



*The prison is locked out, and you see not the person that they're in prison for, but the real human being sitting there and that's what AVP does."*

AVP Facilitator, 2016



**AVP**  
Ireland

Impact Report  
2017



# Acknowledgements

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## About the Author and Contributors

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# Foreword

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a unique training programme, both in the way it is organised and delivered, and by way of programme content. During a workshop up to twenty participants and facilitators sit in a circle, conversing, engaging in collaborative activities, participating in role-plays, and trying to find within themselves the skills and power to resolve potentially violent situations non-violently, and to live a more peaceful life. There is no hierarchy within the AVP organisation, therefore, during workshops there are no teachers present in the room, every voice is considered equal and listened to. All participants and facilitators are volunteers and, for the duration of the workshops, the prison is left on the other side of the door.

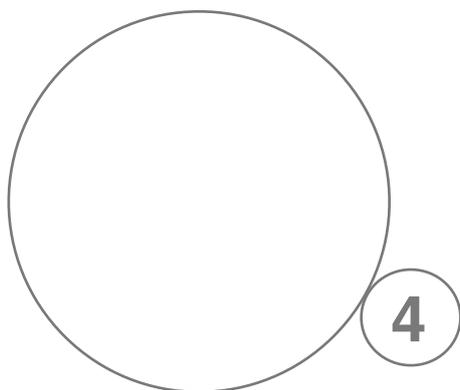
AVP started in New York in the mid-1970s and was brought to Ireland in the mid-1990s. Since then, the programme has been active within the Irish prison system and, up to now, there has been no formal academic evaluation of its impact or outcomes in Ireland. We hope this Report addresses this deficit.

In our society we learn only two ways of dealing with conflict. We learn either to fight for our corner at all costs or to keep the peace at all costs. In AVP terminology both of these are known as 'power-over' scenarios. We either try to gain power over another person through fighting or we let another person, or a situation, have power over us. The core message of AVP is that we have within us the power to transform a conflict into a win-win solution.

AVP workshop facilitators have a strong conviction that the programme has a positive impact on participants. Facilitators are witnesses to the impact that AVP has on their own lives. The training they receive can lead to changes in their own behaviour and can empower them to lead a more peaceful life. Furthermore, weekend after weekend facilitators witness the differences in participants' attitudes and mindset from the start of workshops on Fridays to the end of workshops on Sunday evenings.

This Impact Report aims to demonstrate how AVP helps participants to find non-violent ways to deal with conflict and empowers them to make constructive, positive and lasting change in their lives.

AVP Working Committee and Board of Directors



*“As violence can be seen as a method in handling conflict, then increasing cooperative problem solving skills are a central part in building the capacity to solve conflicts without using or suffering from violence. This is indeed the key alternative to violence”.*  
(Walker, 2011: 14)

## Introduction

The Alternatives to Violence Project, hereafter referred to as AVP, has been running conflict resolution workshops in Irish prisons since 1994. These experiential workshops help prisoners to develop skills for dealing with conflict without resorting to violence.

This Report will outline the impact that AVP has had, and is having, on the lives of the prisoners and the volunteers who participate in the workshops.

This Report seeks to answer the following questions:

- **How does AVP impact on a prisoner’s life when they are in prison and after they are released from custody?**
- **How does AVP impact on prison life, and on relationships between prisoners and between prisoners and staff?**

This Report focuses on the years 2014 to 2016. AVP and its partnerships during the study period will be presented first, followed by the research itself, including a review of international research, statistics, research interviews and questionnaires.

# 1. Presentation of AVP Ireland

## 1.1. The History of AVP in Ireland

AVP is an international organisation and AVP Ireland is member of this wider global community. The programme began in 1975 when inmates at Green Haven Prison in New York State asked local Quakers to help them design a programme so that they could learn to solve conflicts non-violently. Prison inmates and Quakers collaborated and devised a prison workshop. The success of these initial workshops generated requests for more and thus, AVP was born. The programme was well received by the 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 input, AVP internationally is a non-profit, non-denominational organisation.

Every three years, AVP International organises a world gathering to share the work done in other countries and to evaluate and improve AVP training methods. The last AVP International gathering took place in Maynooth in July 2014 and was attended by 154 delegates from 43 countries. The next gathering will take place in Nepal at the end of 2017 and AVP Ireland is sending three representatives.

AVP International helps each country where it is active by providing new training resources, updating the workshop manuals, and by offering opportunities to share experiences and improve training methods.

## 1.2. The Members of AVP in Ireland

The organisational structure of AVP in Ireland is non-hierarchical. Every AVP member has an equal say and decisions are made by the group during meetings.

For administrative reasons however, AVP Ireland requires a Board of Directors who oversee the running of AVP. Helen Haughton and Jenny Haughton, two long serving Directors, retired in 2015. The three current Directors are Mr Padraic Murray, Ms Gráinne Carty and Ms Fiona Smyth.

A part time Coordinator, Dorothee Potter-Daniau, was appointed in January 2016 and looks after administration, planning and organisation of AVP in Ireland. Key activities accomplished in 2016 include:

- Increasing the number of workshops in Wheatfield Place of Detention
- Introducing the programme to Cloverhill Prison and Shelton Abbey open prison
- Reintroducing the AVP programme to Limerick prison
- Introducing the AVP programme to a secondary school, St. Mark's Community School in Tallaght
- Partnering with the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) in Tallaght, an organisation that provides a Restorative Practices programme since 2010.
- Fundraising to ensure the continued stability of the organisation.

