

In This Issue:

Our Summer Intern

AVP National Gathering

National Gathering in 2017

A Guided Meditation

Helping Prospective Facilitators

AVP Massachusetts facilitators have been active and engaged since our last newsletter in 2015. Some AVP-MA facilitators attended the AVP/USA Annual Gathering in Denver, Colorado. This summer we were blessed with a wonderful intern, Nialena Ali. Highlights of these activities are included in this issue.

Meet Nialena, Our Summer Intern

After completing my junior year at Mount Holyoke College, I found myself searching for a summer internship. I have always been interested in human rights and justice, and I knew that I wanted to work with those incarcerated. After browsing through the websites of dozens of DOC programs and re-entry organizations, I came across the Alternatives to Violence Project. I was immediately attracted to the compassionate wording that AVP used to reference inmates (i.e. “incarcerated citizens” as opposed to “offenders”) and I believed in its mission. So I sent an email to Chris Campbell who put me in touch with Nancy Shippen and from there my journey began.

For the past three months I have done administrative work for AVP behind the scenes while attending workshops and engaging on site. I feel so fortunate to have been able to view the full scope of the project. It has been so refreshing to see people from all walks of life embracing one another's humanity. And it has been humbling (to say the least) to bear witness to all the work that goes on behind the scenes and all the many ways that people dedicate and volunteer themselves for the benefit of others (not to say that AVP isn't a mutually beneficial initiative). Seeing the amount of emotional and mental growth that takes place in a matter of days has been so inspiring and definitely the most rewarding part of my time with AVP. As I return to campus in just a few weeks I will bring the values and skills that I gained from AVP with me and carry them throughout all of my future endeavors, interactions and relationships.



Nice Nialena Ali

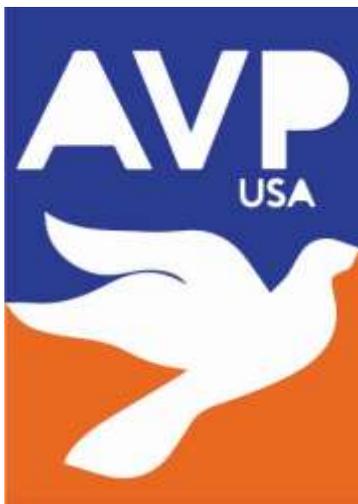
AVP National Gathering

Capable Chris Campbell, Natural Nancy Shippen, and Balancing Betsy Simmons from AVP-MA were among the facilitators who attended the National Gathering in Denver, Colorado, which was held on the beautiful campus of Regis University in May 2016.

Chris Campbell Reflects on the AVP National Gathering

I arrived after a long train ride from the airport feeling very much an alien in a strange land, wandering the large campus of Regis University in search of the site of the national gathering. 45 minutes later, I stumbled upon it and never looked back.

In light of recent events, it seemed like this year's theme, *From Retribution to*



New AVP USA logo

Restoration was almost Pollyannaish. How will we ever create “restoration” in our time in light of murders by police of innocent civilians, especially of young black men, and of retributive murders of peaceful police officers? One answer may lie in the squadron of up and coming AVPers featured at this conference – youth who are doing great things in their communities and who are drawing still more youth to AVP. A number of them attended on scholarship, as “Peace Fellows.”

Innovative, creative, often outspoken, and even critical of our existing organization, these young men and women asked for more voice, and for more diversity in AVP. In the wake of their uproar, the business meeting had to be delayed to accommodate a conference-wide circle of dialogue, and allow board members to sort out whether youth needed more representation at the board level. As a result of that dialogue, bylaws changes are being drafted even now for adoption at the 2017 National Gathering, which we will host.

I got to spend one late evening with a bunch of these young adults and we had a candid exchange about the differences in our perceptions about the organization. While we did not agree on all points, I did respect the conversation, and I left impressed by how articulate and capable they were.

The arts were also very present at Gathering 2016, as evening activities were entirely structured by a local Arts Council. So we heard poetry, saw paintings, created a collective mural, and heard stories. It was good to see art in play, since arts often say what many think but cannot find words for. I think we also learned for our own planning that arts are a dense medium, and a little can go a long way. Too much static sitting while listening to one poem after another can be taxing on a weary audience. Note to us: variety and active engagement are key.

