

The

TRANSFORMER

Supporting and Celebrating the Facilitators of AVP Workshops

A Collection of Reminders

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Collection of Reminders

Remembering what AVP is about provides us a framework for our roots. This issue holds up those

things that keep me going and pull me back to my original "aha" of why I do this work. Initially it seemed not to be as in-depth as we would like in the *Transformer*, but

a second and third reading prodded me into allowing myself to see the depth of each simply-put perspective of this powerful work we do.

Of course the usual exercise, conference info and miscellaneous AVP

news is here, but please read deeper than the words. Special thanks to Auburn Correctional Facility AVP facilitators for their creation of this season's newsletter.

Somehow it seemed right that it was the Spring issue

Pat Hardy, Co-editorial volunteer



Appreciation

AVP inside facilitators and participants are never remiss in thanking all of the outside facilitators and participants for their generosity of time and their sacrifice.

In the 13 years of being part of the AVP community, I always have felt that I gain more than I give. We all have countless stories of moments that are so profound that we honor them in the retelling. I am grateful for those moments that have contributed significantly to who I am as a person, a parent and a social worker.

During a meeting or workshop, we are able to suspend the realities of prison for a time that we again may be reacquainted with humanity. In that humanity, we experience hope, humility, appreciation for those around us and forgiveness; and we come to understand the vulnerability and grace in giving of ourselves. And in all of this, gratitude brings us full circle and AVP thrives.

Exceptional Xenia Becher is a clinical social worker who works and teaches at a local university.

The Transformer

The TRANSFORMER

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Sum Up My AVP Experience!?

Asking me to summarize my AVP experience is like asking me to share a caramel white chocolate chip cheesecake with my fellow facilitators--hard to do, but I'll do it!

Like so many others, I came to AVP with my own agenda-complete Basic and Advanced Workshops to ward off any Family Reunion Program (trailer visits) denials from lack of Aggression Replacement Training being satisfied. However, AVP has an agenda all its own for the sincere and open-minded. I call this agenda the "AVP Bug."

The "AVP Bug" for me is the overwhelming urge to invite people to enjoy participation in workshops and the special topic supports that follow. I found the AVP workshops to be therapeutic--more ways to promote positivity in a negative environment than I already knew and how to build a community worth being part of.

People from all spectrums of life who encourage my positive efforts are now good friends of mine. Now, people look at me in a workshop and ask themselves, "What in God's name are those civilians and prisoners doing?" or "Is that civilian really enjoying prisoners?" Those are questions I once had myself.

As a facilitator, I hope to be an example of how the "AVP Bug" is a good bug to share with others. James Richard aka Jolly Jza, 36-year-old father of three, has spent 12 ½ years into a wrongful conviction and has been facilitating since 2012. AVP nurtures his positive growth.



When I took AVP for the first time, I knew it was a changing point in my life. During the Basic Workshop, I told myself there was no reason for me to take AVP. But on the last day I had a change of heart. AVP made me realize everyone has a changing point in their life. Mine was on December 28, 2012, the last day of the workshop.

The workshop showed me a person can change from being negative to being positive. I always dealt with conflict in a negative way, but behaving this way changed on that day. I also opened my mind to getting closer to people. Now I say "thank you" to AVP for bringing me a family inside the prison walls. Thanks to AVP, I'll always have someone to look up to in a positive way. AVP rocks!

Simple Solomon (James Hardeman) has been involved with AVP since 2012 and is an enthusiastic apprentice facilitator.



Labels

The philosophy of Transforming Power has empowered me to define myself rather than be defined by judgments of others. It took nearly 12 years of incarceration before I happened onto AVP; but since then, this relationship has supported me as much as I've supported it. As a young gay man in a relationship with an older man, I found that the relationship was defined by dysfunction, especially concerning power and control. I gave away control in the hopes I would be empowered by his wisdom. I depended upon him for answers about my life's purpose and how to become a man that my father would be proud of.

This relationship took place before the marriage equality movement and before gay people served openly in the military. We were in an era when being gay meant being stigmatized by a homophobic culture. In our struggle against negative perceptions, we used wealth as a buffer and dressed in expensive clothes and ate at fine restaurants. We never spoke about our age difference, but that played a part as well. Our striving to find security for ourselves meant turning against our inner truths while holding up a superficial brilliance. The cracks were always there; and with time they grew until questions broke things wide open, leading to my partner's death by my hands.