A working committee comprised of seven facilitators, including the Board of Directors, make the organisational decisions and manage the affairs of AVP in Ireland. This committee supports and supervises the work of the AVP Coordinator.

AVP Ireland has almost fifty trained facilitators, both from inside and outside prisons, who are involved with AVP and actively facilitating workshops. Monthly meetings are organised to assess the work done, to plan upcoming workshops and to discuss any issues arising. All facilitators are volunteers and choose to support the organisation by giving their time. Facilitators are welcome to sit on the working committee and, in doing so, to make decisions about the running of the organisation. Facilitators are the core members of AVP.

## 1.3. The Vision, Mission and Values of AVP Ireland

The vision, mission and values of AVP exist to help define and guide the organisation, and to help to maintain and grow the presence of AVP in prisons and in the community. They are outlined below.

### Vision

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

### Mission

To enable workshop participants to heal by rebuilding 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. AVP do this by engaging participants in individual and group activities wherein they discuss, address and reflect on their past and how they can learn from it, and how this learning can help them to build the skills and confidence they need to effectively deal with future conflicts in a non-violent way.

### Values

The core values of AVP are essential. 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.

## 1.4. The Workshops

AVP recognises that violence comes in many forms such as physical violence, sexual abuse, put-downs, jokes and sarcasm. While particular workshops can be modified to meet the needs of a specific group, the fundamental objectives of all AVP workshops are:

- To encourage individuals to take responsibility for themselves and the consequences of their behaviour
- To serve as one another's community, and
- To find options other than fight or flight when faced with conflict.

### The setting of the 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.

## The four different levels

### 1 Basic Level Workshop (16 to 18 h)

- Builds self esteem
- Works to improve listening and assertiveness skills
- Develops cooperative attitudes
- Introduces the notion of 'Transforming Power' which is a central tenet of AVP practice

In the Basic Level workshop, AVP seek to assist individuals in fostering personal growth and the idea of change. Usually during the Friday evening and Saturday morning the focus is on building trust and creating a sense of community by offering listening exercises, opportunities to affirm oneself and group discussions. Through

collaborative activities, e.g. cooperative construction and puzzles, the group builds cooperative and collaborative skills. On Saturday the concept of Transforming Power is introduced. On Sunday participants take part in role-plays that offer the opportunity to apply the idea of transforming power and to experience it.

### 2 Second Level Workshop (16 to 18 h)

- 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
- Examines stereotypes in different situations
- Considers the notion of power structures and the idea of inner power
- Asks how participants can develop forgiveness and work towards reconciliation

Second Level workshops focus on topics chosen according to the needs of the participants. At this level the workshop attempts to build upon collective experience in communication, co-operation and problem-solving. On the Friday evening the group brainstorms and reflects on their own goals to agree a topic to focus on, e.g. anger, fear, relationships, communication,

forgiveness. The agenda for the rest of the workshop is then designed around this chosen topic. At this level the activities are more challenging in the sense that they require deeper discussion and greater collaboration within the group. New role-plays are offered on the Sunday to investigate and demonstrate what the group has learned.

### 3 AVP Training for Facilitators (T4F) (16 to 18 h)

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

In this workshop participants are separated into small groups who prepare and deliver sessions to the wider group based on exercises and activities from the Basic Level workshop. This

training is experiential; participants learn by doing. Once trained as a facilitator, a volunteer begins his/her apprenticeship with mentoring from experienced facilitators.

### 4 Male Awareness Workshop (16 to 18 h)

This unique AVP workshop is designed specifically to address issues that arise from the notion of 'what it is to be a man' in the modern world. Masculine stereotypes and the 'macho image' are used as a starting point for this challenging workshop. The notion of 'manliness' is explored and how it can mean different things at different life stages and how it can change with age.

The Male Awareness workshop suggests that being a man is a biological fact and that masculinity is a social construct. During the workshop participants are invited to reflect on manhood role models, masculine stereotypes, the different steps to manliness from adolescence to maturity, and the specific experience of manliness in prison.

## 2. AVP Partners

AVP continually seeks to strengthen the position of the organisation and to form strategic partnerships with other organisations that have similar values and ethos.

### **Irish Prison Service**

The Irish Prison Service (IPS) is AVP Ireland's **main financial funder and supporter**. The IPS provides prison clearance for AVP volunteers and ensures that prison officers are made available to enable AVP workshops to take place within the different prisons. This level of support and cooperation is invaluable to AVP Ireland.

### **Childhood Development Initiative**

AVP Ireland and the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) in Tallaght have developed a partnership that began in 2015. CDI has been implementing a Restorative Practices Programme since 2010. Restorative Practices (RP) are both a philosophy and a set of skills that have the core aim of building strong relationships and transforming conflict in a simple and emotionally healthy manner. The common interest of AVP and CDI is to introduce the programme to young people in schools (see below) and later in Oberstown Children's Detention Campus.

### **St. Mark's Community School, Tallaght**

From the partnership with CDI emerged the idea to introduce the programme in St. Marks Community School in Tallaght, a school that runs on a restorative ethos. The first team of students was trained in 2016 and began running workshops in the school in January 2017.

### 3. Track Record of Workshops (2014-2016)

Outlined below is the data relating to the number of workshops AVP conducted in different Irish prisons and community-based workshops for the years 2014 to 2016.

