

# AVP Volunteers Handbook

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## SECTION 1 Welcome to AVP

Firstly – a huge welcome to AVP Britain. Thank you for choosing to volunteer with AVP. By joining us you are also becoming part of a network spanning over 50 countries worldwide. Since a small group came together in a New York prison in 1975 to run workshops aimed at tackling violence on their wing, this network has continued to grow.

Alongside the learning and support you will be getting from staff and other volunteers, this Volunteer Handbook will help you navigate all the main aspects of working with us. It should provide all the information you need to be a successful volunteer, including what is expected of you and what you can expect from us. It provides a background to AVP and the duties and responsibilities of all volunteers. There are separate handbooks for facilitators, and for those working in prisons.

### Our Vision and Mission

AVP Britain has a vision of a non-violent society and our mission is to work towards this by empowering people to lead nonviolent lives. Through workshops and distance learning programmes we pass on skills to participants to help them build better relationships and to lead lives with less violence.

### Our strategic aims

As an organisation, we aim to be accessible, sustainable and inclusive and to provide a working environment that is supportive and stimulating for our staff and volunteers so that we can provide a valuable and recognised service to our participants. Our key objectives towards this are:-

- Increase the number and geographical spread of workshops in prisons and in the community.
- Develop our distance learning programmes.
- Develop sustainable funding options to maintain our work.
- Cherish and develop all our volunteers and their skills and increase our facilitator base to include a representative cross section of all communities.
- Improve communication across the organisation to ensure that AVP Britain feels like a community working together to accomplish our mission.
- Proactively market the AVP offering as a valuable community resource.
- Improve our links with AVP Internationally.

### AVP Values

#### **A Non-Violent Society**

We believe that it is possible for people to change. We may see violence, both physical and mental all around us, in the home, work, prison and socially, but AVP works from the idea that it is possible to learn new responses which respect ourselves and the other person and reduce our need to resort to violence as a solution. Our life experiences can be used as a learning tool, drawing on our awareness to deal constructively with the violence in ourselves and in our lives.

We start from the individual, but we know that the empowering effect of changing the way we see ourselves and our relationships and can lead to changes in the society around us. We started with one group that has a history of violence - prison inmates - and from there we reached out to community groups and made the training available to everyone.

#### **Transforming Power**

AVP starts from the principle that there is, in each one of us, a centre of great value and a motivation to goodness. Societies and traditions give this idea different names - the spirit, inner light, essence, divine spark, life force - the wording is unimportant but the idea is that we are all worthy of understanding and respect.

This motivation is all too often blocked or forgotten. When allowed to work through us, it can appear as the power to transform violent situations into peaceful ones. AVP works to reveal the Transforming Power that each person has to promote peace and justice.

### **Equality and Diversity**

AVP is a completely independent charity which does not discriminate in any of its policies, workshops or other activities on the basis of gender, race, disability, ethnic or national origin, age, religion, gender orientation, gender reassignment, marital status or sexual orientation. We provide equal opportunities to all job applicants, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries and we oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

### **Decisions by Consensus**

All decisions by the different bodies and committees of AVP are made by consensus wherever possible with full opportunity for all persons to be heard and respected; otherwise, an 80% majority vote is required.

### **Experiential Learning**

The AVP programme facilitates experiential learning with a minimum of lecture. The workshops draw heavily on the wisdom of all participants, not just that of the leaders. The role of the AVP team is to model and facilitate this self-learning process.

### **Volunteerism**

AVP workshops are about personal growth, and people can only choose to grow for themselves. All facilitators are volunteers and we generally expect all our participants to be volunteers also.