Picking up the pieces has been difficult. For nearly 20 years, I've worked hard to identify and live out my inner truth. Emptying myself of self-deceit allowed me to grasp the AVP experience with both hands. On one hand, AVP is fragile as one wrong move or a change in a prison administration ends AVP in that prison. On the other hand, AVP is resilient and tougher than nails, transforming a host of challenges as it continues to grow throughout the world and within the hearts of AVP participants and facilitators.

AVP encourages me in the practice of serving others. It's the only penance I can do. Without it, I would avoid my life through seeking escape and praying for death to appease my guilt and shame. AVP allows me to define my life, showing an inner truth and strength in serving others.

Michael Shane Hale (Second Chance Shane) has been an AVP facilitator since 2007. He mentors apprentices and learns about himself and others from the gifted and wise facilitators at Auburn Correctional Facility.

It Takes Strength

It takes strength to sit in a circle among men and women having discussions about emotions, feelings, anger and our childhoods, which we did during the Manly Awareness Special Topic Workshop. It felt uncomfortable at first to be placed in a position where I might become vulnerable by opening up in front of people about coming from another country (Guyana) and being made fun of due to how I speak. After listening to others sharing their personal stories, I realized we all had something in common. Because I am able to use empathy, I can communicate with others in a group setting. AVP has done a service for me, and I honestly can say I enjoy the

pathway it leads me down.

Marlon Barry, aka
Godtrue GT, has
been a part of AVP
in Auburn since
2004.



16 Years Of Workshops Inside

I've been attending AVP workshops for the last 16 years in various prison facilities throughout New York. When I got to a facility that didn't have the AVP program, I sought to have the program started only to be frustrated by the facility's "red tape"; yet, the hunger for AVP experiences and the tools I learned stayed with me and helped me remain at peace with myself and with others.

When I got to a facility that had the AVP program, I was quick to sign up. I would attend as many workshops (Basic, Advanced and Parenting) as they would allow me to attend (providing space was available). With each workshop I attended, I learned more and more about myself by listening to the life experiences of other participants and facilitators and learning to apply the AVP tools and Transforming Power.

AVP does work if you come with and keep an open mind and you're willing to look honestly at yourself. I've found that most of the AVP participants are not so different from me in their life experiences. By the end of the first day (of a three-day workshop), we discover our commonalities and begin to build a sense of trust and, with that trust, a sense of community. By the end of the third day, I find myself exhilarated, eager to attend the next workshop.

With all that I've learned through the AVP experience, I have become eager--even hungry--to share AVP with others (family, friends and fellow prisoners alike). For this reason, I chose to become an AVP facilitator, giving back to others what AVP has given to me. I use Transforming Power daily. AVP does work if you let it. Don't let the AVP experience pass you by!

Bright Bob (Tumminia) has been facilitating since 2013, first in Sullivan and then in Auburn.

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When I Tell my Friends....

When I tell my friends that I do AVP in a prison, they sometimes ask me what it is like to go into a men's maximum security prison like Auburn Correctional Facility. They ask if I am afraid. I tell them it is an amazing experience to sit in a circle with perhaps 10 to 20 strangers and, by the second or third day of a four-day workshop, to feel like a family. I am always moved by a strong sense of our shared humanity--how much we have in common-despite our different backgrounds. I am impressed by the efforts of many of the men to use their time in prison to become better men for their own sake and for their families. This is what I

tell my friends.

Lucky Lili
(MacCormick) has
participated with
AVP at Auburn
Correctional
Facility since 2009.

Commonalities

People come to AVP from different walks of life. Some come from broken homes, others from different religions and/or cultural backgrounds and some have lived the street life; ie. gangs, drugs and the like. All of them have one commonality-- wanting to find an alternative to violence. But when all is said and done, they find that participating in AVP gives one more than just alternatives to violence.

Because community building is part of every workshop, participants build and gain an extended family they can see almost every day around the facility--be it in the yard, at chow in the mess hall, at callouts or at a support group. Here at Auburn Correctional Facility in Auburn NY, we have a support group, which is like a two-hour mini workshop for participants who have completed Basic and Advanced Workshops and still want more. Support group sessions are held on the first and second Tuesday nights of every month in between our workshops. The support group is not only a two-hour period for enhancing and furthering one's skills in alternatives to violence but is also an escape from the politics of prison life.