Year	Location	Number of Workshops
2014	Wheatfield	6
	Mountjoy	4
	Castlerea	2
	Community	9
	Total	21
2015	Wheatfield	11
	Castlerea	5
	Dochás	1
	Cloverhill	1
	Community	3
	Total	21
2016	Wheatfield	13
	Cloverhill	6
	Castlerea	1
	Limerick	3
	Shelton Abbey	3
	Community	2
	St. Mark's Community School	3
	Total	31

Figure 1 - Track Record of Workshops (2014-2016)

## 4. Statistics about violent incidents in Irish Prisons

The Irish Prison Service (IPS) have issued statistics for prisoner on prisoner assaults for the years 2008-2013. This data (see Appendix D) is compared with data sourced from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) (see Appendix E) which looks at the number of assaults causing harm in the general Irish population.

Appendix D shows that, between 2008 and 2013, there were a minimum of 384 prisoner on prisoner assaults per 10,000 prisoners (2013) and a maximum of 736 assaults per 10,000 prisoners (2011). These figures contrast sharply with those in Appendix E which shows that, again between 2008 and 2013, there were a minimum of 7 assaults per 10,000 people in the general population (2012/2013) and a maximum of 9

assaults per 10,000 people in the general population (2009).

These figures demonstrate the stark reality of assaults within Irish prisons and the fact that if you were a prisoner between the years 2008 and 2013 you were between 82 and 55 times more likely to be assaulted in prison than you would be in the general population.

*“Both quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the effectiveness of AVP workshops provide a strong evidential base for the AVP process. An evaluation by Walwrath (2001) of AVP workshops held in a prison in Maryland, USA found that AVP participants showed significantly lower rates of confrontations after participation (2001, p.707). Sloane (2002) found that, in the 12 months following AVP workshops in a prison in Delaware, participants had committed a mean of 1.81 infractions, whereas a control group of inmates who had not yet participated in a workshop but had signed up to do so, committed a mean of 4.35 infractions” (Walker, 2011: 10).*

This section on statistics in this Report is not as comprehensive as AVP Ireland had hoped due to the sensitive nature of the data required. Statistics are few

demonstrating that this is an area of research that warrants further investigation.

# 5. Research Methodology

## 5.1. Research Methodology

The research for this Impact Report was collected in three ways:

- **Literature Review**

The first, desk-based stage involved sourcing, reading and analysing international studies on AVP. Research articles from the UK, New Zealand, South Africa and the US were consulted to determine the effectiveness of AVP in the context of conflict resolution.

- **Semi-structured interviews with active facilitators based in the community and in Wheatfield Place of Detention**

The second stage of this research project involved collecting primary qualitative data via semi-structured interviews with AVP facilitators in the community and in Wheatfield Place of Detention.

- **AVP Workshop Evaluation (Evaluation of entire workshop)**

The third stage of data collection for this Impact Report has been gathered by way of evaluation questionnaires distributed at the end of each AVP workshop conducted in the prisons (see Appendix D).

## 5.2. Ethical Considerations

The research garnered for this Impact Report complied with the following ethical principles:

- **Informed Consent**

All participants in this research project were involved on the basis of them freely giving their informed consent. Prior to an interview commencing it was explained to the interviewee that their participation was voluntary, that their identity would not be revealed in the Impact Report and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any stage by informing the relevant party. Consent was then obtained in writing from all participants.

- **Anonymity**

All participants in this research project were assured of their anonymity and all signed consent forms were kept in a locked and secure location during the course of the project. Participants are not identified by their own name within this Report and every precaution has been taken to ensure that participants are not identifiable.

Recording devices were not permitted inside the prison, therefore, two people were required to conduct the interviews; the second one took notes.

# 6. Review of International Literature

## 6.1. Six Key Themes in AVP

In this section, international literature on the impact AVP has had on conflict resolution in the UK, New Zealand, South Africa and the US is reviewed. There is a paucity of research in relation to AVP in Ireland, however, it is hoped that this Report will go some way to addressing this deficit and that it may stimulate interest about AVP and its methods among academics in Ireland.

According to international literature, AVP workshops are effective at addressing the root causes of violence and enabling the participants and facilitators to experience new ways of approaching potentially violent situations with a new and more complete set of skills that allow them to have choices when it comes to dealing with these same situations non-violently (see Delahanty, 2003; Sloane, 2002; Walker, 2011; and Walrath, 2001).

During this literature review six key themes were identified in relation to AVP and why it is successful at enabling participants to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

### 1 AVP builds self-esteem/worth

A central goal of AVP is to enable workshop participants to increase their level of self-esteem and to build a strong sense of self-worth.

Bittel (1999) theorised that AVP workshops reversed the cycle that initially led participants to a life of crime. He stated that AVP can reverse this cycle “through building self-worth and self-esteem, facilitating trust, revealing that one has choices, and developing responsibility, all of which lead to a person's being able to choose alternatives to violence in situations of conflict” (quoted in Delahanty, 2003: 2).

### 2 AVP improves problem-solving skills

Problem-solving skills are central to AVP. During the course of the workshops many tasks involve brainstorming such as considering what violence is – its causes, effects and solutions - or finding non violent resolutions to fictive situations . A central tenet of AVP is that facilitators cannot teach a participant what their solutions are, rather, AVP believes that participants' answers are already in them. It is, however, the role of AVP to provide the necessary stimulus so that participants are enabled to seek and, hopefully, find their own solutions (see Delahanty, 2003: 2).

