

## WHAT IS 'AVP'?

People involved with AVP use the term to mean a variety of things. One meaning of 'AVP' is as the name of an international nonviolence movement supporting people who have been affected by violence to handle conflict and build better relationships. AVP began as a workshop programme in US prisons, co-created by prisoners and experienced group workers in the 1970s. The movement works in around 50 countries worldwide – in prisons, schools, refugee camps, conflict zones and other communities – usually with individuals in disadvantaged and violent situations. Many participants have lived with severe violence and/or have committed it against others.

'AVP' is also used to describe the philosophy behind how we work. At the heart of AVP is a belief in the potential of individuals and communities to discover the strength to transform situations and societies so that all can live with less violence and ultimately flourish. We believe it is possible to experience this, and that we need to develop skills and attitudes to serve it well in our relationships and in society as a whole.

In addition to supporting people to finding ways of living well individually and together, our work also aims to confront violence and its causes. AVP understands violence to have many forms. Perhaps most obviously, it includes physical and verbal abuse in relationships, which are in turn usually associated with injustices in society, themselves a form of violence. Many people in AVP also draw links between violence in homes and communities and the large-scale violence of war and ecological harm. Although AVP focuses on working with individuals and their relationships, our work can also be seen as part of a wider field of social and political concern for a more just, less violent world.

'AVP' is sometimes used to refer to a personal and collective commitment. To what? Perhaps: to celebrate life-giving potential of all people, including ourselves, to strive to respect and value ourselves and others with equal passion, and to work for social change accordingly. We aim to reflect this in how we work: for example, AVP facilitators try to avoid 'teaching' participants, instead taking part in the workshop alongside them and learning all together. These are some of the values of nonviolence, which we try to bring in to all we do and our daily dealings, including with each other. This is a challenging commitment and, being human, we do not always manage to meet it, nor could we expect to, but it is a value and goal that probably most AVPers would say they share.

Finally, 'AVP' is the name of our organisation in Britain, one of the larger branches of the worldwide movement. AVP Britain is a charitable organisation supporting the AVP community to carry out our work. The organisation is divided into six geographic areas, where around 150 volunteers organise and deliver our workshop programme. Volunteers also form eight national and regional volunteer committees. We have five part-time staff in London and Glasgow managing the administration, helping to improve how we work, developing the organisation and, of course, trying to raise funds in a difficult economic climate. We now supplement our workshop programme with a successful distance-learning project for prisoners; in the future we hope to become a national voice and source of experience on issues of interpersonal and community violence and prison reform.

Welcome to 'AVP' – in all its meanings.