

AVP



Summer 2016

The

TRANSFORMER

Supporting and Celebrating the Facilitators of AVP Workshops



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National Gathering Report **6-7**

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Editor's Note:**Youth & Education—How do we continue to transform our work as AVP facilitators?**

Any theory that cannot be used in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public. – bell hooks

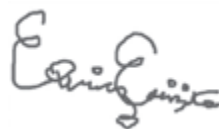
This year, *The Transformer* has highlighted hot topics being discussed in AVP communities around the country. Our Winter 2015 edition featured perspectives on AVP and diversity; in Spring 2016, we focused on outreach—including the debut of a new AVP-USA logo and brochure.

This Summer 2016 edition has been curated by Larry Bratt and Jeffrey Ebb of Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI). The JCI facilitator team set out to explore the topic of youth and education, and found another topic within: the role of active gang members in AVP. Should active gang members also serve as AVP facilitators? JCI facilitators offer a

range of perspectives on gang members and youth in AVP.

In this edition, we also highlight the 2016 AVP-USA National Gathering held in Denver, Colorado this May. Thanks to the AVP-USA Peace Fellows for writing a report on the gathering, and to Mysterious Monica and Rad Ray for sharing photographs of the event.

Peace,



EQUALIZE-IT ELŻBIETA



The TRANSFORMER

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Transforming Power at Work

By "Lighthouse" LARRY BRATT

Along with co-editor Jeffrey Ebb, this is the fifth consecutive summer issue of *The Transformer* that the Jessup Correctional Institution (JCI) AVP facilitators' community is contributing to. Editor Elzbieta Putrycz suggested we cover education, perspectives of youth and the incarceration of youth.

This summer we address those themes but also the issue of gangs inside prison. Few object to the idea of gang members participating in an AVP workshop, but a question remains: should gang members participate as AVP facilitators? This question surfaced at a recent quarterly Facilitators' Retreat. Pro and con voices

spoke their concerns openly.

I stated my reluctance in continuing to have gang members as AVP facilitators since a current facilitator had just returned from 60 days on segregation for participating in a gang brawl. I had my supporters. Yet, when the young gang member and his supporters spoke, I was surprised, both by their insight and rational arguments. Their arguments were supported by the fact that many AVP participants at JCI are gang members, that some inmates join gangs for protection and that some gang members relate better to other gang member/facilitators who show the power of Transforming Power in their daily lives.

Afterwards, I told the facilitators I was compelled to change my position by the persuasiveness of the gang member's arguments (Transforming Power Guide #5: Be ready to revise your position if it is wrong).

JCI AVP facilitators would like to hear the views of other *Transformer* readers on the question: **"Should active gang members also serve as AVP facilitators?"**

"Lighthouse" Larry Bratt: AVP participant and facilitator since 1995. Devotee of Sai Baba who taught me to "Love All Serve All."



Redeemable Quality

By JEFFREY "EMANCIPATED" EBB

As a founding member of the JCI AVP Center of Excellence, I appreciate the work we are doing for the youth incarcerated at JCI. Imprisonment requires adapting to an environment where the "societal norms" include isolation, repression and violence. Often, in prison, people tend to react with violence because to appear "weak" can result in being preyed upon. That is the reality of this abnormal environment.

Having now been a facilitator incarcerated for over two decades, I know consciousness raising and critical thinking are two valuable AVP skills which help to break the cycle of violence. When young men experience our unique workshops, such as the Basic Workshop, Transforming Power for Manhood, Using Transforming Power in Court and Parole Hearings and Help Increase the Peace for Youth, the resulting feelings of respect and community are palpable.

One skill I have come to value in my AVP tool-box is building community. We bring participants together from diverse backgrounds (urban areas, rural areas and other countries) and, through the process, we find out how much we have in common.

The common bonds established in workshops can be seen outside the workshop and serve to provide emotional/mental space needed to resolve potentially violent situations before they escalate. The majority of the young men here do not want to be violent.

I treasure the privilege to serve at-risk and gang-affiliated youth. I offer them opportunities to learn new tools to transform their thinking, restore balance in terms of victims involved, and maximize every opportunity to prepare for a successful life when they return to their communities.

We cannot become what we need to be if we remain what we are. The creed of the Center of Excellence provides my motto: **"We are in the business of saving lives!"**

Emancipated Ebb helped organize the HIPPY (Help Increase the Peace Project for Youth) workshop, Transforming Power at Work in Court & Parole Hearings and, more recently, Transforming Power for Manhood. He facilitates ongoing training for facilitators. He is the new editor of the JCI "Outback Observer Newsletter."

Gangs and AVP

By CHARLIE "COOPERATIVE CHUCK" POOLE

I am a 47-year-old white man living in a black man's world. I'm not in any gang, but a good portion of the population here does belong to a gang. There is always a new challenge, and I love it. At a recent facilitators' retreat, a discussion took place: Should JCI AVP allow gang member facilitators to facilitate a workshop?