### **Team Leadership and Community**

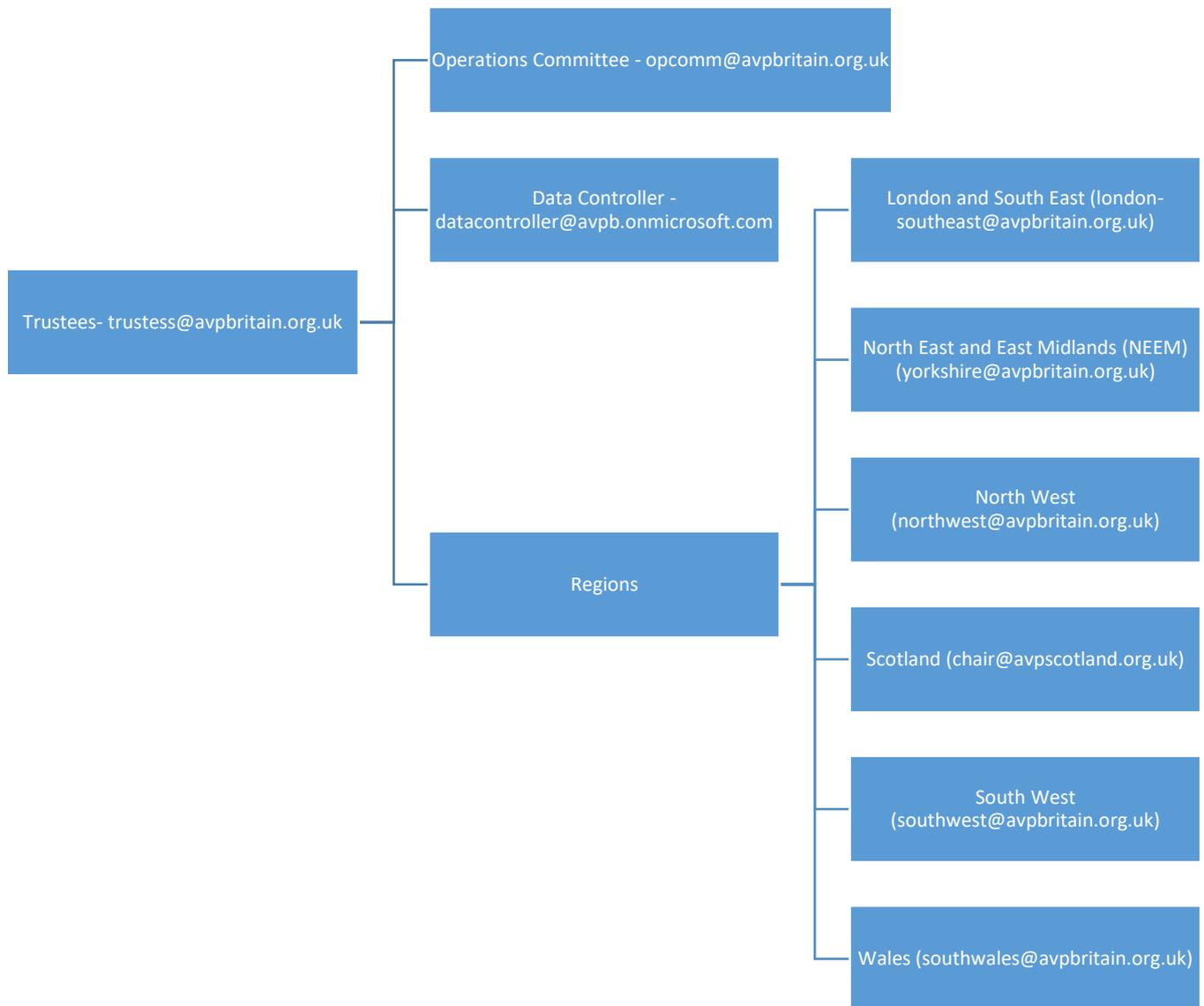
AVP uses a team leadership model, with individuals working together as equals and by mutual agreement, both in workshops and committees. AVP is about community and not hierarchy.

### **How we are organised**

AVP Britain is divided into six geographic groups –Scotland, Wales and four regional areas in England. Each group has its own Regional Coordinator (paid or voluntary) and Regional Management Committee (or similar body). The AVP Regions are semi-autonomous and organise their own fundraising and workshop programme, whilst working within the broad framework of AVP's national strategy and policies; other decisions made nationally.

Nationally, the Board of Trustees sets the organisation's strategy for development, safeguards its values and good name, ensures good governance and financial viability, and ensures that the organisation is meeting its charitable objects. Trustees are also responsible for leading the organisation's fundraising effort. Responsibility for day to day operational activities is delegated to the Operations Committee which oversees in particular the support for volunteers, the training of facilitators, the quality and content of workshops and communications.

The diagram below shows the overall structure of AVP with contact details.



## Your contacts

Your main point of contact should be your Regional Coordinator or, in the case of financial queries, your Regional Treasurer. In some regions there is a Development Worker, who may be able to answer your question, or point you in the right direction.

Our National Office is not at present staffed on a daily basis.

If you have an issue of national importance, you may wish to contact the Trustees ([trustees@avpbritain.org.uk](mailto:trustees@avpbritain.org.uk)) or, if it is concerning workshops or training and volunteer support, the Operations Committee ([opcomm@avpbritain.org.uk](mailto:opcomm@avpbritain.org.uk)).