*“Training designed to improve problem-solving skills has been found to be effective in reducing violent behaviour”.*  
(Walker, 2011: 15)

### 3 AVP develops real trust within the group

At the start of an AVP workshop the notion of trust can be almost or completely absent. In fact, a tense atmosphere often pervades the space. Trust is built within the workshop between participants. This process is facilitated initially by a set of 'ground rules' which are discussed and agreed upon at the outset of every workshop. These include:

- no put downs
  - affirm self and others
  - listen and don't interrupt or speak too long
  - observe confidentiality
  - volunteer only yourself
  - the right to pass
- (see Delahanty, 2003: 1)

*"In the context of the AVP process, trust describes the confidence in and reliance upon another person's ability and willingness to be supportive and constructive in social situations. It is also about honouring another person's confidence and reliance in you to do the same". (Walker, 2011: 13)*

The group decides the rules by which the weekend will run. This demonstrates to participants that this is their workshop, their opportunity and this allows the group to bond quickly and for trust to develop. As trust grows between the individuals this fosters the feeling that the workshop is, as Walker describes, a "safe place" (2011: 7).

Sloane suggests that "AVP offers an opportunity to develop trust" (2002: 3). For many AVP participants "the notion that they can trust someone else is, for most, a totally new concept" (Sloane, 2002: 19) and Sloane goes on to say that the growth of 'affective trust' is the foundation upon which other 'pro-social' skills can be built.

*"In order to help the participants address violent behaviour, AVP teaches negotiation, tolerance, communication and self-confidence. These are social skills, so AVP graduates should, theoretically, be better able to deal with their peers, as well as corrections officials and "get along" better in the prison" (Sloane, 2002: 10-11).*

### 4 AVP develops more effective communication and enhances social skills such as listening, assertiveness and empathy

In his comprehensive study, Sloane (2002) noted how the majority of AVP participants have deficits in social skills. Sloane theorised that "AVP may provide the first opportunity for many of its participants to see pro-social behaviours in practice" (2002: 17). Frey (2002) found that childhood aggression is a predictor for later high-risk behaviours and that aggressive behaviour was a proxy for under-developed social skills.

Once 'trust' is established the individuals within the group can begin to examine, develop and acquire more effective and productive 'communication' skills. The workshops will demonstrate how non-verbal communication, poor listening skills, judgemental attitudes and many other areas all encompass communication. It is not just what we say, but how we say it and so much more that come under the umbrella of communication.

## 5 The experiential nature of AVP workshops

As stated in the AVP Basic Manual, “ours is a process of seeking and sharing, and not teaching” (see Delahanty, 2003: 2).

In AVP workshops there is no teaching; facilitators are not there to lecture. Facilitators are there to deliver the exercises, to participate and to learn from fellow participants. It is a symbiotic relationship between all members of the group. Members learn from each other with each participant bringing something different to the table, something fresh and something new.

*“The need for non-violent and constructive approaches to conflict to be a realistic alternative to violence means change must be experienced rather than simply learnt”.*  
(Walker, 2011: 6)

## 6 The importance of ‘Transforming Power’

Transforming Power is often introduced in workshops using the ‘Mandala’, a circular depiction of key skills or traits that form part of, or contribute to, Transforming Power, namely: ‘expect the best’, ‘think before reacting’, ‘look for a non-violent way’, ‘respect for self’, ‘caring for others’. (AVP Britain, 2006, p.23)



The AVP Mandala

Sloane suggests that one explanation for how AVP works is through developing the notion of power, particularly in the concept of Transforming Power. He states that “the workshops aim specifically to instill the idea that the inmates do have the ability to control their lives and influence their environments” (2002: 23), which is particularly influential with inmates who do not see themselves as ‘actors’ given their background of abuse and victimisation.

According to this research, AVP is effective at building trust and developing social and communication skills in a well-constructed and experiential learning environment.

## 6.2. How AVP benefits the prison community and the wider national community

In generating and promoting the six key themes as addressed above, AVP benefits the community within prison as well as the wider community beyond the prison walls.

### Non-violence in prison

Many violent offenders come from broken communities with low levels of social capital. Therefore, AVP can often be their first introduction to what a functioning, trusting and supportive community is all about. This 'community' ethos is carried from the workshops into the prison, permeating the prison culture and day-to-day life. If there is less violence in the prison, the quality of life is significantly improved. Initiatives such as the 'weapons amnesty'\* and the growth and development of the 'Red Cross'\*\* were driven by AVP facilitators and participants who wanted a safer and better prison community in which to live.

### Effects on Recidivism

Regrettably, due to the nature, scope, time and budgetary constraints it was not possible to investigate whether there is any correlation between attending an AVP workshop and future recidivism rates in Ireland.

However, Sloane (2003) "argues against the use of recidivism as a measure of effectiveness, on the basis that measuring the success of a program against the single variable of absence of reconvictions doesn't take into account the many other factors influencing the individual during and after his/her release" (quoted in Delahanty, 2003: 5).

### Leaving Prison

The vast majority of prisoners that attend AVP workshops will one day walk out through the prison gates and re-enter wider society. It is therefore imperative that they are encouraged and facilitated to tackle their offending behaviour.

\* The 'weapons amnesty' was an initiative that was driven by AVP facilitators in Wheatfield Place of Detention. Preceding the amnesty, assaults utilising weapons were at levels that were worrying staff and inmates alike. Consequently, a group of prisoners who were active with AVP as facilitators organised for anonymous collection points where inmates could drop off weapons in 2012. The project was a great success and assaults using weapons dropped significantly in Wheatfield. The 'weapons amnesty' has been run a number of times since and is an ongoing success.

\*\* The 'Red Cross' is a scheme that was piloted in Wheatfield Place of Detention by current and former AVP facilitators. The 'Red Cross' is a peer-led project for improving the healthcare of prisoners and was so successful in Wheatfield that it has spread to all 14 prisons in Ireland. For more detail see Wheatfield Prison (IPS) and Irish Red Cross (IRC) Partnership Project, 2009.

