Summary of research on the effectiveness of the Alternatives to Violence Project **(AVP**).
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A. History and Description of the AVP Program

The Alternatives to Violence Project began in 1975 when a group of inmates at Greenhaven Prison in NY asked the Quakers to help them in their efforts to keep community youthful offenders from spending most of their lives, like they were, within the prison system. They asked local Quakers to help them develop a program which would teach these youth how to resolve conflicts nonviolently. A number of the men and women involved in the Quaker Project on Community Conflict responded to their request, and devised the first prison workshop, held at Greenhaven Prison in 1975 (Schuford, 1993).

The success of the AVP workshop quickly spread by word of mouth. More workshops were offered, and the program spread rapidly throughout the New York State prison system. Within a few years, it had spread to other prison systems throughout the country. Workshops began to be offered, not only in prisons, but in communities and schools, and also for some businesses, churches, community associations, street gangs, and in women's shelters and other locales. Today AVP workshops are being offered in 41 US states, and in over 38 countries around the world (www.AVPUSA.org).

The AVP program consists of three levels of 2-3 day workshops: a Basic Workshop, an Advanced Workshop, and A Training for Facilitators Workshop. The Advanced Workshop is more intense than the Basic Workshop, and focuses on a few areas chosen by the workshop participants - covering such topics as anger, bias and stereotyping, forgiveness, relationship, communication, and in some countries, AIDS. The general design of each workshop is essentially the same, but the choice of many of the exercises used will vary with the choices of the workshop facilitators. In spite of this flexibility, the workshops are "amazingly and consistently successful" (Garver & Reitan, p 6). Garver & Reitan list 10 elements of an AVP workshop which they feel create the experience of a safe and challenging community, and which allow an AVP workshop to work every time. These include: 1)voluntarism, 2) teamwork, 3)ground rules, 4) transforming power, 5)learning by experience, 6) spiritual focus, 7) progressive focus and cumulative process, 8) light and livelies, 9) varied pace, and 10)feedback.

Basically each AVP workshop is an experiential workshop, based on a set of ground rules (no put downs; affirm self and others; listen and don't interrupt or speak too long; observe confidentiality; volunteer only yourself; right to pass) and a strategically designed series of exercises, including games called "light and livelies" which quickly build a community of safety and trust within the group, and allow the kind of open sharing that makes the workshop successful. An important ingredient of the program is the concept of "Transforming Power" which is believed to be the inherent ability of every person to reach within to find ways to resolve conflict non-violently. (Shuford, 1993, p.7) Feedback on the effectiveness of the program is taken from the participants at the end of each segment, which allows for continual revision and improvement of the exercises. The goals of the workshop are to build community, build self-esteem by affirming self and

others, and the learning of communication, cooperation and conflict resolution skills. Bittel (1999) theorizes that the workshop works by essentially reversing the cycle of development that leads to a life of crime, i.e., difficult life situations leading to low self-worth and low self-esteem, a lack of trust, disempowerment, a lack of responsibility and ultimately, violence. He feels that AVP works by reversing this cycle, through building self-worth and self-esteem, facilitating trust, revealing that one has choices, and developing responsibility, all of which lead to a person's being able to choose alternatives to violence in situations of conflict.

It is an essential requirement, both within and outside of the prison system, that every participant in an AVP workshop do so on a voluntary basis. Each workshop is led by a team of two or more facilitators, three facilitators being the most common model. The term "faciliators" is used instead of "trainers" and reflects the philosophy of AVP, According to the AVP Basic Manual, p.2., "Ours is a process of seeking and sharing, and not of teaching. We do not bring answers to the people we work with. We do not have their answers. But we believe that their answers lie buried in the same place as their questions and their problems - within themselves. Our job is to provide a stimulus and a 'seeker-friendly' environment to encourage them to search within themselves for solutions."

After taking the Training for Facilitators Workshop, a new trainer must then apprentice with more experienced trainers until s/he has sufficient experience facilitating to be given the title of Facilitator, and after more experience, the designation of Lead Facilitator. In the NY prison system, two or more inmate facilitators will generally work with an "outside" facilitator as the leadership team, and some prisons have a large "cadre" of inmate facilitators, from which to draw the leadership team for a workshop. Sing Sing prison in NY, for example, where AVP has been offered for over 25 years, has had, at times, over 50 inmate facilitators. Weekly "support" meetings are held for this leadership team, and this has offered a community of support for those inmates who truly want to transform their lives and not return to the prison system. In New York City, a number of these former inmate facilitators have formed a support network, called Landing Strip, to help inmates being released from prison find work and support in their transition from life in prison to life outside the system. According to Walrath (2002) in Delaware, which also has a highly developed AVP program, inmates are taken through a 5-step program (basic training, advanced training, training for facilitators, facilitation, and management council membership) which "promotes a nonviolent community within the institution." (p.3).

