency with allowing time for thorough preparation, debriefs and reflections for each workshop. In line with “caring for others” and “respect for self” we have reduced the length of community workshops by 5 hours to 17 hours without any apparent loss of impact. This was because the longer workshops were very draining and it was difficult to get participants with busy lives to commit to such a full weekend.

AVP in Prisons

Facilitating workshops in prison is our core business. Our very first workshop was in the maximum security Casuarina prison. We decided to have participants from both the main prison as well as protected prisoners. Staff were apprehensive about this but allowed us to give it a go. The prisoners themselves were either apprehensive or uncomfortable, but agreement was reached to proceed with the workshop and see what happened. It was fascinating to watch the barriers come down as the workshop progressed. It was a great learning experience for the early facilitators about the power of AVP. Men who prior to the three day workshop would not tolerate each other's presence, were laughing and playing together. Listening to one another and seriously discussing issues of personal importance to them. We continued with this type of workshop for several years until new security issues following a riot in 1998 made it difficult for us to access the prison.

A challenge in working in prison for some of us was overcoming generally held prejudicial attitudes. That prisoners are bad people and deserve to be locked away from the rest of the community. This is particularly the case for high profile criminals whose crimes have been very well documented and are regularly rehashed by the media. One of the early insights that many facilitators have is that prisoners are people who may have done bad things. Sometimes their disadvantaged upbringing and social circumstances can be blamed. Sometimes they appear to be mentally ill, intellectually challenged or to not fully comprehend the idea of consequential behaviour. Very often they appear “just like us.” It becomes clear in the very first workshop that the AVP philosophy of Good in Everyone is so true and so important to state and to hold as a core belief as an AVP facilitator. Of course it is also important to remember that they are not perfect little angels and some may strive to gain personal advantage from what they may initially see as naive outsiders. This is something the prison staff stresses when doing inductions. Our organisation developed comprehensive guidelines for people going into prison with regard to behaviour and demeanour. We emphasise these to new facilitators and try to adhere to them, but we also try to treat the prisoners as equal human beings and, for those who go through all the workshops, as friends.

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We work in several prisons and have discovered that there are three major criteria that determine how well an AVP program will work in any particular facility. The first is that workshops are held regularly throughout the year. This leads to the second criterion of inmate facilitators. They are invaluable to having a vigorous ongoing program. Not only do they give each workshop more “street cred,” they also act as an example of what can be achieved for new participants on a basic workshop. Further they are of vital importance in spreading the word, enrolments and general workshop organisation. The third important factor for success is of course the prison staff. A champion in administration can be so valuable and help us to navigate sometimes incomprehensible and fluid rules. A sympathetic superintendent can remove otherwise insurmountable barriers.

Never during our twenty five year history of prison work have any of our facilitators experienced personal violence in prison. We have occasionally witnessed mild incidents between participants, but nothing that has required outside intervention. Sometimes we bring selected people in to train along with the prisoners, but we try to minimise this as it means that a prisoner on the waiting list will be unable to do the workshop. We do it because community workshops are few and we need to maintain our supply of outmate facilitators. Those who train in prison generally find it a powerful experience. Likewise community workshop participants are often pleasantly surprised and impressed to find that one of their team of facilitators is an ex-inmate. One of our recent successes is to gain permission for an ex-inmate to facilitate within the prison system. This provides a powerful example for the men inside.

We now regularly work in four WA prisons holding more than thirty workshops between them. We have tried, unsuccessfully, to establish ourselves in several others but have been unable to either due to lack of suitable facilities or lack of enthusiasm from the staff. We hold occasional workshops in remote prisons and help other states facilitate prison workshops. Our major site of operation is currently Acacia prison, a privately run maximum/medium security facility holding more than 1500 men. We advocated for workshops even prior to the opening of this prison in 2001. We were successful and now have a solid, programmed series of workshops annually with additional training days. We have a great team of inmate facilitators as well as some ex-inmates who now help us on the outside. Anecdotal reports from staff indicate that the program is effective and can cause significant behavioural changes in individual men. There is a long waiting list for basic workshops which is an indication of the popularity of the program.

