



AVP California Update

Alternatives to Violence Project

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www.AVPCalifornia.org

Join the dream team

If you could work with a group of people on a project to which you felt deeply committed, who might they be?

What about a newly retired person, searching for something to do that really makes a contribution, who, after taking the three training workshops, commits to one week a month facilitating in prison? What about two weeks? AVP/CA has at least a dozen of these dream volunteers, most pay their own travel expenses. All find this work feeds their souls and gives retirement new meaning.

What about a prison staff member who works in a remote prison and already has way too much to do, who not only understands what AVP is about, but now wants to be a facilitator offering the workshop in the community just outside the prison? AVP/CA has more of these treasures. With AVP, they are able to see new hope for the reasons they originally joined the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

What about the person with a full-time job who is fully trained and finds solace and deep satisfaction from going into prison or working with kids four weekends a year facilitating AVP workshops? With increased acceptance by the prisons, more weekend workshops are becoming available; local schools and youth groups are also hungering for AVP workshops.

What about a parolee who started AVP in prison and now wants to be involved outside? AVP/CA has a half-dozen such individuals who are facilitating and enriching community workshops by telling their stories.

What about community and prisoner facilitators, who volunteered with AVP in California prisons for at least five years before CDC phased out AVP? Now 15 of these "old hands" are back -- training and mentoring new facilitators (at least two in every workshop) ---

and they have prepared to add even more to their plates: training prison staff in TACT skills (Teambuilding And Conflict Transformation in the workplace).

What about incarcerated men and women who volunteer not only to take and then facilitate a workshop series, but also to donate money to keep the program going? AVP/CA has over 100 trained facilitators inside California prisons.

What about active facilitators who also take on the tasks of running a statewide organization: the finances; the coordination of scheduling and meetings; publication of this Update; responding to mail, and numerous other tasks?

Over the past year and a half, AVP/CA has been fortunate to have capable, deeply caring and conscientious people make extensive commitments to the ongoing offering of Alternatives to Violence Project. The work is so enriching that every one mentioned above is continuing to take on the same level of responsibility and to add on duties or time. And you know what? ... They are all wonderful people to work with!

Finally, you, too, are needed on this Dream Team.

The many forms of volunteering

AVP volunteers are more than prison workshop facilitators. AVP volunteers come in a various forms. Here are a few:

- **Community workshop coordinators** (usually local people) handle the logistics of the workshop and- function as back up to the facilitation team. This involves a half-day of time setting up and cleaning up after food throughout the weekend.
- **Prison-program liaisons** work with the prison to set up workshops, assure that the team has gate clearances, arrange for lodging, and schedule team members. An hour or two a month is needed for these liaisons.

Volunteer with AVP/California. Call 800/905-6765. Email AVPnat@earthlink.net

- **Local recruiters** establish relationships in the local community and find people to take the community workshops. Recruiters will spend approximately 10 hours a week recruiting in the community for a month prior to a workshop and maintain lists for future workshops at other times.

- **Prison support-group facilitator** are advisors to the inside facilitators who offer support groups for those inside AVPers interested in honing their AVP skills. Such a facilitator may go inside for an evening or two every month.

Prison staff sponsors work with facilitators to set up workshops and special events as part of their job, often putting in extra time beyond regular working hours.

AVP has waiting lists!!

In every prison yard where AVP is offering workshops, there is a waiting list of 100 people or more — in some as many as 500 — waiting to take the workshop.

Prisons are calling regularly to ask when AVP can begin in their facilities -- including Pelican Bay and Vacaville.

12 active AVP programs in CA Dept.Corr. & Rehab

San Diego- R.J. Donovan Corr. Facility*
San Luis Obispo –Cal. Men's Colony*
El Centro - Centinela S.P.*
Chino - Heman G. Stark Youth Corr. Fac.*
Blythe – Chuckwalla Valley S.P.
Tehachapi – Cal. Correctional Inst'n *
Soledad - Corr. Training Facility
Salinas – Salinas Valley S.P.*
Jamestown - Sierra Conservation Ctr.*
Susanville - Cal. Corr. Ctr.
Susanville- High Desert S.P.*
Chowchilla - Ctrl. Cal. Women's Fac.

*Italics are newly opened. *Weekend workshops*

Local councils developing

Local councils are the basis of AVP workshop programs. The focus of the Steering Committee is, not only to open prisons, but also to develop local councils of trained facilitators who function independently, overseeing their local prison and community workshops.

San Diego, Central Coast, Antelope Valley, Santa Monica/Claremont, North Bay, Santa Cruz, and the San Francisco Peninsula all have active councils. Santa Cruz has a regular support group functioning at CTF Soledad, as does Sierra Conservation Center in Jamestown

where Joyce Bahnzaf is fast creating a local group.

The greater Bay Area facilitators recently gathered, reestablishing the East Bay council and setting the agenda for future direction and cooperation among the now three Bay Area groups.

Though the Division of Partnerships at CDCR did not accept our grant request to pay local volunteer recruiters, some exciting developments are happening in the specific local areas where volunteers are needed. A team is developing in Riverside and the desert. Mark Koenig has been making progress on the huge task of recruiting volunteers in the San Joaquin Valley. Diane Neubert, formerly a prison coordinator at Greenhaven Prison, has moved to Crescent City and is ready to organize for Pelican Bay.

The Steering Committee has recently pulled together job descriptions for both a council and prison liaisons which should be up on the website by March.

Funds are still needed for these recruiter positions.

Two lifers tell it like it is

Two male inmates made a beeline for me as I stood alone at the edge of the classroom during the final session of a Basic workshop in Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. Unlike others who milled around during the break, these men – one black, one Hispanic - made eye contact and moved very purposefully toward me. “What’s this about?” I wondered briefly.

“Will you do something for us?” they asked, almost in unison. “Uh-oh,” I thought. “Here comes a request that is bound to break the no-personal-contact rule of AVP.” But they surprised me.

The African-American prisoner came right to the point. “You take AVP into the Youth Facility in Chino, right? WE met there.” His Latino friend chimed in, “Yeah, we both got in trouble when we were kids. And now we’re behind bars for life. Here’s what we want you to do, OK?”

“Next time you go to Chino, will you give those guys a message from two lifers? Tell them that we didn’t have any AVP when we were young. Tell them to pay attention, and then to use what they’ve learned when they get back out on the streets. Tell them that AVP bonds guys together better than gangs do, that AVP even trumps race. Tell them that if we’d learned AVP and used it when we were their age, we wouldn’t be in prison for the rest of our lives.”
Judith Favor