AVP throughout the world is a grassroots, voluntary, organization and effort. While there are a few paid state coordinators, the bulk of the organizing and training is done on a voluntary basis. And, although the original workshops were designed and facilitated by Quakers (members of the Society of Friends), and while various groups of Friends throughout the world still support the program, financially, and by offering leadership in AVP at the local, national and international level, AVP-Inc., worldwide, is a non-profit, non-denominational organization.

B. Evaluation studies on the effectiveness of AVP

The spread of the AVP program throughout the country and the world is in one sense a testimonial to the successfulness of the workshop. Something about it must be working for it to have spread throughout the globe, with very little money and minimal organizational structure. However the effectiveness in achieving the goals of the workshop, which are ultimately to help the individual to live a non-violent lifestyle (and in the prison population this would include not committing violent actions within the prison system or when the prisoner returns to society) has been only partially assessed. The AVP/USA distribution center offers 4 studies evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Two of these are based on interviews with people who have experienced the program.

One of the interview studies is the evaluation of AVP in Rwanda, (Niyongabo & Yeomans, 2003). AVP Rwanda began in February 2001, as a joint project of Rwanda Yearly Meeting of Friends and the Friends Peace Teams' African Great Lakes Initiative, but has evolved into a largely independent entity (p.1) Since that time, 36 men and women have been trained as AVP facilitators, and conducted 19 workshops since October 2002. Of the 278 participants served in these workshops, 315 were *Gacaca** judges and administrators. These *Gacaca*-focused workshops were in addition to the 30 AVP workshops provided to the general Rwandan community since 2001. In August, 2003, the two interviewers (Niyongabo & Yeomans) met with 39 people who represent a cross-section of people served in the workshop, individually, in four regions of Rwanda.. The results of these interviews were organized thematically around the AVP Workshop methodology, most referenced program elements, relationship to Rwandan culture, overcoming ethnic divisiveness, forgiveness, contributions to the *Gacaca* process, hierarchy, women, family, and religion, with concluding remarks by the interviewers. These results indicated that AVP had been helpful, not only to the judges involved in the *Gacaca* process, but in helping the participants resolve conflicts within their families and their everyday lives. **Gacaca* is a traditional form of arbitration utilized to deal with justice and reconciliation for both the victims and suspected perpetrators of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

A second evaluation study was conducted on the AVP program in New Zealand (Phillips,2002). Phillips, the author of this study begins by reviewing four studies of AVP to date, two of which were done in New Zealand (Curreeen, in 1994; Watt, in1998), one in Australia, (Joy, 1995)and one in England (Bitel et al, 1998). The New Zealand studies, were minimally quantitative, in that they administered specific psychological measures (State-trait anger expression Inventory in the Curreen study, and Violent Incidents Scale in the Watt study) . Curreen found "moderate changes in behaviour as an outcome of the workshop" and also that the prisoners had high positive regard for the workshop (Phillips, p 8). The Watt study did not find any statistically significant measure which showed that AVP workshops changed the number of violent incidents recorded, but follow-up staff questionnaires and facilitator interviews indicated that the strength of the workshop was the openness and sharing, and awareness of nonviolent strategies for resolving conflict. (Phillips, p 9). The study by Joy in Australia evaluated an Advanced Workshop with 16 participants using the *The Way I See It* (TWISI) questionnaire, a self-

report tool, and found that the group overall made significant changes in their attitudes toward conflict. A qualitative follow-up to this study showed substantial positive changes over a period of time, including the outcome that support, administrative and custodial staff began their own AVP training in community-based AVP courses. (Phillips, p 10). The study in England by Bitel et al in 1998 was basically an interview study in three British prisons, one of which was a women's prison. The interview questionnaire developed was driven by outcomes that AVP was seeking to achieve, and, according to Phillips thereby "produced findings that directly informed AVP about the quality and outcomes of the workshops they'd provided." (p.10). Following a model similar to the Bitel study, Phillips' study began by examining 81 end-of-workshop evaluations to gain an initial source of information about participants' impressions and understandings of the AVP experience. These data were analyzed using a qualitative research computer program to code the responses for broader commonalities or themes. This preliminary sampling showed similar themes to the study of Bitel and his colleagues, so a national survey was developed, which included demographic data, rating scales regarding the helpfulness of AVP to bring about some particular change, and six open-ended questions. This survey was sent out to 635 past AVP workshop participants throughout New Zealand in November 2001, 417 to the community participats, and 218 prison inmates. Of these 146 completed questionnaires were returned, 101 from the community and 45 from prison inmates. Cumulative ratings of helpfulness of the workshop in achieving the AVP objectives were computed, indicating that most participants felt that the workshop helped "most of the time" for 5 objectives and "sometime" and almost always" for the other two. The open-ended questions were subjected to a similar qualitative analysis and yielded a number of themes spontaneously reported by the respondees, which included increases in sense of community, self-confidence, clarity of expression or understanding, enhanced skills and knowledge, communication skills, trust, intimacy and safety, responsibility, self-esteem or self-worth, and respectfulness. Phillips (2002) concludes that "The results of this study show that AVP workshops are impacting on individual lives in such a way as to contribute toward meeting the goals and objectives of AVP set out in Table 2 (p.4). Additionally, open-ended responses clearly show that people are being empowered to make use of the choices that they open up through the experiential process used in the workshops." (p33).