AVP in Schools

The day before he was assassinated in 1968, Martin Luther King told Dr Lafayette to take non violence training to schools. At a US National Gathering in 2013, Dr Lafayette told our Australian representative that we had done just that! WA facilitators learnt from that person and other Eastern Staters and have run TIP (Towards Increasing the Peace 5-8yr olds), HIPP (Help Increase the Peace Project 9-12yr olds) and a Youth program for High School students since 2000. In Warnbro Community High School, the youth program was run for many years. Sometimes this was with separate nationality groups but mostly with mixed groups. The facilitators at that school had the program registered as an endorsed subject which meant that students who did the Basic, Advanced and T4F as well as keeping a journal about the program and how conflicts were solved, would gain a point for their WA Certificate of Education. We have done the youth program with The Girls Academy, in St Mary's and the Government High School in Broome. Near Perth, workshops have been done with Aboriginal youth groups, with a Muslim girls' holiday group, Sowillo High School, HALO school, Edmund Rice College in Bindoon, Maida Vale High School and at Helena College where three yr 11 girls have just

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completed the requirements for the WACE. Muslim women facilitators joined teams to present workshops to their upper primary students.

Since 2004, we have been doing HIPP at Helena College Junior School. For the last few years we have done Basic and Advanced levels with the full Year 4 class and then 6-8 students have been chosen to do the training for Facilitators. They are then on teams with adults to present the sessions in the following year. We have used puppets, dolls, plus cave men, witches and pirate costumes, to make the program exciting but the students have pleased and surprised us by their depth of understanding and their quick answers. Some of the ten year old facilitators could demonstrate some useful techniques to adult facilitators. They showed this at the 2017 National Gathering in Perth when they ran a session. They also have us fully involved at a training before the WA AGM each year.

AVP in the Kimberley

In September 2009 after advertising to local groups and churches a taster was held in the Broome community, then Jo Vallentine and Peter Fry with two visiting facilitators from England did a workshop with prisoners, most of whom were Aboriginal. It was held on a veranda and some of the drawings were done in the red dirt. After that many workshops were held in the Broome community and the prison. Locally trained facilitators with experienced ones from Perth when needed travelled out to communities like Beagle Bay, Balgo, Noonkenbah, Bidyidanga and Wankatjunka. With the support of Astrid Gerrits, Community workshops were held in the Anglicare buildings, TAFE and at Outcare with staff and clients from groups such as Alive and Kicking Goals, Men's Outreach and Anglicare as well as the two high schools. In 2011, we started in the new Derby prison (West Kimberley Regional Prison) and did many workshops and trained inmate facilitators amongst the separate men's and women's sections there until 2016. Staffing shortages then made that difficult. We also did one at Milliyamara which is a rehab centre. Most of the participants in the Kimberley workshops were Aboriginal and we used their suggestions to change the Mandala and words used during workshops to suit those people.

There is still a great need in the communities and it is hoped that at least 2 facilitators from somewhere can live in communities like the Fitzroy Valley and spread the AVP there.

AVP in the Pilbara

At the request of Trevor Clifton whose country is in the Pilbara, we started doing workshops there in Nov. 2016 in the Bloodwood Tree Association buildings with their staff. Wendy Cawdell became a facilitator there and was the main supporter for many workshops in that first 18 months. We trained two groups of facilitators there and then at the end of the year the Well Women's Centre began hosting workshops. We did two series there from Nov. '17 to Oct '18. When we began in Port Hedland, we hoped that we would train enough facilitators to be able to start in the prison at Roebourne. The challenge is to get participants in the town who are free to travel out to communities. Most people we have trained have done it as Professional Development and are fully employed. There are very few self funded retirees in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions. In 2019 we have done some workshops with the IBN group which supports the Yinhawangka, Banyjima and Nyiyaparli people and have just started a series with the Youth Involvement Council which hopes to train facilitators to work with the young people around town and in the outlying communities.

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AVP in the north of WA was made more difficult due to the remoteness of the communities, difficulties of accommodation and transport. Many individual facilitators were involved and donated a lot of time and personal expense to the effort.

Challenges and Successes

Working together

The early AVP committee consisted of about eight enthusiastic new facilitators. The first prison workshops had been transformative for some of us as well as for the participants. It became clear that AVP was not just about workshops but was a philosophy for living. We operate by consensus and still to this day we have never voted on an issue, but talked and listened to one another, trying to adhere to the AVP philosophy and reminding each other of this. We had very little funding initially and people were very generous with both their time and money in order to keep things going.

