



Alternatives to Violence Project Welcome Pack and Volunteer Policy

Thank you for your interest in Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)!

You are welcome to our open monthly meeting every second Thursday of the month in Quaker Meeting House, Eustace Street, Dublin at 7.30pm.



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What is AVP all about?

AVP is a network of volunteers running workshops for anyone who wants to find ways of resolving conflict without resorting to violence. Since 1995 AVP has worked in the community and mostly in Irish Prisons. AVP is a peer led programme helping participants to find creative and non-violent ways to deal with conflict. Workshops are facilitated by a mixed team of 4 to 6 inside and outside facilitators. All facilitators are volunteers.

We are seeking new volunteer facilitators to join our existing team. Most of our workshops take place at the weekend: Friday evening and all day Saturday and Sunday. Currently we are running workshops in prisons in Dublin, Limerick, Castlerea, Portlaoise, Cork, Shelton Abbey (Arklow) and Loughan House (Cavan).

A brief history of AVP

AVP Ireland is a member of AVP International. The project began in 1975 when inmates at Green Haven Prison in New York State asked local Quakers to help them to design a programme to learn how to solve conflicts non-violently.

They collaborated and devised a prison workshop. The success of this workshop quickly generated requests for more, and AVP was born. The programme was well received by inmates and quickly spread to many other prisons and countries throughout the world. Although the original workshops in the US were designed and facilitated with Quaker oversight, AVP International and AVP Ireland are non-profit and non-denominational organisations. As of 2019 AVP is active in more than 40 countries around the world. The last International AVP gathering took place in Kathmandu, Nepal, in October 2017 and was attended by 146 delegates from 40 countries.

AVP was introduced in Ireland in 1995 and has been active in Irish Prisons since then. Close to 50 active facilitators from inside and outside the prisons are running workshops voluntarily.

AVP Vision, Mission and Value

The Vision, Mission and Values of the AVP help to define and guide the organisation, and to maintain and grow our presence in prisons and in the community. These are outlined below.

AVP Vision:

A community based on honesty and respect that can resolve conflicts without resorting to violence.

AVP Mission:

To enable workshop participants to heal by rebuilding their self worth. This is facilitated by creating supportive communities based on trust. AVP believes that all individuals must take responsibility for their actions and that ultimately violence and conflict can be transformed. We do this by engaging in individual and group activities that discuss, address and reflect on our past and how we can learn from it to help us build the skills and confidence to effectively deal with future conflicts in a non-violent way.

AVP has the following core Values:

AVP started in prison with the strong conviction that **there is good in everyone**. AVP adopts a **non-judgmental attitude** and considers all participants to be equal. AVP is a **non-hierarchical** organisation and every voice has the same weight. Decisions are reached by **consensus** during meetings. AVP considers that both **caring for others** and **respect for oneself** are essential to adopt non-violent ways. AVP believes in **experiential learning**. Participants learn by doing and not by taught lectures and teaching; this approach is both **holistic and realistic**. The central theme in AVP is **Transforming Power**. This is the power, available to us all, to transform what might be a violent or destructive situation into a non-violent one.

What is involved in the different workshops?

AVP workshops usually take place on the weekends in a big room in the school of a prison. Workshops are advertised and participants sign up voluntarily. In prisons where AVP is already established, active prison-based facilitators promote the programme and assist in organising the workshops with the active support of Irish Prison Service staff.

During workshops the group are seated in a circle formation with participants and facilitators seated together. Material utilised during the workshops consists mainly of a flip chart and items needed for the activities such as markers, paper, handouts and small items for certain types of exercise (soft balls, newspaper and tape etc.). Some exercises are done in small groups of three to five with a debriefing among the larger group at the end of the exercise.

The workshops consist of four different levels. AVP asks participants to voluntarily participate in its workshops and avoids situations where attendance is mandatory. Anyone who is willing to apply AVP principles in his or her own life can be trained as a facilitator.

The four levels of workshops are well documented in manuals provided by AVP International. There is a manual for each level, approximately 250 pages, offering dozens of exercises and activities. The Basic Level workshop gives participants an opportunity to experience AVP and, should they wish to continue, they can then progress to the Second Level where participants can select the particular areas in relation to violence that are most salient for them. Training for Facilitators (T4F) is a specialised workshop where participants are trained to become AVP apprentice facilitators. The fourth level workshop, known as Male Awareness, examines how and why the social construction of masculinity can engender and indeed promote violence.

The objectives of each level workshop are outlined below.

