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alternatives  
to violence  
project

# **Finding Alternatives to Violence:**

## **An evaluation of AVP workshops at HMP Shepton Mallet**

### **Executive Summary**

**Dr Kathryn Tomlinson**

**January 2008**



# Finding Alternatives to Violence

## An evaluation of AVP workshops in HMP Shepton Mallet

Kathryn Tomlinson, January 2008

### Summary

The Alternatives to Violence Project ran a pilot project of three workshops from November 2006 to June 2007 with male life prisoners at HM Prison Shepton Mallet.

Participants valued the AVP workshops because they were relaxed and **enjoyable**, attendance was **voluntary**, and the men did not feel under the **scrutiny** they feel characterises prison-run courses. The **positive group dynamic** was remarked upon repeatedly, and in many cases this was said to have **continued to exist** in interactions between the AVP participants long after the workshops had ended. The atmosphere which enabled this bond to form was felt to be in part due to the facilitators' open and friendly approach, as well as to the voluntary choice made by the men to attend.

The workshop took participants through exercises related to self-esteem, communication, teamwork and non-violent resolution of conflict. In line with the experiential nature of the workshop, different people valued different aspects of the workshop in different ways. However, the **value of communication**, particularly in expressing one's feelings, was highlighted for several men, and team or **community building** exercises were the most memorable. This was reflected in the ease with which the groups bonded and the fact that for some those bonds have remained months after the workshops ended.

Several people reported that what they had learned had resulted in **changes in attitude and behaviour**, and were able to give examples of conflicts since the AVP workshop that they had resolved without violence. But for many this learning was the **result of a long process**, and attendance at several courses in prison, of which AVP was one. The difference between AVP and other courses was largely in relation to the pedagogic approach, it being relaxed, informal, elicitive and experiential.

The evaluation was unable to find evidence of the benefits in relation to attitude and behaviour change of **attending more than one AVP workshop**. This was in part due to attendance patterns of participants, and the timing of the evaluation, although the data suggested that level two was valued for the learning atmosphere more than the programme content. AVP's approach seems to add value to existing offending behaviour courses due to its pedagogical methods.

Efforts should be made to examine the research evidence in relation to such learning strategies.