I took the pro position. After all, what better way to change and save lives? My reason is that I co-facilitated a workshop with a gang member. There were also eight gang member participants in the workshop. During an exercise, I shared a recent event in my life that nearly led to violence. Another

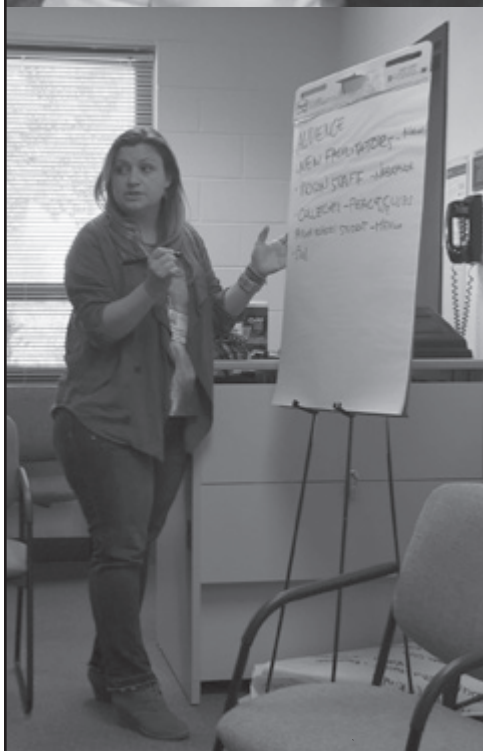
prisoner told lies about me, and several friends wanted to beat the man up. I stopped them and stated that I am an AVP facilitator.

The gang member participants started saying I was bluffing and that I'm a liar. In fact, the workshop suddenly became a hostile environment. That is when the gang member facilitator spoke up. He took charge of the exercise and shared his personal knowledge of my character, that he witnessed the event, how much I have influenced his life and mentioned the service I provide to others throughout the prison.

Now when these gang members see me on the compound and in other

workshops, they are respectful and open up more in workshops I facilitate. TP Guide #1: Seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground. A gang member facilitator can reach across the gap to other gang members because he knows that life. I can attest that a facilitator who is also a gang member has saved lives through his facilitation. That alone is a good reason for me to vote that gang members can become AVP facilitators. Trust the Process.

I have one daughter and three granddaughters. I love helping others and am blessed with my AVP family.



AVP on SOCIAL MEDIA

The Public Relations/Outreach committee is interested in coordinating social media efforts. If you keep up some form of AVP social media — Facebook, website, hash tag, whatever — please contact outreach@avpusa.org





To Have or to Have Not

By JAMES "WONDERFUL" WOOD

At our last quarterly facilitators' retreat, a discussion ensued concerning two facilitators who are also active in gangs. I imagine most people do not understand the gang lifestyle. I don't, but I am making an honest effort to be open-minded. If you were to meet these two young facilitators in a workshop, you would not know they are gang members. They know their AVP exercises.

Questions that arose during the retreat varied from the ethical to concerns about our program's image. Does

gang membership take away from the integrity of the AVP program? Should we continue to allow gang members to take T4F Workshops? Are we as AVP facilitators the deciding factor for determining the timing of a person's change? Should we practice what AVP preaches: "to trust the process"?

These young men are growing stronger with every workshop they facilitate. Personally, I want them to stop gang activity. I want them to continue to facilitate. I don't have answers to these questions. However,

I know that by trusting the process, the discussions help to make our AVP community become better and grow healthier.

As a *Transformer* reader, I ask that you please address this vital issue. Keep the discussion going in person and on the web.

I love facilitating Basic Workshops. Upon release, I hope to create a non-profit to build housing for ex-offenders called LOFT: Least of These.



Donate to AVP every time you shop! Use the Amazon tab at the bottom of www.avpusa.org, and Amazon will donate 5% of your purchase to AVP. Tell your friends!



Reflections on the National Gathering from the Peace Fellows

By MEG, QUAN AND GRACE

Attending the AVP-USA National Gathering for the first time was, like all the work we strive to do in AVP, full of connection, community-building and learning how to communicate. The gathering was an opportunity to gain knowledge and become reinvigorated about workshops and was a place to create relationships with individuals who are just as passionate about changing our prisons and empowering those living in them as we are. The speakers, breakout sessions and collaboration

with the Colorado Prison Arts Festival re-centered us both in the oppression that is the prison system of the US and the tremendous ability of the human spirit to survive and transform bleak situations into power, love and opportunity for transformation. We left inspired and rejuvenated.