▸ Basic workshop – 16 to 18hours

- Builds self esteem
- Improves listening and assertive skills
- Develops co-operative attitudes
- Introduces the notion of 'Transforming Power'

Through discussion, games, cooperative activities and role playing, participants learn new and creative ways to respond to conflict situations. AVP workshops seek to assist individuals in personal growth and change.

▸ Second level workshop – 16 to 18 hours

- Examines the hidden fears that usually underlie anger, jealousy and prejudice
- Considers situations that may trigger anger
- Develops better communication skills for potentially violent situations
- Looks at stereotypes in personal situations
- Considers the notion of power structures and the idea of inner power
- How to develop forgiveness and build reconciliation

Second level workshops can focus on related topics chosen by the group of participants according to their needs. They build upon collective experience in communication, co-operation and problem solving.

▸ Male Awareness Workshops – 16 to 18 hours

Designed specifically to address issues that arise from violence associated with gender.

▸ AVP Training for Facilitators (T4F) – 16 to 18hours

- Introduction to leadership styles
- Builds skills in conflict resolution
- Develops planning, presenting and processing skills

Once trained as a facilitator, a volunteer begins his/her apprenticeship with mentoring from experienced facilitators.

Testimonies from past participants

It's taking it from the workshop to the belief within yourself, you know that you don't need to use violence to get on in life (AVP Facilitator)

Below are a number of quotes taken directly from participants evaluation forms following the completion of an AVP workshop in an Irish prison in the past two years.

'The most thing I'll take from here is how to control my anger'.

'It's important to look inwards regularly to identify issues'.

'Anger and violence are my responsibility'.

'I will try to defuse a situation instead of turning to violence'.

'I learned how to be patient and persistent'.

'I learned to listen and open up to a group of people'.

'How to control emotions and understand myself a bit more'.

'How to talk up and not let it build up'.

'Not to let little problems build into something extreme'.

Below are quotes from interviews with facilitators conducted in 2016 inside and outside the prisons to prepare our Impact Report

'AVP really helped me, it brought me a lot of stuff for me to realise the potential, that I didn't have to live a life of violence, that it wasn't about me giving up on myself in life that I could live a life without using violence and still be a strong person.'

'It was like an epiphany for me, that I could live this life without using the violence.'

'It's about that choice and Transforming Power is about that, when you're in a situation, you know that if the situation is a face-on-face, it's gone to that stage because of something. There has to be a reason behind it. So you find that reason and then you defuse, you change that situation and you transform it around.'

'I think AVP allows prison inmates to be themselves and that during a workshop they're themselves for a whole weekend. They're not challenged by the prison. The prison is locked out, and you see not the person that they are in prison for, but the real human being sitting there and that's what AVP does.'

'AVP was the first introduction to community (within the prison).'

'(AVP) changed the whole ethos of this jail. (AVP) fills the school, encourages prisoners to come to the school, it lowers levels of violence.'

'I have learned empathy since being in AVP. I have learned to use the AVP model, applying it to my own personal life. AVP has enriched my life. After a weekend in the prison doing an AVP workshop, I always leave with a huge sense of achievement.'

'I just found AVP to be the most powerful weekend of my life.'

Becoming an AVP facilitator

▸ Recruitment:

Volunteers can apply by filling out application forms sent by the coordinator and providing the required documentation (CV, referees and proof of ID). To be able to take part in workshops in prison, volunteers have to apply for prison clearance. If they want to be involved in workshops with young people, they also need to be garda vetted. Volunteers can attend information meetings or meet with the coordinator in order to gather all the information they need to decide if they want to proceed.

▸ Requirements to become an AVP facilitator

The AVP is a peer led programme. Workshops are facilitated by a mixte team of 4 to 6 inside and outside facilitators. All facilitators are volunteers.

The two requirements to become a facilitator are literacy to be able to use the manuals and a commitment to AVP values and ethos.

Three aspects dominates the AVP philosophy regarding training:

- Every contribution is valuable and anyone willing to can develop facilitation skills.
- We believe in experiential learning, meaning that facilitators will learn by doing.
- AVP is peer led and we believe everyone has some kind of expertise to share with others.

We ask our volunteers to commit to facilitate **three workshops per year** once trained. It means that volunteering with AVP is a **long term commitment**. Being fully trained (initial training and apprenticeship) will take up to 18 months. In order to maintain a sustainable model, we expect people to stay with us a few years once they are able to lead a workshop.

