
Introduction

The AVP International Gathering 2014 brought us together to share, learn and celebrate.

Theme: Diversity and Inclusion

154 AVPers from 43 countries met in the beautiful and historic surroundings of the Maynooth campus, Ireland. Under the guiding lights of diversity and inclusion we searched in our different and similar ways for peaceful pathways into the future. The Gathering was preceded by AVP Advanced workshops held in the Rathmines which were well led and attended by experienced AVP Facilitators.

AVP is here to stay

During the Gathering of international faces and accents we made friends, shared stories and exchanged inspiring experiences with an open eye focused on sustainability. The size and emphases of this gathering, the largest in our history, left us in no doubt that our future is assured and will demand much of us.

AVP Europe emerging

The Gathering not only brought people to one country, it did more than that, it connected various people to each other for the common purpose of AVP and peace. In addition, the Gathering brought together 35+ AVPers from across Europe for the first time to discuss the possibilities for collaboration and support and to appoint our next European Regional Representative.

Host country issues

As host country, AVP Ireland shared some current work regarding violence against women, homelessness, and of the long and ongoing process to reach peace across the island of Ireland. Delegates listened and danced with delight to the music of Ireland.

Programme focus in Wheatfield

A thousand stories could be told but one must be shared, that of a visit to Wheatfield place of detention, where six inmate AVP facilitators shared their personal journeys:

'Though we may be in the gutters some of us still look at the stars'.

'In the past the people were afraid to approach me because of my reputation of violence. Since I became an AVP facilitator people find it easier to approach me when looking for help with their own problems'.
'I came to prison...with a life sentence for murder...a year later I did my first AVP workshop...it taught me to turn my back on violence...it gave me the tools to change my life...it taught me a lot about empathy...which makes it less likely to be violent towards somebody.'

'This is probably the most important thing AVP has taught me and if I can teach that to someone else I have done my job'.

'It taught me to be creative...I write a lot of poetry now...I couldn’t live without AVP...I thank AVP for making me the man I am today'.

Finally one inmate concludes with the word of John O'Donoghue:

'May you realize that you are never alone, that our soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the universe'.

The future

As AVPers return to their localities, energized with new contacts and skills, each country and region continues planning for the future.

In Ireland, we have a two-fold challenge, firstly to build and sustain the core workshops and secondly to develop a more sustainable model for AVP. The urgency to renew and expand the AVP Ireland team is now critical to our future. First steps have been taken and we look forward to newly trained Facilitators emerging before the close of the year.

Thank you

We in Ireland are very grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to host the AVP International Gathering and wish those who pick you the baton well in preparations for the next such event. We will join with you in good time.

Here, we note and give thanks to the incredible Host team who gave so much to ensuring that the International Gathering was a success. Thanks also to our key donors amongst whom the Quakers and Rowntree Trust feature significantly. One immediately outcome is that the Gathering has been able to create a Research and Development resource for those AVPers willing to contribute to the growth and development of AVP International.

Jenny Haughton,
October 2014.