Understanding the national structure and how our local programs fit into it helped us imagine the future of AVP together. One of the continual themes of discussion was how AVP intentionally can further inclusion

and diversity of voices at the national level—as facilitators and leaders within the organization. There was a powerful current of energy towards acknowledging and working to change this. During the final night of the gathering, we participated in a discussion about how to continue growing AVP-USA; and though there were different views, the group found consensus. We learned from this experience how great the need is for change and growth in AVP as well as the need for collaboration.

Peace Fellows participated in various parts of the gathering, including the Peace Fellows panel on Sunday. We also were inspired to get involved in committees to continue our involvement with AVP-USA. As a Peace Fellow, Quan participated on the panel on Criminal Justice Reform and spoke from his own experience. His words brought the room to tears and cut close for him personally, especially when he heard about the restorative justice program where offenders could

meet their victims. Grace joined the Education Committee to learn more about resources like HIPP (Help Increase the Peace Project) and school workshops. Other Fellows joined the By-Laws Committee to help update the existing organizational by-laws to reflect AVP today. Each of us gained new insights and tools to carry back to our local partners and, together, felt the momentum for getting more folks involved in national gatherings.

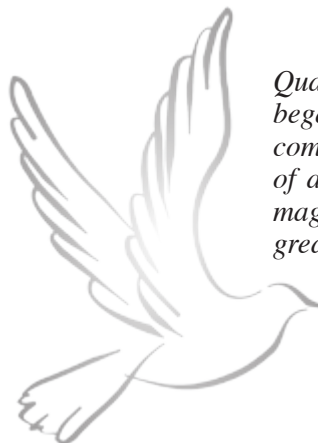
One of the biggest benefits to attending this national event was the ability to talk about and build tools with folks who have been doing the work for years, doing it in new contexts and bringing fresh insights from their own experiences. Overall, the national gathering was an opportunity for reflection and celebration. It showed us the diversity of AVP and the strength that exists when various facilitators collaborate with each other.



Gracious Grace is from Atlanta, GA. Over the past year and half, she has facilitated workshops with various communities including refugee youth, incarcerated women, and the Non-Violent Communication group. She is excited for the opportunity to be a Peace Fellow and looks forward to starting new initiatives, sharing her AVP experience, and providing support wherever needed.



Meg Brauckmann is currently channeling her endless curiosity into adventures in teaching elementary school students creative expression, spending time with thirteen housemates in an international community that houses refugee/asylum seekers, and investing in anti-racist work in Baltimore city where she's lived for the past three years. AVP is her favorite weekend activity.



Quality Quan was recently paroled from Solano State Prison, where he began his AVP journey of transformation. Quan is surrounded by a loving community of family, friends, and AVP loved ones. His favorite comment of all time from his Affirmation Posters: "You are a mighty warrior, a magician, a king, a treasure, a mountain of goodness! You are one of the greatest gifts I have ever received."

A Revolutionary Speaks Out

By REVOLUTIONARY RASTA

At the last facilitators' retreat, the topic of active gang members being facilitators came up. As both an active gang member and an AVP facilitator, I argued that by my still being in that lifestyle but doing things non-violently and advocating for non-violence, I am clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of Transforming Power. Who better to facilitate non-violence workshops than someone to whom workshop participants can truly relate? It demonstrates how being open to Transforming Power can make any situation a win-win.

I believe AVP will be better received if participants (many being in prison gangs) see the results of genuine Transforming Power energy through someone they respect and can better relate to. What do you think?

I will have my security status lowered to Minimum effective within the next three months. Upon release, I hope to bring AVP to other gang members.



Like the new AVP USA Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/alternativestoviolenceprojectusa>



Inside Point of View

By WISE WOODY

I am an AVP facilitator. I am also an affiliated Bloods gang member. Being an AVP facilitator could contradict my gang lifestyle. There are certain rules, regulations and protocols with gang membership just as with AVP. Being involved in a gang, you are automatically guilty by association.

Many people believe all or most gang members are violent people. When gangs originated, many were built on the very things that civic organizations are founded on: family, community and the willingness to protect each other. Gangs were not built on destruction, violence or wrongdoing.

The media ignores the positive aspects of gangs. From the inside, I see that gang membership teaches growth, economics, brotherhood and discipline. Violence in gangs reflects irresponsibility and uneducated leadership. When I was introduced to AVP, I fell in love with it. To me, AVP offers an escape from the conflict the media constantly portrays about gangs. AVP has taught me a sense of responsibility. I brag to my family about being an advocate for AVP. People ask me for advice. AVP has changed my life, but I am still a Blood because the gang raised me.

I am learning to Trust the Process while evaluating the conservative opinions of my elder AVP facilitators.

AVP in Education

By MICHAEL "TENACIOUS"
THOMAS

I have been a facilitator since 2003. I believe AVP should be introduced in schools at a young age. I wish AVP had been in my school to help with violence, anger and the negative feelings I had in my life. AVP can be beneficial to youth in school because it can help them (us) reduce negative ways of thinking.