▸ First Training of facilitators

To become an AVP facilitator, one needs to complete the four levels of workshops (65 hours of training): women who cannot complete the male awareness workshop, undertake two second level workshops instead. Once someone has completed the four levels, he/she becomes an apprentice and will start facilitating workshops with more experienced facilitators to guide him/her. Apprenticeship lasts as long as necessary. When facilitators feels ready (usually after 4-5 workshops), they are progressively guided to become a lead facilitator. AVP's structure is not formal or rigid. The apprentice facilitator will receive ongoing support and training while conducting the workshop. When he feels ready, the volunteer can take the lead of a workshop.

Volunteer role description

The main duties of an AVP facilitator are:

- ✓ prepare the workshops
- ✓ where appropriate attend pre-workshop meeting with fellow facilitators
- ✓ help in planning an agenda for the workshop
- ✓ share the workload evenly between facilitators
- ✓ practice and know the material that he/she is responsible for
- ✓ ensure participants are welcomed and valued
- ✓ deliver exercises to the participants
- ✓ ensure the smooth running of the workshop
- ✓ ensure that the workshop is kept confidential
- ✓ organise breaks / lunch for the participants
- ✓ help with setting up the workshop and tidy up afterwards
- ✓ take care of all AVP materials /equipment.
- ✓ prepare certificates and ensure they are signed by all facilitators
- ✓ inform the co-ordinator if workshop supplies need to be replenished
- ✓ write a report and provide the co-ordinator with an accurate list of participants
- ✓ ensure AVP's good reputation is maintained

Desirable attributes of an AVP facilitator:

- ✓ an interest in working people
- ✓ a good sense of humour
- ✓ excellent communication skills
- ✓ be patient and non-judgmental
- ✓ be punctual and dependable

Guidelines for volunteers

General guidelines:

- ✓ We hold our workshops in prison as guests of the Irish Prison Service. When you go into a prison you are going in under an AVP clearance and that means anything that happens, while on the workshop and after it as well, AVP is responsible for and answerable to the Irish Prison Service. Please bear that in mind.
- ✓ Nothing can be brought into a prison i.e. food, drink, phones etc. It goes without saying contraband. In some prisons handbags may have to be left at the gate so please bear this in mind. Photo Id is usually required as well.
- ✓ No AVP volunteer should attend an AVP workshop in prison, if they know a friend, family member etc., will also be in attendance. If this happens by accident, please notify the workshop facilitators as soon as possible.
- ✓ A friendship / romance or personal relationships between facilitators and prisoners can cause serious difficulties for AVP and the Irish Prison Service. In this case the matter should be brought to the attention of the AVP Co-ordinator prior to any subsequent prison visits being arranged.
- ✓ We insist our volunteers should not look for information about participants and respect their right to privacy. AVPers are not interested in what prisoners have done in their past but in what they will achieve in the future. Looking for information about inmates will damage the trust and sense of community AVP is trying to create during a workshop.

During a workshop:

- ✓ What happens or what is said in a workshop is confidential. No one wants to hear or read about their thoughts, feelings or personal life in the newspapers or as gossip or on social media. However according to Irish Prison Service policy, a volunteer must break confidentiality and talk to an officer if:
 - a participant threaten to harm himself/herself (e.g., suicidal).
 - a participant threaten to harm another person (e.g., assault, kill).
 - a participant gives precise and new information about a child abuse and neglect case, a vulnerable adult abuse case or an undisclosed crime.
- ✓ While attending a workshop in prison, do not give out your personal address or phone number. If you would like to correspond with an inmate ask them to write to you via AVP, Quaker House, Stocking lane, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. Any correspondence will be forwarded onto you. Professional letters are suitable, letters related to the work we're doing (organisation of workshops, meetings, documentation on non-violence etc...), and also cards for occasion (get well soon, congratulations, birthday...). We recommend to

avoid sending personal letters that can compromise your prison clearance and the work we're doing.

- ✓ Volunteer should follow a very simple and casual dress code to attend workshop in prison.
- ✓ Have a good time when you are on a workshop but please remember your boundaries.
- ✓ A volunteer should take on as much responsibility as he/she is comfortable with and no more
- ✓ It's expected for a facilitator to be present for all the sessions of the workshop
- ✓ Facilitator participate in the exercises, but only to lead the group to a deeper participation.
- ✓ A volunteer should lead by the example and respect the community agreements at all time.
- ✓ A facilitator should accept feedback about his/her skills and what he/she needs to improve on and give feedback to other members of the team in a constructive way.
- ✓ It's important to remember: the role of facilitator is not to teach, lead or give long talks but to encourage participants to express themselves and care for them.

In case of incident: a written report is submitted to the coordinator. The coordinator refers to the working committee who will decide of the follow up. It can be asked to a volunteer to step back if the guidelines have not been followed.

