



## WHAT'S NEW IN AVP

# Alternatives to Violence... Is There Another Way?

by Michael Cremer, an inmate at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Faribault

Alternatives to violence. What? I didn't know there were any. After all, this is a prison and violence is the only way to survive. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Do unto others before they do unto you! We carry with us the philosophy of the streets; that it is a dog eat dog world here. We have learned that only the strong shall be in control, and only those who take their world by force are considered to be strong.

Could there be another way? Have we experienced enough pain, agony, defeat and time locked up, to be willing to try another way? I have discovered my violent, irrational ways to be fruitless and futile. Doing time has been the continual consequence of my not having an alternative to violence, anger, and the pressures of life. I'm tired and I'm finally willing to discover a new to live and cope with reality.

Recently, I experienced a life changing weekend at the Faribault Correctional Facility! No, it was not a party weekend, or a trip to the hold, or even a new woman. It was a group of five volunteers and sixteen inmates. The volunteers donated the entire weekend to these men; including over 22 hours in the workshops alone. This group is not a division of the Department of Corrections, and as a matter of fact they refuse to do a seminar with D.O.C. staff present. The seminar is called "Alternatives to Violence Project," (AVP).

At first I thought, "22 hours, man am I going

to be bored!" This seminar was incredible. I have done eight years in an institutional environment and attended many meetings and seminars. I had previously never seen the active participation by 100% of those who started the meetings.

Everyone who attended the first three hour session went the other 19 hours. At the first session, some had that "convict" image painted on thick. We "appeared" to be tough, smile-free, fearless, emotionless men. But something changed. What in the world would motivate 16 prisoners to want to come back hour after hour?

The volunteers taught us about what they called "a sense of community." An environment of trust, honor and respect. Within a few hours the facilitators had us playing games and doing things I thought impossible in prison. The ice began to break, the false images began to fall down. Each inmate seemed to give permission to others to get real and be real. A sense of community developed over a short period of time because mutual respect and trust came into effect. It was unlike anything I have ever seen before. The "tough guy" look turned into smiles and laughter. Depression turned from defeat to hope.

Although I was an eye-witness; I still find what I saw and what I experienced almost unbelievable. I discovered that there is an alternative to violence. I discovered that that even in prison there is a better way than my way. *continued next page*





