One thing that gave us a bit of trouble was the issue of feedback. It is a critical part of AVP to give and receive feedback. It is very important for change and improvement. We took it very seriously and post workshop debrief sessions could last for hours. Some of us were unused to such honesty. It had two effects. One was a sense of freedom and growth. A realisation that it is possible to be truthful and still maintain a friendship. The other was learning how important it is that feedback is given sensitively, tentatively and constructively. We were not all immune to feelings of hurt and anger when receiving feedback and this led to upsets within the group. I think we still wrestle with the delicate balance of when and how to give feedback.

We also had to learn to work with one another even if there had been difficulties in a previous workshop. It is important that issues are dealt with when they arise as honestly and as thoroughly as possible. We found early on that the facilitation team is a model for the whole group. Participants can sense if there is unrest within the team just as a happy well functioning team is likely to lead to a successful workshop. We are conscientious of reminding ourselves, and agreeing to, the team contract prior to every workshop. We strive to have a group of facilitators from which we can draw any combination to form a team. Occasionally however personality clashes prohibit this.

We now have about 25 facilitators who actively facilitate every year and another 15 or so who keep in touch and hope to facilitate but are often too busy. It is from this group that we form our management committee every year. In line with AVP principles it is volunteer self only. Amazingly this has proved to be an efficient and effective way of working. The committee is engaged, enthusiastic and conscientious. We meet monthly for about two hours and have a process for making urgent decisions by email between meetings. We have developed policies over the years as the need has arisen. Things like workshop numbers, prison guidelines, spending guidelines etc. However these have not yet been systematically documented or adhered to. We prefer now to use the term “best practice” recognising that we have to be flexible, not too rigid. Alternatively we want to guard against practices and situations that are potentially harmful or damaging to workshop process or participants. Thinking about best practice is a continuing challenge for us.

Training

We have always held regular training sessions. Initially they were held after management committee meetings but more recently we have been having them on a separate day, less often, but for longer with a shared meal included to allow for social interaction. Training is important to keep our knowledge up to date to practice skills such as presenting and processing. Occasionally we have experts to talk on particular topics but more often we find we have

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sufficient knowledge and expertise within our own group. These sessions are also important for us to get to know each other which makes working on teams much easier. They are also a way of maintaining connection with those people whose busy lives prevent them from being able to facilitate many workshops. Those who volunteer to coordinate training usually ask all facilitators which topics they would like to be covered at the start of the year and design the training program based on the results.

In the prison where we do most workshops we have training days twice a year with the inmate facilitators. These are very valuable sessions and often a good way for a new outmate facilitator to experience going in to a prison for the first time. We ask the inmates which topics they feel would be of value and concentrate on these. In the past these sessions have been with mixed mainstream and protected prisons but at the moment the mainstream facilitators are opposed to mixing the two. This is a dilemma since we have to meet with each group separately and it dilutes the time we spend training. Also however it encourages the prejudice and goes against the philosophy of “we are all equal.”

National and international aspects

Each year, we have sponsored WA facilitators to attend the Australian National Gatherings. These have been called National Training Gatherings or Regional Training Gatherings. For the last few years representatives from our New Zealand and Asian groups have joined us and enriched the International feeling of AVP. New ideas and trainings are shared at these Gatherings. In WA, we have held one in 2012 and 2017. Both of these have been inspirational as far as learning goes, but also very community building for our own group. Internationally, we have part sponsored 2 or more of our members to attend the last 6 International Gatherings in New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, Guatemala, Ireland and Nepal. The sharing of ideas and the strengthening of our own commitment to AVP makes this so worthwhile. We have benefited from joining local teams to facilitate workshops before and after the IGs. Imagine the personal value and learning one receives from doing workshops with children in one country, teachers at a university in another, people from refugee camps in another and so on. One of our members also joined another Australian woman to do 6 workshops in various places and with different types of groups around the Philippines.

AVP WA has always had a representative taking part in the avp-aus-network skype meetings. We have also had members on International Committees such as Education, Best Practices, Manual writing, a special committee to discuss the ownership and distribution of manuals worldwide, and IG planning. Sally Hderzfeld was co-ordinator of the organising committee for the Guatemalan IG and found it to be a great learning experience about our AVP world, its people and similarities as well as the use of AVP principles during committee meetings. The International Aspect of AVP is very important.

Selecting Facilitators

When we run a training for facilitators' workshop we have a brainstorm on “what qualities would you like in a fellow team member?” None of us can live up to the long list that is generated which of course is one of the great benefits of team facilitation. However we sometimes have difficulty in deciding which individuals are suited for facilitation. Throughout the series of workshops we emphasise that not everyone will be able to become a facilitator but when it comes to the crunch it is difficult to tell someone that we do not wish them to be a facilitator. It can be very hurtful and disillusioning for the individual and we have a duty of care to let them down gently.