## Social Skills

Talking in a group, active listening and respecting a different point of view are all experienced within an AVP workshop. Exercises in empathy and better communication are central to developing effective social skills so that when a potentially violent situation presents itself the person will have developed the necessary social skills to identify and utilise in that situation. Again, the experiential nature of the AVP workshops is key here. Exercises including role-plays are used so that participants can experience how violent situations do not usually spontaneously erupt (they do in rare cases) but rather they develop until they reach a point of no return. Here social skills are vital for defusing a potentially violent incident before it has been allowed to reach boiling point. The Mandala and TP (Transforming Power) cards (see page for details) have been identified as crucial to this process as participants and facilitators select the issues which are potential triggers for them and work on these so that they can develop the social skills to combat this deficiency and turn it into a strength.

*“Prison systems seem to be preoccupied by concerns about education, not social skills, a curious paradox, since most prisoners are incarcerated for anti-social behaviour of one sort or another, not for being uneducated”.*  
(Sloane, 2002: 8)

*“Bischoff (2003) also notes that AVP doesn't address the issues of the victim, and the inmates' responsibility for the harm done to the victim. AVP works on building the self-esteem of the inmate, who gradually, having a restored sense of his/her own worth, may begin to look at the impact of his/her behaviour, and be more ready for restorative justice, victim/offender types of reconciliation and healing.*

*Thus, the use of Non-Violent Communication techniques would be a natural next step for the AVP program, in preparing inmates for restorative justice, i.e., victim-offender reconciliation and other ways of making amends to the victim and the community” (Bischoff quoted in Delahanty, 2003: 5).*

## Restorative Justice, Victims and the Future

AVP workshops effectively introduce a restorative approach and victim/offenders reconciliation. Developing self-empathy and consequently empathy for others is another milestone on the road for all AVP participants and facilitators. The development of non-violent forms of communication is also important for addressing offense focused work.

## 7. Interviews and their Findings

 *“So the impact is that, again the impact is it has not just become something I do as a facilitator, it’s become a belief in my life. It’s a belief for me, it’s not just, AVP isn’t a workshop, it isn’t an organisation, it is all that.”*

The existing research that was consulted for this Report came from international sources. It was, therefore, considered essential to get the Irish perspective on AVP. To do this, six semi-structured interviews were conducted, three with experienced facilitators in the community and three with experienced facilitators in

Wheatfield Place of Detention. The questions asked at these interviews can be viewed at Appendix A and B.

In this section the major themes which emerged during the interviews are presented.

  
All the quotes marked by this sign are from AVP Facilitators interviewed in 2016.

### 7.1. AVP as a force for good in prisons

 *“AVP changed the whole ethos of the jail.”*

During the interviews it emerged that AVP has a positive effect on many direct and indirect aspects of prison life. The facilitators interviewed in Wheatfield thought that AVP was “something that was good, that was needed in the prison” (AVP Facilitator, 2016). However, AVP was also utilised as a method of “trying to help people stay out of the prison system” (AVP Facilitator, 2016). This subtle and often unseen aspect of AVP can be helpful when new and often first time offenders enter the system.

Interviewees reported that experienced AVP facilitators are often asked to talk with new inmates to let them know that prison is not a wise lifestyle choice. Often the facilitator can help to quell the obvious anxiety that a new inmate may be experiencing. It was also highlighted in interviews that AVP facilitators and participants were instrumental in setting up the Red Cross project in Wheatfield and played a key role in the many weapons amnesties within Wheatfield (as discussed in section 7.2).

## 7.2. Commonality / Community

 *“AVP engenders empowerment – doing something for yourself and the prison community.”*

*“AVP has helped me a lot, getting to know everybody, something in common with them.”*

*“(AVP) taught me about what’s available in the prison. AVP was the first introduction to community (within the prison).”*

*“AVP brought these three disparate groups together and gave a sense of community and helped to stop discrimination and introduced tolerance.”*

The ideas of ‘commonality’ and ‘community’ were noted during the interview process as a positive aspect that the AVP workshops have developed in the day-to-day life and culture of the prison. Interviewees stated that life inside the prison walls is very different to life on the outside in the community and that AVP acts as a catalyst for bringing disparate groups of prisoners together. As one interviewee stated, “AVP brought these three disparate groups together and gave a sense of community and helped to stop discrimination and introduced tolerance”. It was felt that this type of interaction is beneficial for developing a sense of community within the prison walls. It also helped to engender the notion that prisoners were not alone and that AVP helps people to

overcome feelings of isolation which can be prevalent, as some said, prison “can be a lonely place” (AVP Facilitator, 2016). For others, getting to know the inside team of facilitators was important as this helped to build understanding that, whilst all prisoners are individuals with their own issues, needs and concerns, they also share much in common. An association with AVP is central to developing this shared experience by helping to engender the feeling of commonality within the group which, in turn, makes prison life that little bit more manageable. Group work, a way of sharing experiences, emerged during interviews as a strong point of AVP workshops and was considered a catalyst for ‘change’.

 *“Group work is central to change – people (prisoners) have the same problems and getting to know people increases understanding.”*

## 7.3. Communication

The lack of effective communication in prison between prisoners, and between staff and prisoners, emerged during the interview process. The importance of listening was also highlighted as key to communication. AVP workshops aim to develop effective listening skills. Active listening is vital within the prison environment since comments between inmates, and between staff and inmates,

can become magnified and misconstrued leading to problematic situations which can, in turn, lead to violence.