Two more recent studies from the US are more controlled, quantitative studies. Sloane (2003) studied the effects of AVP on infraction rates in a state prison in Delaware. Participants in the control and experimental groups were randomly selected from lists provided by the Delaware Correction Center. The control group was drawn from a population of 125 inmates who had volunteered, but not yet begun the AVP training as of Feb. 2002. The experimental group were 31 inmates had completed the training by February 2002. Change in incidence of anti-social behavior, from before the training period to the post-training period, as measured by recorded infractions of prison rules, was the dependent variable, on which AVP graduates were compared to the control group. These data were gathered by examining the prison records of the control and experimental groups. The study showed that AVP is effective in younger inmates and those with a high school education or greater, irrespective of race.

Another quantitative and controlled study by Walrath (2002) was done at a medium-security corrections facility in Maryland. The experimental group was drawn from a list of inmates who were scheduled to take the AVP workshop, and the experimental group was selected from a group of inmates who volunteered to participate in the research, but who had not volunteered for AVP. A total of 94 participants (53 intervention and 41 comparison) were recruited for the study. Both the intervention and comparison groups were assessed at base-line and 6 month follow-up. This occurred over a one-year period (since basic workshops were only scheduled on a once-a-month basis). The dependent variables for this study included more direct assessments of the intrapersonal and behavioral impact of AVP. Four intrapersonal measures were included: the Anger Expression Scales (Spielberger, Johnson & Jacobs, 1982), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, (1965) Scheier and Carver's (l985) Life Orientation Test, and Rotter's (l966) Locus of Control Inventory. Inmate behavior was assessed through a self-report questionnaire that included 10 items that asked the inmate to report frequency of involvement in confrontation. Findings showed that, after controlling for age, inmates who particiated in AVP had significantly lower levels of expressed/experienced anger at 6 months post intervention, compared to nonparticipant inmates; inmates who participated in AVP reported significantly lower rates of confrontrations 6 months after the AVP training; inmates in both groups had significantly lower levels of global self-esteem 6 months following the intervention, and inmates, in both groups demonstrated a trend toward highly levels of optimism 6 months after the intervention. While this study represents an improvement in experimental controls, it is still limited. The groups were not randomly selected, and the difference in motivation between inmates who volunteer for AVP and those who just volunteered for the study were not controlled. Also, the behavioral measure was a self-report measure, which is subject to the biases of self-reporting.

None of the evaluations dealt with the problem of recidivism. Sloane (2003) argues against the use of recidivism as a measure of effectiveness, on the basis that measuring the success of a program against the single variable of absence of reconvictions doesn't take into account the many other factors influencing the individual during and after his/her release. He suggests that these factors are more pervasive social problems that can't be expected to be dealt with by one simple training program, and therefore he used a measure of behavior within the prison system as the dependent variable, arguing that it more clearly measures the outcomes of the training.

Bischoff (2003) also notes that AVP doesn't address the issues of the victim, and the inmates' responsibility for the harm done to the victim. AVP works on building the self-esteem of the inmate, who gradually, having a restored sense of his/her own worth, may begin to look at the impact of his/her behavior, and be more ready for restorative justice, victim/offender types of reconciliation and healing. This seems to be more like the "self-empathy" Rosenberg (2003) feels is necessary before one is able to have true empathy for others' needs and feelings. Rosenberg (2003) himself has been using his methods for many years in victim-offender reconciliation, and achieved considerable success. Thus, the use of Nonviolent Communication techniques, would be a natural next step for the AVP program, in preparing inmates for restorative justice, ie., victim-offender reconciliation and other ways of making amends to the victim and the community.

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