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We have an interview process of about half an hour during which we ask them some standard questions and maybe some specific questions about things we have observed as they did the workshops. We also give them opportunity to ask us questions. The interviewing team, usually two or three, with one being an inmate if we are in a prison, then sends a recommendation round the committee and if there is consensus we send a letter to the candidate. The interviews are by invitation and if there is an individual of whom we are very wary we would not invite them to be interviewed. We also ask participants if they want to be interviewed with a view to becoming a facilitator and some choose to opt out at that stage. New community facilitators also receive a letter letting them know about our Facebook and website.

We never reject anyone outright. Our main criteria for not accepting someone would be that they could work against a successful workshop outcome. Perhaps they use violent imagery or allusions. Maybe they are overtly sexist or racist. In these cases we would tell them we felt they were not ready to facilitate and suggest they enrol in further workshops. If a candidate has limited understanding of AVP, an intellectual disability or poor language skills we would offer them a position of “assistant.” These people are part of the AVP facilitator community and come to trainings and celebrations. They can, if they chose, with administrative tasks and participant enrolments. There is also opportunity for them to move on to apprentice facilitator should their ability improve.

We also bear in mind that facilitators do not have to be highly skilled, knowledgeable, articulate and charismatic. Mainly they have to be committed to nonviolence and enthusiastic about the AVP philosophy. In some ways having a team member who is shy or who is illiterate can say a lot about how we work and be encouraging to potential future facilitators in the workshop.

In prisons, during the interview process, we emphasise how AVP facilitators are representatives of the program and its philosophy. If an inmate facilitator has a violent charge we like to re-interview them and would perhaps ask them to do another workshop as a participant before facilitating again. This rarely happens and we have found that inmate AVP facilitators walk the talk and have the respect of their fellow prisoners.

Both in the prison and in the community new facilitators are appointed as “apprentice” facilitators, stressing that there is still much to learn which will come from real workshop experience. This label is never officially removed. It is up to the individual to decide that they are now experienced and some like to think they are always “apprentices.”

Retaining Facilitators

A challenge for us is keeping people engaged once they have been accepted as facilitators. We run training sessions several times a year and try to get as many people as possible to attend. These sessions also have a shared meal and social aspect to them. However people drift off after completing the training for reasons that are unclear. Perhaps it is lack of involvement or perhaps they find that AVP is not for them.

To try to counter this loss of people we have a written process we try to follow for retention of community facilitators. This involves firstly to be welcoming to them and to try to help them feel part of the group. Secondly we try to remember to give them airspace in the group as well as encourage them to volunteer to be part of workshop teams and for roles in training sessions. Finally we assign each new person a mentor whose role it is to maintain contact with the new person and if possible be on the first team with them. The mentorship role continues for 6 – 12 months. It is a delicate balance of between being supporting and encouraging and being too persistent and enthusiastic. We also try to keep people informed through a regular newsletter

and regular emails inviting them to volunteer for workshop teams. We have an active Facebook page and a website with information and educational resources. There are also national and international email discussion groups that facilitators can join.

We have found that facilitating workshops is the most effective way to retain facilitators. An AVP workshop as a team member can be a profound and rewarding experience. Also by the end one usually feels much closer to the other team members and therefore more likely to want to remain part of the group. It is important then that new people are offered a chance to facilitate soon after they qualify.

Ex-inmates are a particular challenge. While in prison many men are enthusiastic about the program and fully intend to continue with it on release. However in reality most come along only once or twice to training sessions. It may be that the program reminds them of their time inside and they want to move on with their lives. Having said that, we have a few ex-inmates who have become regular team members, some even going back inside prisons to run workshops. This gives a very powerful message to participants.

Dispute resolution

As with any group difficulties and disagreements arise from time to time. As an organisation whose goals are the peaceful resolution of conflict it is important that we acknowledge and deal with our internal conflicts openly and honestly. We have mostly been successful in this but failures have also occurred with occasional people, having or choosing, to leave the organisation. We do not have a specific dispute resolution procedure thinking that AVP philosophy is our guide in all that we do. Honesty and courage are key factors in firstly admitting to a disagreement and subsequently taking steps to try to resolve it. Sometimes this can be simply between two individuals but more often we would have other facilitators sit in to witness and contribute in a relatively objective manner.