Through attending workshops and support groups, the AVPers at Auburn CF are helping others find the commonalities we all share.

Joseph Miller, aka Young Yusuf, started participating in AVP in 2010, completed the T4F in 2012 and has 98 hours of facilitating workshops so far.

Inspired by Inside Facilitator Stories

I felt inspired after reading the powerful and well-written words of the inside facilitators at Green Haven Prison, the birthplace of AVP, in the 2013-14 Winter AVP-NY newsletter and on their website avpny. org. It is always informative and affirming to read the words of those who know AVP through personal experience. The power and meaning of their stories cannot be misunderstood. AVP addresses directly that part of us which is good. The transformation of the individual begins at that point. A metamorphosis happens, and we glimpse who and what the true person is. Once the true person is known and acknowledged, there is no denying it--try as a person might. Transforming Power and the transformation of the individual become a lifelong self-improvement project. The strong and well-informed men telling their stories at Green Haven Prison are the future of AVP. No matter which words are used, they always describe a shared experience. I thank the AVP family for being who and what they are. Bernard "Happy" Hatch has been an AVP facilitator since

1999.

A surprise in Spanish

I remember the day I stepped into the facilitators' training group thinking it was for another Advanced Workshop. What a surprise it was for me to find out they had chosen me (Jorge) to be a facilitator. Without hesitation, I agreed but was in doubt until I found in me the transforming power needed to be a better human being. My higher power is God the Father in heaven, but my AVP family members are Christ-like, too. In my very first workshop, I found myself nervous about leading exercises and explaining everything. There were participants who spoke Spanish and needed translation. So I facilitated and translated, too--no time to be nervous. Thank you, AVP brothers and sisters, for all your help. Joyful Jorge (Hernandez) is a dedicated apprentice at Auburn Correctional Facility.

Mentoring

Mentor was a friend of Odysseus (Ulysses) entrusted with the education of Odysseus's son, Telemachus. The tradition continues with mentoring apprentice facilitators in AVP. As a participant, the workshop experience seems to flow effortlessly, so much so that a participant may do a head spin at the thought of facilitating. Enter the mentor. At Auburn Correctional Facility, mentorship allows new participants to find balance in facilitating workshops and support groups. It creates a healthy bond between an apprentice and an experienced facilitator.

The bond strengthens community and communication skills. Honoring a commitment to show up, give constructive feedback and encourage other people helps people grow. The first few baby steps are taken hesitantly. It's wonderful to watch an apprentice start out overwhelmed, then work through the challenges and eventually be off and running as a facilitator. One opportunity as a mentor is to remind new facilitators of their "baby photos" and awkward first steps they never seem to remember.

Michael Shane Hale (Second Chance Shane)





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Follow-up from Winter Transormer:

Facilitators' Experiences in Philadelphia High Schools

After a series of Basic Workshops in Philadelphia high schools, Genuine John Knight asked facilitators to record their answers to 10 open-ended questions on <u>MonkeySurvey.com</u>. The following points contain the gist of the many responses received:

