

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT WA INC

Annual Report of the Chair for 2023

Introduction

2023 was the 29th year of the Alternatives to Violence Project in WA. We had some challenges, but overall it was a busy and successful year. In summary some of our achievements are listed below:

- Have run 39 workshops.
- Organised a national gathering
- Negotiated a change of administrator
- Held training sessions in and out of prison
- Have trained inmate and community facilitators
- Have had regular committee meetings
- Maintained a current website
- Maintained an active Facebook page
- Circulated regular newsletters to facilitators and supporters
- Continued to wrestle with prison clearances
- A treasurer managing several different accounts
- Updated our written policies and procedures
- Sat on national and international committees
- Attended several expos and festivals to promote AVP

Thanks to all

This year in particular it has become evident to me how much appreciation and gratitude is due to the members of AVP and its supporters. We give our time voluntarily to run workshops mostly within the prison system. It is true that there are rewards in seeing a community form during the process and observing the changes in individual participants as they have personal insights into their current and past behaviours. However each workshop requires considerable effort, time and focus. On top of this we are all wrestling with difficult issues in our own lives.

I would like to thank:

- All facilitators both inmates and community for their dedication.
- Our funders who have generously supported us over many years
- The staff at the various prisons in which we work who help us navigate the sometimes complex regulations
- The Religious Society of Friends who allow us to use their premises as an office base and for some functions

Workshops

We held a total of thirty nine workshops during the year which was an increase of ten on the previous year. Of these:

- 12 were in Acacia Prison
- 6 in Karnet Prison
- 7 in Bunbury Prison

- 8 in Wooroloo Prison
- 6 in the community

2 scheduled prison workshops at Acacia were cancelled due to a fire. 7 community workshops were cancelled due to lack of participants.

18 community facilitators and 29 inmate facilitators actively participated in workshop teams.

Northwest Workshops

Although most of our workshops are in the metropolitan area we realised that since 2009 we have carried out more than 60 workshops in the Kimberley and Pilbarra regions of WA. Most of these have been in Broome, Port Hedland and Derby. But a few were in small communities such as Wangkutjunga, Balgo and Bidyadanga. Our most recent workshops were held in Newman in December. We hope soon to have sufficient skilled facilitators in that area to run the workshops independently.

Change of Administrator

Many thanks to Mark Newhouse who has been our administrator for almost 10 years. During this time Mark made a tremendous difference by updating our manuals, producing concise manuals and improving prison liaison, to mention but a few of his achievements. Mark relinquished the role in June but fortunately he remains a member of the organisation. Collette Chester took on the position for six months but has now resumed the role of treasurer. Our new administrator for 2024 is Selene Moonbeams

Prisons Clearances

Still in 2023 obtaining clearances for our outmate facilitators proved to be a major challenge. The Department of Justice are assessing our program and hope to be able to re-issue clearances by March 2024. We organised a meeting with the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services to see if they had influence in this area but they were unable to help

Facilitator Days

We held facilitator days for community facilitators as well as three in Acacia prison and one in Wooroloo.

Our final community one was a “Sallybration.” This was a tribute to Sally Herzfeld who has been a facilitator for many years. Not only that, she will continue as a committee member in 2024. However she has decided that it is time for her to scale back some of her AVP commitments. Sally has facilitated workshops in most Australian states as well as some overseas. She has also been an active member of several international AVP committees

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 a large following. We also boost various posts to target audiences and ensure that our community workshops are well organised. Thanks also to Selene for producing the newsletter. She now does this on a monthly basis which gives more regular information to our members. Our website is a fount 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 attends each time.

The National Gathering

AVPWA organised a national gathering in October.

It was stimulating and fun. It was a hybrid event with most of the sessions being available virtually as well as those of us there in person. Usually there were about 15 of us in the room with a few more on the screen. The sophisticated “Meeting Owl” technology in the Quaker Meeting House was a great boon! It was good to meet in person after the COVID epidemic prevented this for the last few years.

Highlights were meeting new people, conversations over meals, learning how different groups do things and a visit to Acacia Prison. We met with the mainstream facilitators in the morning and the protection men in the afternoon. It was inspiring to hear from them the benefits our program brings to inmates.

We had post gathering evaluations from 15 people who had participated. All appreciated the gathering. There are a few ideas to consider for another time. Perhaps a residential venue, a smoother way of catering and more expert facilitation of the live and virtual participants.

The Committee

Our committee worked together well and respectfully during the year. There was lots of enthusiasm and sharing of the workload. We have adapted to hybrid meetings where a proportion of members attend virtually. This is facilitated by the use of the “Meeting Owl” technology lent to us by the Religious Society of Friends.

Our committee during the year was:

Jim Thom (Chairperson)

Sue Reid (Deputy Chairperson)

Collette Chesters (Treasurer)

Sue Mulholland (Minute Taker – first six months)

Sallie Hosking (Minute Taker – final six months)

Sally Herzfeld (Deputy Treasurer)

Selene Moonbeams (Member)

Jacob Gunnink (Member – co-opted in December)

I would like to thank the 2023 committee for their hard work and commitment during the year.

Our Challenges

Challenges for the coming year are:

- 1) Difficulties in obtaining prison clearances from the Department of Justice.
- 2) Training new facilitators in the community. Although our administrator has an extensive publicity strategy for community workshops we still find it difficult to attract participants.
- 3) Retaining the engagement of new facilitators, both within the community and on release from prison. This is exacerbated by the challenge of difficulty with prison clearance in that new facilitators face a considerable delay before they can facilitate inside.

The Future

I am optimistic about the future for AVPWA because we are a group of volunteers motivated mainly by a desire for peace and an enjoyment of the workshop processes which bring a group of diverse participants together into a cohesive community. The committee and others in the group generally are willing to put in a lot of thought and effort to overcome such challenges.

We intend to form a separate group to focus on our publicity and promotions strategy so that we can run more workshops in the community, train more facilitators and have more people available to run prison workshops.

We have also been approached by a school that are keen for us to run our programme with the year 9 students. We are in negotiations with Albany Prison to see if we can run workshops there.

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.

Jim Thom
Chairperson AVPWA
16th February 2024