What sort of things cause disputes in a group that works towards peaceful solutions? One is feedback. Although we all agree to give and receive feedback sometimes we are not as “grown up” as we would like to be and feedback can cause lingering resentments unless we fully process and deal with it. Another thing is that on teams we can feel that a fellow team member is treading on our toes and taking over an exercise we are facilitating.

Funding

Initially we received support from the Religious Society of Friends. We used the Quaker Meeting House as our base for meetings and training sessions, something that continues to the present day. Several of our first facilitators were Quakers. Today most of our facilitators do not identify as Quakers but there remains a strong link between the two groups. Early funding which enabled us to run the first community workshops came from the Mercy Foundation. Also the facilitators were generous with their own money and often paid for supplies, food and petrol from their own finances. We also charged participants in community workshops on a sliding scale depending on their ability to pay but always emphasised that money should not be the factor deciding their participation. Those who could not afford to pay were encouraged to be part of the workshop free of charge. We charged prisons a fee to cover our travelling costs and workshop supplies. During the first few years our bank balance never exceeded a few hundred dollars.

Twenty years ago we were invited to apply for funding from an anonymous benefactor. We did this through a legal firm representing the donor and received a grant from them. We have had this grant, in increasing amounts, ever since. We have considerable freedom in how we spend this money, the only conditions being that it forwards the aims and objectives of AVP and

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that we submit a comprehensive annual report. This has been of tremendous benefit to us. It has allowed us to employ a part time administrator who organises workshops and teams. This person also liaises with prison administration and other officials. They ensure our supplies are up to date, workshop kits are prepared and many other tasks as necessary.

Because of this we now have a bigger team of facilitators and run over 50 workshops a year in several different prisons. We can also afford to pay facilitators travel costs and send a limited number to national and international AVP gatherings. We have also been able to assist with the establishment of AVP in other Australian states and support groups that have only a few facilitators and sometimes find it difficult to get a workshop off the ground.

Celebration

We adhere to the philosophy that it is important for groups to celebrate. We have an annual end of year party. When an ex-prisoner is released and joins us on the outside we have a cake. We celebrate milestones such our 5th, 10th etc anniversaries. We recently celebrated our 25th anniversary which was attended by both current and former facilitators.



The 25th reunion of AVPWA Sept 2019

The training sessions include a shared meal to try to encourage people to get to know one another. Occasionally they are themed such as an international session where people come representing their country of origin. We have from time to time had a weekend away together and these have been very powerful bonding experiences which were a mixture of AVP learning, relaxation, fun, games and excessive food ingestion!

We also try to make our final training session in the prison be a year end celebration.

Women's Prisons

One of our visions is to have an established program in women's prisons. We have run a few workshops in a couple of women's facilities but have been unable to get a stable program established.

There are particular reasons why women's prisons have proved difficult. One is that most women prisoners have shorter sentences, and therefore less likely to be shut off from family and outside contacts. Our experience is that women are still very tuned in to their family issues on the outside. On a daily basis, they are concerned about their kids. Who's looking after them? What if they are sick? What if Granny (often the carer) gets sick? Secondly, if they have a prison job, there is great reluctance to give it up, even for the few days of the workshop, or to find someone else to fill in for them. Thirdly, the emphasis is often on preparing for release making their own medical appointments, figuring out budgeting, shopping for the family etc., and this is all very important. Another factor we found in both the women's prisons we tried in Perth, is that the Administration was not as helpful as in men's prisons – they have their agendas, and plans for the women, which it seemed, didn't stretch to the kind of personal empowerment which AVP offers. Also, in one prison in particular, it was extremely difficult to find a space large enough for a group to function without a lot of passing traffic/interruptions from other inmates.

After several of these hurdles became routinely obvious, we decided we should concentrate on prisons where we do get Administration support, where there are reasonable facilities, and where there is a willing population of inmates, prepared to try something different. It seemed like we were wasting a lot of time trying to manage difficult situations, whilst at the same time, there were men queuing up in prisons with positive interactions with administration.

We did quite a few successful women's workshops and trained facilitators in the Derby prison. Sally flew to Broome on Sundays, was met and driven to Derby by Damien Monado. They did Mon, Tues all day and Wed morning in the men's section and then Wed afternoon, Thurs and Fri all day in the women's prison before driving back to Broome. The full days were 8.30 -4.00 except on the Friday when they finished at about 2.30.