- Following the AVP process is absolutely necessary. When we strayed from the fundamentals, we felt the pinch.
- Make participation as voluntary as possible in the school environment. When students refused to move--even during a hurricane--or fell asleep or decided not to talk with their partners in concentric circles, we felt naked without the volunteer card. We proposed an opt-out, but the school administration demurred. As the workshops progressed, the school administrators realized an alternative activity was necessary and provided one. When given the option to leave, students chose to cooperate and stay. Perhaps a better solution is to have an extra workshop ready to accept the recalcitrant. This extra workshop could adjust to disruptors by listening to their reasons for refusing to participate.
- Keep the workshop size manageable; i.e., less than 20 participants. Students in a 26- person workshop complained about boring gatherings. We adjusted for this comment by splitting into two groups. The smaller gatherings did not last long enough to become boring. However, the workshop lost some of its cohesiveness.
- Maximize diversity amongst participants. We chose to organize by home room rather than random selection of students. The result was that tensions already present in classroom dynamics were imported to the workshops wholesale. We can deal with random personality clashes, but polished conflicts ripened by weeks in class together is best avoided. We saw students transcend racial and cultural diversity by sharing the same classroom.
- **Preparation of participants is vital.** Many facilitators commented that the students were expecting to be in class and were surprised by the workshops. Facilitators were not prepared to explain AVP in appropriate detail to participants who knew nothing about it. Some students felt we viewed them as a violent community.
- Team work is the heart of AVP. We assumed pick-up teams of experienced facilitators with a prototype agenda would suffice. Many of the teams met for the first time on Sunday afternoon for workshops starting on Monday. Better preparation could be achieved by forming teams and having planning sessions over the internet before coming to the location of the workshop.
- Consider authority issues on workshop teams. We put almost all of the teachers through the Basic and Training for Facilitators Workshops. Many teachers came out of our training gung-ho for AVP. These teachers were an asset to the program. Other teachers found the AVP-style facilitation to be incongruent with the image they wanted to present to the students. Some teachers belonged to the screaming school of classroom management. Teacher buy-in is essential! A teacher in the workshop can be a blessing. Some teachers wear their authority gracefully, and we end up culturing a comfortable classroom environment. However, in terms of authority, having teachers in student workshops is akin to having corrections officers in a prison workshop. Be very deliberate about this decision. Teacher facilitators worked well most of the time. But teacher-less workshops have greater potential for developing participant maturity.
- Be clear with the administration that the AVP process will be protected. We do not allow observers, but we are open to participants as equal members who accept our confidentiality guidelines and plan to report their experience later.

Additional Observations:

- Given the adolescent energy level, L&Ls saved the day. Expect to do many.
- When doing adjective names, a list of potential adjective names will be useful for keeping the focus on practicable aspirational attributes.
- Gathering and concentric circle questions set the workshop's safe atmosphere. Some that worked for us include: How did you get to school today? What time did you go to bed last night? What did you do in the hour before bed? If I could invite three people to dinner, who would they be and why? I know I am getting angry when ... Something you don't know about me ...
- Deeper questions improved engagement.
- Adjust your presentation to feedback from the students. Ask for evaluations at the end of every session, and modify future sessions to incorporate the participants' feedback.

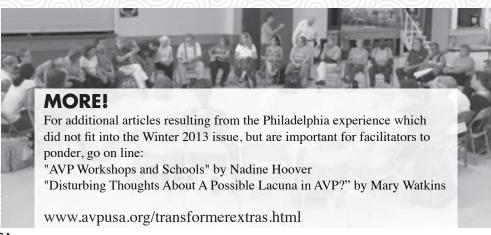
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- Try to understand the cultural background of participants.
- Be aware of the comfort and acoustics issues in the working space. Several of our workshops were in overheated rooms with poor acoustics. Check the spaces in advance and plan alternatives. We had to move to the cafeteria, spending some time in hallways and on the playground.
- Schedule down and connect time for facilitators. Expect some facilitator negativity and plan for it.
- Ensure lines of communication for facilitators. Most of our facilitators stayed in the same motel. We had debriefing
 meetings for two hours each evening. We had one large meeting. Perhaps a number of smaller meetings would have
 worked better.
- Snacks for the students during the workshop were helpful. In our case, teachers and facilitators provided the snacks.
- We saw many potential facilitators in the student body.
- Take care to ensure there are only positive comments on affirmation posters. For example, one comment was: "Now I know where you live." Also consider whether to require all affirmations to be signed.
- Students responded when asked to reflect on their experiences.
- Stepping over the line exercise, presented early in the workshop, is an ice breaker.
- Boredom, in itself, has value as a topic for processing.
- "I messages" and role plays were useful, but be sure to discuss the application of these. For example, students commented that using "I messages" with their parents during an argument might be risky.
- Self disclosure, on appropriate topics, helped people open up.
- Bullying is a difficult but important topic to present.
- One fun exercise involved toilet paper. A facilitator passes a roll around the circle, asking each participant to take as many sheets as they like. The gathering question was: Tell us one unique thing about yourself for each sheet.

Conclusion:

Returning to high school was a shocking experience. Working in some schools feels like working in a coercive environment that we as adults do not experience normally. One purpose of secondary school is to funnel adolescent energy into socially useful endeavors. By its nature, this can be coercive. We are in a position to reduce the overt coerciveness of schools.