## Workshops and Participants

Our standard workshop extends over at least 15hours, usually from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon. Special workshops over extended periods e.g. 1 day a week for 3 weeks may be organised for specific groups.

Whilst we believe everyone can gain from AVP, most of our participants tend to be:

- in the criminal justice system, at risk of offending, or who are ex-offenders and/or
- those affected by domestic violence, including perpetrators and/or
- those whose mental health has been affected by violence.

## Volunteering in AVP

### How we involve volunteers

Although AVP has a few paid workers, nearly all our activities are carried by volunteers. There are opportunities to get involved in a wide range of activities including:

- Workshop facilitation
- Overnight hosting of facilitators
- Workshop meeting and greeting
- Workshop organisation (including organising catering)
- Workshop bookings
- Financial management, including book-keeping and budgeting
- Fundraising
- Outreach and awareness-raising
- Publicity
- IT work
- Office administration
- Trustees and National Committee administration
- Regional Management committee or locality steering group membership

If you have any other skills or experience you think could be helpful, please let us know.

### Volunteer Support

We offer all our volunteers regular support including mentoring as well as opportunities for training in e.g. Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity, Mental health and Safeguarding.

#### **Your induction and training**

All volunteers undergo a general induction, when you will have an opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns you might have about the role. Then, if both you and AVP are happy with the arrangement, you can begin volunteering. You will also be given a more detailed description of your chosen role

#### **Volunteer Agreement**

We ask each volunteer to sign a volunteer agreement which sets out what AVP expects from the volunteer and what the volunteer can expect from AVP. Where a volunteer

could have access to confidential information or money we normally ask for one or more referees. Your regional coordinator will be able to advise. The Volunteer Policy is available on the AVP web site ([www.avpbritain.org.uk](http://www.avpbritain.org.uk)) along with other policies.

### **DBS/PVG and reference checks**

All new staff and volunteers in England and Wales are normally required to go through a DBS check although this is not required in Scotland.

We recognise that some potential volunteers may have criminal records and may be reluctant to apply for voluntary work where this would involve the disclosure of their record. In AVP we believe in the power of all people to change – and are willing to work with those who are honest about their journey. Please rest assured that if we do ask about criminal records we will handle the information you provide in confidence. Should you disclose them, we will not take into account convictions deemed spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, unless the voluntary position is exempt from the Act.

If the Disclosure reveals information that we were not previously aware of, we will discuss the matter with you before making a final decision.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is a vital part of skills development for all our volunteers. You will be invited to choose a mentor; this may be a facilitator from a previous workshop you have attended, or another experienced volunteer you feel able to communicate with well. Your initial meeting will focus on how you will work together, how often you will meet, and what you hope to gain from the relationship. Just contact the Regional Coordinator to progress with choosing a mentor.

The mentoring process is:

- a supportive form of development
- focused on helping you manage your volunteer role and improving your skills
- designed to meet your own objectives and the aims of AVP
- managed in a relatively informal manner
- a learning opportunity for both parties

You can benefit from the mentoring process by:

- committing the appropriate amount of time
- expressing what you aim to achieve through volunteering with AVP
- continually assessing your own abilities (strengths and development needs)
- making the best use of the advice and opportunities offered and taking responsibility for making things happen
- being open, honest and constructive

### **Facilitator Training**

If you are interested in facilitating, you need to initially complete two workshops (ideally a level 1 and a level 2 workshop). During the second workshop, you should discuss with the lead facilitator the possibility of becoming a facilitator. You will then be given a self-assessment questionnaire to complete together with an experienced facilitator. After considering the questionnaire, it is normally clear if you are ready to train as a facilitator. If so, you will be asked to complete a third workshop so that you have done at least one level 1 and one level 2 workshop and you will then be offered a place on a training for facilitators (T4F) workshop.

At your T4F you will be provided with a facilitation handbook and a manual with details of exercises. After the T4F you will usually become an apprentice facilitator and you will be fully supported on workshops by your lead facilitator who will provide detailed

feedback and help at each workshop. Generally, the 'apprenticeship' will last about three workshops, although for some people the apprenticeship may be shorter – for some longer. For more details on becoming a facilitator see the web site or contact your regional coordinator.

### **Prison Work**

AVP started in a prison and we still work regularly in prisons. Working in prisons can be challenging because of administrative and security hurdles, but can also be very rewarding. Details of procedures and safeguards for working in prisons are given in a separate handbook.