Staying Grass Roots

Our early workshops were very carefully planned and very thoroughly debriefed. We were keen to try new processes from the manual. But we only ran a few workshops each year. Now we have significantly increased our workload each workshop does not get as much attention and it is necessary to be more efficient and less analytical. There is a tension here in the balance between getting the workshops done and maintaining the authenticity and uniqueness of each workshop. It is still the first time the participants have experienced AVP and we want to make it as special as possible. New facilitators working with more experienced ones often comment that we do things different ways. This has led us to develop policies which can lead to a certain rigidity that is not always appropriate. An example is the number of participants needed for a basic workshop on which we have different opinions. We have a policy for which states the minimum number but on the day there may be less. We often go ahead anyway since those who came have given up their weekend in order to do the workshop. Very likely the workshop is successful even though we went against the policy. We now call our policies "best practice" and accept that there has to be flexibility but still need to guard against extremes for example a workshop with only two participants. We do not want to become a cumbersome bureaucratic

organisation but neither do we want to drop standards so that we no longer adhere to the AVP core values.

How Does it Work?

What happens in an AVP workshop that can it make it life changing? Most of the exercises and process are relatively simple and sometimes used in other settings. The unique features of AVP seem to be its philosophy, its experiential nature, the concept of transforming power, the emphasis on the importance of listening and perhaps most importantly, the formation of a warm and safe community in which participants, and facilitators, can disclose their fears, anxieties and disappointments. When people speak honestly and are listened to deeply personal insights and epiphanies are more likely to occur. This is one of the most rewarding experiences for an AVP facilitator when a participant has an “ah-ha” moment that they share with the group. Often the power of the experience comes through to the group.

Currently in WA we have a research project being undertaken in one of prisons on the efficacy of AVP. But we have a lot of positive anecdotal feedback. We get this from the participants themselves but also from prison staff who note that individuals have changed and sometimes that the prison culture itself has changed since the introduction of AVP. We also see change in individuals ourselves. Sometimes a man who was disinterested and cynical in a basic workshop, goes on to become an enthusiastic facilitator and ambassador for AVP.

Past Chairpersons of AVPWA

1994 – 1997 Merril Stokes

1998 – 2001 Roger Walmsley

2002 – 2005 Jim Thom

2006 – 2007 Jo Vallentine

2008 – 2009 Shane Bailey

2010 - 2012 Anna Alderson

2013 – 2015 Amy Thom

2016 - Murray Axford

2017 – 2020 Selene Moonbeams

Personal Reflections from the Authors

Jo Vallentine

I love the capacity of AVP’s robust program to induce laughter. Every workshop I’ve been in, there has been a lot of laughter (and sometimes tears – optional) but the laughter, not at anyone’s expense, but at the silly situations which are created, especially by the “light and livelies”, is life-affirming and you can feel it being good for you, body and soul! It’s also really special to see people who might come into the workshop apprehensive, gradually unfold into full participation. And witnessing “ahaa” moments as they occur for participants gives great satisfaction. When the workshop deepens into really serious reflections also is rewarding. And the role plays! Sometimes you just can’t imagine certain people taking on a role very different

from their reality, but when they do, it's absolutely wonderful, can be insightful, and often funny!

But I must also admit that sometimes, when getting up very early for the long drive to a prison, knowing that it's going to be for three days running, I think of other things I could be doing. But usually, as soon as we truly "gather" in the group, I know it's exactly where I'm meant to be at that moment.

Merril Stokes

Many people come from families or places where there is a lot of strife and tension. We know these days that constant anxiety reduces our ability to fully develop all our intellectual, emotional, psychological and spiritual capacities. It clouds lives with fear, self-consciousness and a lack of belief in oneself. My early life reflected that reality. It can leave you feeling as if you are living out of a deficit that is hard to define. You don't know what you have missed so you don't know what you need to learn. It is hard to step forth in confidence because you might make a mistake. Eventually I realized that even if I made a fool of myself, I needed to address that fear and 'have a go'.

When AVP came along the idea of non-violence sat well with me so I readily participated in the workshops without being sure of just what I would be experiencing. I have often explained my experience of AVP as learning something foundational about how to live a 'good' life, a principled life of integrity. It filled in some of those old gaps. I wanted to continue to expose myself to all the learning that AVP offered and I believed that so many others would benefit from participating in the workshops. I decided that I would do anything I could to make sure that AVP continued in WA.