AVP would have helped me navigate the treacherous shoals of "hood life." This life sent me to prison with a life sentence and has caused the death of many of my friends. Sadly, this cycle of wasted youth from the inner city continues. Another generation of black youth continues to be murdered in the hood, and the jails are filling up with a new generation of youth who, most likely, will grow old behind the steel and concrete world that robbed me of my youth.

I believe America should make AVP part of the educational curriculum in schools from kindergarten to the twelfth grade and even into college. Such an initiative would create a tsunami that could help save not just an individual here and there but an entire generation.

I am an outgoing person who through AVP has learned how to communicate and see the good in people. AVP is my lifestyle that I use every day. Another Victorious Person.

Poetry for Peace

A Secret Thatz a Secret

By "BRILLIANT" BOBBY AKA TWIST

Whatz a secret thatz a secret...
 Because itz
 Only a secret if you
 Keep it...
 A picture iz a secret
 Thatz a secret...the more
 It tellz you the less you
 Believe it...
 Racizm, bigotry, and prejudice
 Iz a secret because itz
 Everywhere and ever present
 But no one wantz to Teach it...
 Being Black iz a secret
 Because everyone iz
 Trying to Bleach it...
 Being religious iz a
 Secret because no one truly
 Desirez to be it...
 But can recite it good enough!
 To preach it...
 Freedom, justice and equality
 Iz a secret because our
 Brainz are too small to conceive it...
 History iz the biggest
 Secret...thatz why we
 Are all destined to repeat
 It...
 And mass incarceration
 Must be the best kept
 Secret and all the presidentz
 Are Pharoahz and the United
 Statez iz the New Aged
 Egypt...

Peace!

I'm a poet who is ruggedly handsome, despite my fellow facilitators teasing me.



To Educate

By ROBERT "AWESOME ABDUL" MATEEN PITTMAN

AVP and education are key sources of my mental renaissance. I came to prison with a below average I.Q., unable to read, feeling and thinking that I was the product of a hopeless society. Through AVP and my use of Transforming Power (TP), I noticed I was closed off to many things. TP doesn't just apply to conflict situations. I've learned if I remain open to TP, I'll be open to learning new things. One definition of the word educate is *to draw out a person's talent as opposed to putting in knowledge or instructions*.

AVP helps draw out my potential. TP defeated the old me and gave birth to a new me. Now, I facilitate AVP and other

groups. I mentor young incarcerated citizens with learning disabilities. I promote education because of the impact education has had on my life. Recently, I spoke on a podcast on prison education with Georgetown students. I know none of this would have happened without AVP and education in my life. Both changed my life. Hopefully, it will change yours.

"Awesome" Mateen--Co-creator of HIPPY (Help Increase the Peace Project for Youth) and Hip Hop, an off-shoot of HIPPY, a one-day workshop. I believe the children are our future, and it is time to pass on peace instead of violence.



Stuck for Life

By "RADIANT" RONALD ELLIS

Education is a reality that makes the difference in every aspect of our lives. AVP has proven to be an invaluable tool in participants' lives since its inception. Actually, what AVP does is to educate and provide both participants and facilitators with an awareness of *win-win* responses to life; it's a *Life-changer*.

I've considered the opportunity to facilitate an AVP Basic Workshop a real privilege. Observing first-time AVPers enjoying the experience of community

and group interaction is so rewarding. I also appreciate the experience of working as a facilitator in the special purpose workshop: Using Transforming Power for Court and Parole Hearings created by Lighthouse Larry.

I just facilitated one of these workshops over the past two weekends. Afterwards, a number of guys thanked me, and one young guy in particular said to me: "This was the *best* workshop I've ever participated in. It really prepared for a parole hearing. Now I know how

to say all the reasons why I need to be home with my family."

Basically, I'd say that AVP is like fly paper--*once you get involved, you are STUCK for life*.

I have had the privilege to be involved in AVP for the past 30 years. I am a humble and grateful person whose greatest wish is to take AVP to the outside community. It's possibly the missing element.

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SA Avanzado	25.75	
ST Capacitación de Facilitadores (2015)	16.50	

ADDITIONAL MANUALS & BOOKS

HI HIPP Manual (AFSC 2009)	30.00	
AT Trauma Healing Manual (Hoover 2013)	12.50	
AU Sydney Concise Manual (Australia 2012)	14.00	
TA Transforming Power - AVP in Action	11.00	
TP Transforming Power for Peace (Apsey)	6.50	
Lpp Little Book of RJ for People in Prison	4.95	
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Write a letter to the editor. Submit ideas for workshops and activities. Send questions about the AVP-USA organization – how it works, and how you can have a voice. Please submit by August 15th to PO Box 295, Franklin NY 13775 or editor@avpusa.org.