### **AVP Policies and Procedures**

The following AVP Britain policies are to be found in the Login section of the website which is accessible to volunteers and facilitators. It is important that you read and understand them. Please speak to your Regional Coordinator or mentor if you have any difficulties accessing them: -

- Volunteer Policy
- Expenses Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Data and IT Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Policy and Procedure for becoming a Facilitator
- Leaving Policy for Facilitators

Some of the main areas are briefly described below.

### **Safeguarding**

AVPB works with people who may be considered to be 'vulnerable'. Safeguarding is a process which we, along with many other charities, have adopted to ensure we keep our participants, facilitation team, volunteers and the wider community safe. It mainly relates to confidentiality limitations on workshops and any threats which may be disclosed by a participant to harm themselves or someone else but also applies to our volunteer safety before workshops. If you have any situations occurring on a workshop, the policy describes what you should do and who you should discuss this with.

### **Health and Safety**

AVP is committed to providing a safe environment for all participants and our volunteers and facilitators. A risk assessment should be carried out by the lead facilitator for each workshop venue.

### **Data and Communications**

As part of our work we may access personal information about our participants which must be kept confidential. "Personal Information" means anything from which someone could be identified, including their name, prison number, address etc.

In addition, AVPB is required to keep an up to date national database of volunteers and facilitators for insurance purposes and each region is required to send the current email and/or phone number of volunteers to AVPB on a quarterly basis. Within AVPB all identifying or personal data of volunteers or participants is kept on a password protected

data system and not shared outside this. You should not share your contact details with any workshop participant.

You can communicate with other facilitators using the '*facilitators@avpbritain.org.uk*' email group. We also have a regular newsletter for our volunteers and facilitators. Unless you wish otherwise, your email address will be automatically entered on the newsletter address list. If you do not want this to be added, please let us know.

### **Expenses**

Although AVP does not pay its volunteers, we do reimburse all reasonable travelling and other expenses (including accommodation expenses where necessary) in connection with facilitation of any workshop or any other official duties. The Expenses Policy on the web site lays out both the expenses that volunteers can reclaim from AVP and the claims process.

### **Complaints**

The AVP complaints policy outlines the procedures to be followed in the event of any dispute or complaint involving a volunteer or a participant. AVP aims to maintain a high standard of service. However, we recognise that sometimes our service may fall below what is acceptable. AVP will always try to resolve any problems efficiently and fairly and to put things right as quickly as possible. If a participant or a volunteer has a concern they should raise it with the volunteer, facilitator or regional coordinator involved as soon as possible.

## **Organising AVP Workshops**

### **Venue**

Every effort should be made to find venues that are accessible for all our participants including those who have impaired mobility and also where we are unlikely to disturb other groups. Checks should be made on whether papers can be attached to walls by bluetack or tape. Some regions provide catering for participants; others suggest that participants bring their own food or have a shared meal. Arrangements may need to be made for meals for the facilitators. Arrangements also need to be made to welcome participants at the start of the workshop and to collect any money due.

### **Publicity**

Ideally, each region should produce a programme of workshops for a year by the autumn of the preceding year which should be placed on the web site. Local publicity including leaflets, social media, contacts with social services, solicitors, and other charities is also important,

### **Finding the facilitating team**

It is normally the responsibility of the regional coordinator to find a team of facilitators which is balanced in terms of age, experience, gender and location, but this task may be delegated to an experienced facilitator. The Annual Gathering, normally in autumn, is a good opportunity find facilitators. The region is also responsible for arranging accommodation for members of the facilitation team who need it.

### **List of Participants**

The names and contact details of participants together with any special dietary, medical or other needs should be collected and passed to the Lead Facilitator. This information

should be regarded as confidential and the AVP data protection policy (see web site) should be followed.

### **Kit Box**

Each region is responsible for providing a kit box containing all the materials needed for the workshop and for ensuring that it is topped up as required after each workshop. The list of items in the kit box is provided on the web site.

### **Evaluations and Reports**

After each workshop participants are asked to complete an evaluation as well as a diversity monitoring form. Participants are also asked to complete an evaluation prior to the start of the workshop. These forms are normally collected by the lead facilitator and submitted with the facilitators report to the regional coordinator and the facilitators report should be uploaded to the national database.

## **SECTION 3 VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR LOCAL AVP REGION**

*This section can be used by each region to describe their local organisational structure and practices*