The AVP community contains a group of people 'having a go' and doing the best that they can. It is not a community of saints; it is designed to be inclusive. AVP requires self-reflection; it requires me to think about my personal practice; it requires me to think about what I 'hand on' to others in the way I speak or behave; it requires me to respect myself; it requires me to 'think before reacting'. I am part of AVP because it is not a teaching model. The AVP philosophy calls us to seek the wisdom of the group; to build people up; to allow others to experience their talents; to show that we are all in the process of 'becoming'; that it is never too late to change. Most importantly we are called to demonstrate non-violence in all parts of our lives not just in the workshops. I have placed myself in many situations on that road to 'becoming' and found none more enriching than AVP.

Jim Thom

My first AVP workshop was in 1995. My thoughts as I drove to the venue were "why am I doing this – it's just not me?" I had been persuaded to go by the enthusiasm of a friend who thought it all sound wonderful although he himself had opted not to actually do the workshop. Anyway I went in and there was a lady sitting at a desk."How much do I pay?" I said. "How much would you like to pay?" was the response. That's when I first suspected that this was going to be different to other workshops that I had attended in my professional life.

When I got into the hall I saw several people I knew and I also knew the team members. I felt comfortable and glad to be there. This became more pronounced as the workshop progressed. I was right – It was different – not a single Powerpoint or overhead slide. Butcher's paper predominated and there were even some spelling mistakes. Wonderful! What there was in abundance was enthusiasm and authenticity.

Over the six sessions the community feeling in the room developed and grew strong. I think it is that community feeling that has kept me with AVP for so long. It's almost magical and

AVP in Western Australia

I have never been in a workshop where it didn't happen at least to a certain extent. People from that first workshop have remained lifelong friends and I have decided that AVP IS me after all.

Sally Herzfeld

It's the peacemaking and multicultural aspect that got me interested in the first place. Because AVP is a world wide organisation, I have been able to enjoy and benefit from the International Gatherings with pre and post gathering workshops in those countries. In the Philippines, it was a great learning experience to be able to try almost the same activities with various groups from lower primary school to university lecturers. If the facilitator asks the questions, the group sets the level. As an ex school teacher who used experiential methods in the classrooms, I have enjoyed doing HIPP in the primary schools and the Youth program with high school or similar aged students around Australia. Adapting the agendas and the Mandala so that they were most relevant to Aboriginal people in our North and the Northern Territory has been interesting, but proved the fact, that *every* group is different even if they are from the same race. Sometimes when wondering if the large effort needed to run a workshop is worthwhile, I remind myself of the time a prisoner from another country, came on day 3 of a Basic looking almost excited. He said that for the first time, he felt like a person who was liked by others, "I am not just a criminal! There is hope for me!" Of course, as a member of several groups, I also find AVP methods very useful for me in committee meetings.

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Author Bios

Jim Thom: Born in Scotland, Jim emigrated to Australia in his early twenties. He worked most of his life in as a scientist in a hospital haematology laboratory. When he started AVP in 1995 it was a stark contrast to his professional life, but an activity he found surprisingly rewarding. He has worked mainly in community and prison workshops.

Sally Herzfeld. I was born near Perth WA and had a very interesting teaching career with Aboriginal children in our North and then for over 40 years with an Independent school near Perth. Apart from helping with a women's refuge and with refugee women, my main interest after retiring has been with AVP. I've enjoyed workshops in different countries before and after World Gatherings. Apart from workshops in prisons and communities in Australia, I'm lucky to be able to also do youth and HIPP programs in primary and secondary schools.

Merril Stokes. Merrill was part of the initiating group of AVPWA in 1994. She was inspired by visiting facilitators who helped to establish the group such as Steve Angell, Louise Hunter and Elaine Dyer. Merrill was the first chairperson of AVPWA and the philosophy of AVP has been an important part of her life ever since.

Jo Vallentine. Stephen Angell spoke about AVP at an International Quaker conference in Tokyo in 1985. I was inspired! But AVP had to go on a back-burner until 1994 when I was one of a group to get AVP going in Western Australia. It's been an amazing journey of personal growth, laughter and tears, with the organisation flourishing within our large state. Much dedication and living the guidelines have been key factors to our success. It's also been rewarding to support AVP's growth in other far-flung places. My favourite aspect has been prison workshops, and especially the full circle which occurs when inmate facilitators exit prison and work with us in the community workshops.