The notion of communication was also referred to in discussion about the right to speak openly about 'my violence' during workshops.

 *"I found out when I was doing the workshop there was a lot of people, I could actually speak about my violence. I could speak about violence and how it affected me and how it was part of my life. And you know, I didn't want to be that person, that violence and a lot of stuff in 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."*

## 7.4. Experiential learning

The experiential nature of the workshops was seen as positive by participants with

the 'peer led' structure of AVP considered central to this.

 *"AVP is prisoners helping prisoners."*

The training structure was also highlighted as positive. As participants progress through workshops they learn by doing and participating in exercises and tasks. For AVP to be transformative it must be experienced not just learned. The exercises are designed to build on

core capacities that enable participants to deal effectively with situations without resorting to violence.

The experiential element of AVP is key in demonstrating to participants that it is not about sudden change.

 *"It's not about living a full life; suddenly I'm going to cure your violence. It's about the little things and they're the little battles you win the whole way, as you're going along."*

## 7.5. Problem solving

 *“I could live a life without using violence and still be a strong person and there were alternatives and ways I would have never thought of and ways I would have never seen”*

*“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 the situation and you transform it around.”*

Solving problems in a new and more effective non-violent manner is central to the entire purpose of AVP. Prior to participating in AVP workshops, many participants simply do not know that there are alternatives to using violence. The tasks in AVP workshops are designed to foster problem-solving skills both individually

and within the group as a whole. Participants are presented with problems and they must be diligent and creative in their approach to come up with solutions. Often this involves disagreement within the group, however, the tasks compel individuals to work together to come up with win-win non-violent solutions.

## 7.6. Self-esteem

 *“Cause you don’t realise how much violence is around them or in their lives. As I keep saying to the lads and myself – it’s not about giving up about who you are, it’s actually about being who you really are”*

*“(AVP) helped me build confidence in myself. More confidence meant I could turn around and walk away (from violent situations). Before AVP I wouldn’t think like that.”*

AVP believes that increasing self-esteem is very important if prisoners are to move on and to endeavour not to utilise violence to solve their problems. Building self-esteem is a central tenet of the workshops. Participants reported having used violence in the past due to low levels of self-worth and, therefore, it is

imperative that this is addressed during workshops. Public speaking, active listening, group work and sharing all help to promote and develop participants’ self-esteem. As the AVP course is comprised of four levels, this process of increasing self-esteem happens organically and cumulatively.

## 7.7. Transforming Power

☞ *“It’s taking it from that workshop to the belief within yourself you know that you don’t need to use violence to get on in life”*

*“Transforming power, transforming power, because that’s the key of AVP, that there is you know, you have that power within yourself to transform a situation from a violent to a non-violent situation, to a win-win situation, that’s always there”*

*“AVP to me is one of those ways of helping people move on from the life they have to a better life”*

*“It’s up to you. Nobody can change you, or nobody can change me, nobody can change anybody. You could change yourself.”*

For many AVP facilitators and participants the nebulous notion of Transforming Power is often initially beyond their reach. However, Shuford defined Transforming Power as the

ability to “transform violent or potentially violent or unhealthy attitudes, relationships or lifestyles into more positive, healthy, nonviolent ones (1998: 1).

☞ *“You can walk away from anything if you understand yourself.”*

The notion of Transforming Power can help to alter and change the definition of what it means to be a prisoner and “AVP helps to get rid of the ‘hard man’

stigma” (AVP Facilitator, 2016). Transforming Power can also change the dynamic between staff and prisoners:

☞ *“(AVP) taught me not to judge uniforms.”*

### TP Cards

#### Guide to Transforming Power

1. Seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground
2. Reach for that something good in others
3. Listen before making judgements
4. Base your position on truth
5. Be ready to revise your position, if it is wrong
6. Expect to experience great inward power to act
7. Risk being creative rather than violent
8. Use surprise and humour
9. Learn to trust your inner sense of when to act
10. Be willing to suffer for what is important
11. Be patient and persistent
12. Build community based on honesty, respect and caring

The AVP Mandala (see below) and TP (Transforming Power) Cards which are handed out to all AVP participants were also seen as very important.

During the workshops the participants are given TP Cards. On one side of the cards are the following twelve guiding principles of AVP:

AVP cards are used to provide guidelines to participants, so that they can read them when required. The Mandala is a reminder of the core values of AVP. The cards and Mandala are the only two written materials that participants receive at the workshops. They are useful reminders of how resolving a conflict non-violently can be done.

## 7.8. Trust

☞ *“The weapons amnesty – fellow prisoners knew the AVP ‘lads’ and listened to the message about weapons within Wheatfield. AVP facilitators get respect from other prisoners, prisoners listen to you. There have been two to three weapons amnesties now – which utilised the skills learned in AVP.”*

AVP workshops and the entire ethos of AVP are built on trust. The Basic Level workshop is about building trust between the group members and between the group and the facilitators. Without trust there can be no incremental growth. Participants will not open up about difficult aspects of their personal lives unless there is trust.

Concentric Circles\* was mentioned a number of times during the interviews as a method that is central to establishing trust and the skill of ‘active listening’ within the group. Confidentiality is part of any AVP ‘community agreement’ and it is always understood that anything that is heard within the workshop/group does not get repeated or brought up again on the landings. The participants

said that so far this central tenet of AVP has not been broken. The ‘peer led’ structure of AVP also helps to engender trust and this is because it is known that “AVP is prisoners helping prisoners” (AVP Facilitator, 2016).