In 1991, Genuine John began his retirement by spending several years as an AVP facilitator **in Jessup MD**. During this time, he often did two workshops a month. Since then, he has participated in occasional workshops. John has been devoted to the Philadelphia project.



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Pull out and put in your manual



Exercise: ICE BREAKERS

By Michael Shane Hale and Khalib Gould

Purpose: To devise creative and constructive ways to ease tension before it escalates into a problem or becomes a barrier. While "ice breakers" are associated with getting to know someone, this AVP exercise expands the concept of ice breakers to include defusing potentially violent situations.

Time: 10 to 15 minutes (or longer if needed)

Sequence: Have participants count off to give everyone a number. When the facilitator calls a number, that participant steps into the center and is given a scenario (see list below or brainstorm). The participant has a few seconds to think it over and responds in a role-play fashion, using positive and creative ways to break the ice.

Brainstorm: A brainstorm provides additional scenarios and aids the facilitator to assess the group. Go over brainstorm basics and brainstorm situations where ice breakers could be used to ease tensions and promote community. Prompt, "What are some situations where ice breakers would be helpful in easing tensions and promoting community?"

- **1.** You are in an elevator with an elderly person who is visibly nervous because of your presence. What would you do to break the ice?
- **2.** You walk into a room full of strangers. *What would you do to break the ice?*
- **3.** You notice an adult who is visibly angry and threatens physical violence towards a young child. What would you do to break the ice?
- **4.** You round the corner in the cellblock and see your neighbor and a person you don't know arguing over a pack of cigarettes. *What would you do to break the ice?*
- **5.** You see your sibling talking to a person you have a crush on. What would you do to break the ice?
- **6.** You overhear a conversation and realize the person is a producer. You have a demo you want him to hear. What would you do to break the ice?
- **7.** You overhear a person getting blamed for something she/he didn't do. What would you do to break the ice?
- **8.** A white separatist uses the N—word in a room with African Americans. What would you do to break the ice?
- **9.** A devout religious person makes a disparaging remark towards others not of his faith in an overcrowded room. What would you do to break the ice?
- **10.** A person who appears to be transgender is sitting alone and looks uncomfortable. What would you do to break the ice?
- **11.** You know a friend wants to ask someone you know to dance.
- What would you do to break the ice?

 12. You notice someone is being obnoxious and rude.
- What would you do to break the ice?

 13. While inside a store, you notice a celebrity whose work you are a fan of.
- What would you do to break the ice?

 14. Someone is trying very hard to be funny, but people are annoyed instead.

 What would you do to break the ice?
- **15.** Someone is being loud and funny, but it is at the expense of someone in the room. What would you do to break the ice?

Processing Questions:

- How did it feel attempting to "break the ice" with someone you didn't know?
- At any time did you feel that it was necessary for you to take action?
- How did past experience affect the way you approached or handled the situation?
- Was there anything you would have done differently in any of the scenarios to successfully "break the ice"?
- Would anyone in the group like to share a time when they had to "break the ice"? Was it successful?
- Do you think it is more difficult to "break the ice" in real life than it is while role-playing?

Best Practices

I am so fortunate to be part of AVP inside Auburn Correctional Facility where the second-ever workshop was held. This particular program is almost 40 years old!!! One of the most wonderful aspects of AVP is that of Transforming Power which allows us to be innovative in our methods. Each correctional facility, community or school AVP program has a different set of circumstances and needs. Inside our local New York State facilities, we have developed a few new tools and traditions that work for us.

Year-End Certificate

One is the year-end certificate. We keep track of the attendance at workshops, weekly facilitator meetings and support groups as well as special tasks that facilitators take on. An example might be "120 workshop facilitation hours, support group facilitation and regular attendance at facilitator meetings for the year 2013." Outside volunteers print this information on certificate paper and then laminate the certificate. In addition, we have developed a sheet on AVP-NY letterhead that lists the skills and responsibilities for each line on the year-end certificate. Besides being a nice way to recognize our hard work, these certificates can be used to prepare for parole board hearings, resumes and job applications.