It was also mentioned that, outside of the workshops, things can get “messed up in prison – bad visit or a bad phone call” (AVP Facilitator, 2016). Here the trust built up among the AVP community in prison can provide an important support structure. In these difficult but all too real circumstances prisoners can use the trust and skills that have been built up and earned within the workshops to listen, help and support each other through difficult times in their prison lives.

\*Concentric Circles is an exercise where the group form two circles, one inside the other. Participants sit opposite each other and one talks while the other listens for a period of between one and two minutes on a chosen topic. Then the roles are swapped. It is utilised in AVP workshops as an icebreaker and to enable participants to practice active listening skills and to gain a deeper insight into a given topic.

## 7.9. Safety (AVP tested in reality)

☞ *“And there were times when there were situations when fellas were saying why didn’t you do something about that \_\_\_\_\_ and I would say, explain to them, why use violence when you don’t need to. So for me the impact of AVP has within the prison for me was, it brought me to a safe place, that I could walk the landings and I could survive, without using violence, without having fear, people leave me alone through fear, rather they didn’t bother me because of respect. And it was a respect earned, not a respect borne of fear.”*

According to anecdotal evidence AVP has lowered the incidence of violence in the prisons where workshops are held. According to one of the interviewees:

☞ *“I’ve seen fellas who’ve been on a P19 practically every day inside and the level of P19s would drop. And they’d still get in trouble, but it wouldn’t be as much as they did.”*

The Weapons Amnesty which was held in Wheatfield a number of years ago was based on the key principles of AVP – community, trust and non-violence.

☞ *“For instance I was very interested a few years ago when, in Wheatfield, they all produced various knives and things they had. There was a day when you had an amnesty over producing anything like that and it worked, I mean this was the impact of AVP and people wanting to bring a change to their lives.”*

## 7.10. More AVP needed in Irish prisons

 *“Well I’ve no doubt at all it makes a difference and I think the more people that there are who do it, the more it impacts.”*

During the interviews it soon became apparent that the interviewees thought that there should be more AVP workshops in Irish prisons. According to the research findings demand for AVP

does not match the current supply. However, AVP is planning to host more workshops in more prisons throughout the entire Irish prison system.

## 7.11. Prison officers to do AVP training

 *“I would love to see the Prison Officers doing it”*

*“It’s something I’ve always said; it should be part of Prison Officers training, AVP. I think they should actually do workshops too.”*

Prison Officers encounter and deal with violence in the course of their work. Therefore, during the research for this Report it was suggested that IPS Officers should participate in AVP

workshops, so that they have a better understanding of the violence, its causes, consequences and possible cures.

## 7.12. AVP and Personal Motivation to Change

 *“I think a lot of them don’t understand it, because it’s something new. It’s not a way of looking at life that they’ve ever seen before”*

*“To be honest, there were guys who walked out of the workshop and decked somebody, but that’s their choice. Maybe they didn’t get what AVP was about, maybe they didn’t want to. But you have to allow them their choices as well.”*

AVP workshops are emotionally challenging and require participants to examine and assess difficult aspects of their lives. The nature of the workshops and the commitment required to effect real and sustainable change is considerable. Consequently not all workshop participants are in the right

frame of mind, emotionally and/or psychologically, to facilitate this type of dynamic change in their lives at that time. In other words, personal motivation and the willingness to embrace change need to be present and not all participants are in the right place in order for this to happen.

## 8. Evaluation Forms and their Findings

At the end of every AVP workshop participants and facilitators are asked to fill in a questionnaire (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was not designed specifically for the purpose of this Report, however, the responses to one key question are relevant.

For this Report, AVP reviewed 199 questionnaires representing:

- 10 Basic Level Workshops
- 6 Second Level Workshops
- 2 Training for Facilitators Workshops (T4F), and
- 2 Male Awareness Workshops

The following prisons and community-based workshops were represented in the questionnaires:

- Castlerea Prison (5 workshops)
- CDI in Tallaght (community-based) (3)
- Cloverhill Prison (1)
- Stocking Lane (community-based) (1)
- Dóchas Centre (1)
- Shelton Abbey Open Prison (2)
- St. Mark's Community School (2)
- Wheatfield Place of Detention (7)

Focusing on the question 'what is the most important learning for you during the workshop?' recurring themes arose:

- Awareness of alternatives to violence - awareness of TP
- Skills in conflict resolution / not letting a bad situation build up / thinking before reacting / walking away, letting go / being patient and persistent
- Anger management / aware of anger, trying to control anger
- Self-awareness / laughing at oneself / understanding emotions and own situation
- Listening
- Opening up, speaking in public, expressing feelings
- The importance of trust and honesty
- The idea that there is a community / people are different but have similar problems

The themes which emerged from the questionnaires concurred with the international literature and the interviews which were conducted for this Report. Individual questionnaires emphasised the notion of personal growth. This contrasted well with the interview questions which were more focused on the wider question of prison life. Noteworthy too is how often workshop participants mentioned anger and how many identified and experienced, often for the first time, that they can learn to control it (anger). The AVP team acknowledges that any process of change is complex and multi-faceted and that, for any change to occur, individuals must first change their mind-set. Awareness is often the first and most important step for participants in changing their mind-set and their ways.

# Conclusion

## **AVP's impact**

Violence is prevalent in Irish society and is endemic within the prison system. The evidence uncovered in this Report demonstrates, however, that when people engage with a programme such as AVP, violence can be better understood and transformed. The research findings in this Report can be divided into micro and macro levels. Firstly, AVP cultivates, encourages and supports the participants who attend the workshops on an individual micro level. This is facilitated by improving communication skills, developing self-esteem and fostering new and create ways of solving problems. Secondly, AVP attempts to tackle the issue of violence on a wider community-based macro scale. AVP endeavours to build a sense of community and to increase the notions of safety, trust and empathy within the prison population and the wider prison community, including among prison-based staff who benefit if the prison community is stronger and more cohesive.

AVP has been researched in many jurisdictions, however, there is a dearth of research when it comes to AVP in Ireland. The international literature was quite clear that AVP can and does benefit participants by building self-esteem, engendering trust, and by developing communication, social and problem-solving skills. These skills must be experienced rather than simply taught and the experiential nature of AVP workshops remains key to this. The notion of Transforming Power enables participants to know that they can influence the outcome of potentially violent situations and can increase the level of agency in their lives.

The *raison d'être* of this Report is to garner research on the experience of AVP within the Irish prison system. The data obtained in the Irish context confirmed and built upon the international literature. The interviewees concurred with their international colleagues and confirmed that a sense of community, effective communication, and building trust and self-esteem were all vital for moving from violent to non-violent ways. Interviewees also noted that AVP is a force for good in Irish prisons, *e.g.* the Weapons Amnesty and the establishment and growth of the Red Cross were actively driven by current and former AVP facilitators. It was noted, however, by the prison-based facilitators that the supply of AVP workshops is not currently meeting the demand in prisons.

## Paths to explore

One of the most striking research findings in this Report is that AVP participants suggested that Prison Officers attend AVP workshops to gain a more holistic understanding of violence. Another significant finding in this research is that interviewees reported that AVP participants must be ready for personal change in order to benefit from AVP, merely attending the workshops is not sufficient.

A number of areas identified within this Report require further research and analysis. The relationship between recidivism and attendance at AVP workshops is certainly worthy of more scrutiny and could not be adequately tackled given the nature and scope of this Report. The statistics on the relationship between AVP and violent incidents is an area that also requires more data and further analysis. It was noted by a prison-based facilitator that levels of indiscipline and violence after participants attend AVP workshops were lower, but the evidence was anecdotal and certainly worthy of further and rigorous investigation.

In 2012 the European Union passed *Directive 2012/29/EU* which established minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. It would, therefore, be beneficial if current offenders were given the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to engage in victim-offender reconciliation and further restorative justice practices. It is hoped that AVP would be placed at the heart of such prison and community-based practices.

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## Appendix A – Interview Questions for Inside Facilitators

1. How long have you been involved with AVP?
2. How and why did you become involved with AVP?
3. Why did you decide to become an AVP facilitator?
4. What impact has being an AVP facilitator had on you personally?
5. In your opinion how has the presence of AVP affected life in the prison?
6. How is your AVP experience affecting your day-to-day life in the prison?
7. (How) has AVP changed you personally?
8. What parts (if any) of AVP have helped you deal with your day-to-day life in prison?
9. What has been the most important thing you have learned from your time as a facilitator with AVP?

## Appendix B – Interview Questions for Outside Facilitators

1. How long have you been involved with AVP?
2. Why did you become involved with AVP?
3. Why did you decide to become an AVP facilitator?
4. What impact has being an AVP facilitator had on you personally?
5. How do you think the presence of AVP affects life in the prison?
6. How has AVP changed you personally?
7. What parts of AVP have helped you deal with potentially violent situations in your day-to-day life?
8. What has been the most important thing you have learned from your time as a facilitator with AVP?

# Appendix C – Example Post-Workshop Questionnaire

## ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE WORKSHOP EVALUATION



Were your expectations met? Yes / No

*Please give us your comment on the following aspects of the workshop:*

> Total programme: .....

.....

> Exercise most liked: .....

Why? .....

.....

> Exercise least liked: .....

Why? .....

.....

> Team members: .....

.....

> The group: .....

.....

> Describe the most important insight/learning that you will take away from this weekend:

.....

.....

.....

> Other: .....

.....

> What specific suggestions do you have for improving this workshop? .....

.....

> Do you feel the name of the workshop accurately describes what is offered? Yes / No

If no, what name would you suggest? .....

*Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Your input is important to us and helps us to consider changes to the way we do things.*

## Appendix D – Prisoner on Prisoner Assaults (2008-2013)

Prisoner on Prisoner Assaults						
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Arbour Hill	0	4	0	1	4	7
Castlerea	53	51	77	78	73	103
Cloverhill	98	145	118	144	97	76
Cork	92	161	82	90	43	30
Dóchas Centre	4	5	26	22	25	21
Limerick	78	19	101	78	45	31
Loughan House	5	6	2	4	1	0
Midlands	68	48	80	113	68	88
Mountjoy (Male)	51		117	177	92	107
St.Patrick's Inst.	242	128	323	415	156	57
Portlaoise	3	4	14	19	12	5
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0	0	1	0
Training Unit	4	5	1	0	0	0
Wheatfield	61	96	73	129	98	77
PSEC	0	0	0	4	0	2
Total Assaults	759	672	1,006	1,274	715	604
Total Committals	13,557	15,425	17,179	17,318	17,026	15,735
Assaults per 10,000	560	436	586	736	420	384

Data supplied by the Irish Prison Service (IPS)

## Appendix E – Assaults in the General Irish Population

Assaults in the General Population			
Year	Assault Causing Harm	Population of Ireland	Assaults Per 10,000
2008	3,850	4,460,000	9
2009	3,733	4,520,000	8
2010	3,713	4,550,000	8
2011	3,584	4,570,000	8
2012	3,231	4,580,000	7
2013	3,089	4,590,000	7

Data obtained from the Central Statistics Office (CSO)