Support Group

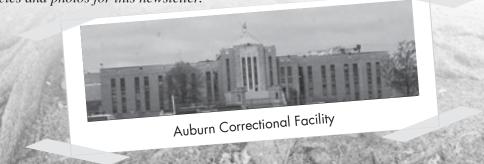
Auburn's AVP Program has facilitator meetings weekly as well as a support group which meets twice a month, providing space for participants who have completed an Advanced Workshop to continue to reap the rewards of AVP when our workshops are not in session. The support group meets the first two Tuesday evenings of the month and is facilitated by our apprentices while they are mentored by seasoned facilitators in "on the job training." Here, our apprentices get an opportunity to practice exercises and Light and Livelies before a smaller group of participants and before going in front of larger groups in the actual workshops. We find this method successful and supportive to our fledgling facilitators because it helps them to overcome stage fright while empowering them and others with the tools of Transforming Power and the food for thought that AVP provides. In addition, the regular participants at the support groups usually are trained to become apprentices themselves at the next T4F Workshop.

Combination Basic and Advanced Workshop

In one small facility where men stayed for about six months to complete a substance abuse program, we found we had very small groups (3-8 participants) for both Basic and Advanced Workshops which were to be held simultaneously. Postponing until numbers were larger was not practical because the inside participants and facilitators were anxious to hold workshops before they were transferred. In some cases, the facilitation team was as large as the number of participants. We dealt with this situation by developing an agenda for a combination Basic and Advanced Workshop where every other session and all Light and Livelies were done together. Obviously, it would have been quite difficult to do Light and Livelies with only 3-4 participants in a workshop.

When apart, the Advanced Workshop chose a focus topic and did some specific exercises pertaining to that topic. Whenever possible, a general exercise such as Concentric Circles used topics that pertained to the focus topic. The participants in the Advanced Workshop presented Transforming Power to the combination workshop which worked well because Advanced Workshops usually review Transforming Power in the second session; whereas, the Basic often presents Transforming Power in the third session. If anyone wants the actual agenda we developed, contact AVP-NY at info@avpny.org.

Jumpin' Jill (McLellan) has been doing AVP for almost 20 years and has been the inside AVP coordinator at Auburn Correctional Facility since 1999. Special thanks for Jill's efficient coordination and submission of articles and photos for this newsletter.



The 2014 AVP/USA National Gathering May 23 - 26, 2014

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • www.avpusaconference.org THEME: The New Underground Railroad

Rerouting the Highway from School to Prison, and Welcoming Our Returning Citizens Back Home

AVP has a powerful offering in addressing the disproportionate numbers of our people of color returning home from prison to broken relationships and bleak employment opportunities and our crumbling public education system for today's youth.

Come discover and create how the AVP Underground Railroad works: breaking barriers and building AVP communities; empowering youth and teachers; aligning with re-entry programs; enlisting youth and prison-trained AVP facilitators onto every community facilitating team.

Featured Plenary Speaker, J. Jondhi Harrell from Decarcerate PA, The Center for Returning Citizens and an AVP Facilitator. Mr. Harrell will be joined by a panel. Look for updates on the AVP 2014 Conference website.

LOCATION: Temple University, 1940 Dormitory,

1940 Liacouras Walk, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA 19122



ACCOMMODATIONS: Your choice is between a single occupancy room with a private bath, or double-occupancy room with a private bath. Linens included. Meals starting Friday night through Sunday breakfast and all program are also included. Please indicate roommate preferences. Number of singles is limited.

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP!

The Pre-Conference Workshop on Friday carry out the theme of the conference, The New Underground Railroad.

Friday May 23. 9am to 3pm. AVP Goes to School.

Location: Temple University.

A panel of Philadelphia teachers, high school students and AVP facilitators will share their learnings from the September 9-12, 2013 beginnings of AVP.

Workshop fee = \$50 plus Temple University room and board charge.

TRANSPORTATION:

Transportation options from Philadelphia International Airport to Temple University: Temple University is located 20 blocks from Center City Philadelphia, and easily accessed by public transportation.

SEPTA Train (Airport train ends at Temple Campus station) \$8.00 to Temple University, no transfer needed.

Temple University Station 927 W. Berks Street (between 9th & 10th Street), Philadelphia PA 19122 Four block walk to Temple University "1940 Dormitory", 1940 Liacouras Walk, Phila, PA 19122

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