I enjoyed a number of really stimulating sessions. One was on somatics, a field I knew little about. In somatics, it is presumed that trauma is stored in the body, so that physical touch or deliberate physical action is said to help us access and work out traumatic experience. I went in with skepticism, but was impressed by the genuineness of the presenters and by the emotion they were able to draw out in their session. The session pictured above is being led by Nancy Hutchins (standing).



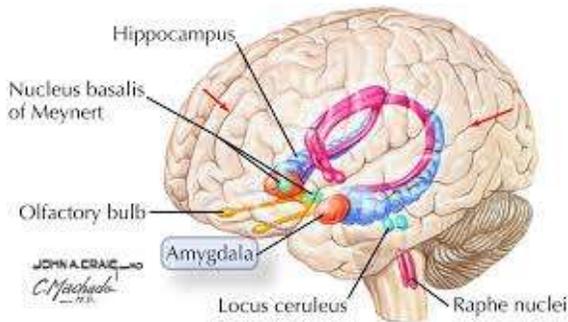
A lot of the fun at these events is just about who you come across in conversation. One evening a bunch of us wandered to a nearby pub where I listened to a group discuss some of the issues faced by AVP National, such as whether to pay AVP facilitators. While we love the volunteer nature of AVP, we may exclude those who can't afford to volunteer whole weekends. There is merit on both sides of the issue and it was good to hear the dialogue as the organization works its way through hard questions.

I met Bronwen Hillman, President of AVP International. I met up with AVPers I had facilitated with or spoken to previously. I met with more youth. I roomed with a crazy guy whom I would never have otherwise met in normal circles of my life, but who left a deep impression of friendship and understanding with me. He played guitar and lived part time in a yurt. He would later present on his experience with doing AVP with solitary confinement prisoners. (At one point, he apparently had to pretend to be a chaplain just to get in!) He spoke passionately and in a raw voice about his own vulnerability in doing that work, and about the despair he encountered.

There were many other moving moments, and I hope more AVPers in Massachusetts will have many chances to attend these events in the future as they are inspiring and eye opening. On arriving at Regis, I had wandered with lonely frustration across the large campus in search of the AVP Gathering. By the end, I left grateful for every part of the experience, and feeling like I owned the place.

Nancy Shippen Reflects on the Gathering

It was great to be back at the National gathering since I missed it last year, many old and new friends, long discussions and rooming with Betsy Simmons although we didn't see that much of each other.



I presented two workshops. John Shuford and I joined forces to present material about **AVP and the Brain**. John's contribution was about the effects of trauma on the brain physiologically and how AVP can help form some healthy brain connections. I presented on the work of Daniel Goldman and others. Their work looks at the components of social Intelligence; resilience, outlook, social intuition, social awareness, sensitivity to context and attention.

Concepts from this work include:

The social brain. Whenever we connect with someone, social brains interlock. Repeatedly driving our brain into a given register molds certain neural circuitry and can refashion our brain positively or negatively. It's important to choose your company. Increasingly we are isolated from the immediate environment by music ear buds and cell phones. This is taking its toll.

Emotions are contagious and positive emotions are more contagious. It's hard to resist the positive nature of AVP. Simpatico or rapport entails mutual attention, shared positive feeling, well-coordinated nonverbal interaction indicated by mutual empathy, good feeling invoked through tone of voice and facial expression, coordination or synchrony through pace and timing of a conversation and our body movements.

We are hardwired for empathy. Mirror neurons sense both the move another person is about to make and their feelings, and instantaneously prepares us to imitate that movement and feel with them. The more we feel empathy the more we want to help – altruism.

We are also hardwired for assessing risk. Our amygdala is constantly scanning at lightning speed to decide if there is anything 'off' about a person or situation. Living in stressful, traumatic situations makes this the first assumption.

A newly discovered type of neuron, the spindle cell, guides social decisions. They are the fastest reactors and more plentiful in humans than any other species. We have about 1000 times as many as our closest ape relatives. They connect the part of our brain that coordinates our attention, thoughts, emotions and our body's response. They are very fast and rich in receptors for the chemicals which play key roles in bonding with others.

While all this instant judgment is going on, we also become aware and are able to bring our slower logical, skillful brain into action. We can make decisions based on prior experience, understanding of the other person, and consideration of the consequences of our actions. AVP helps us learn to slow down our reactions, evaluate the situation and apply skilled responses. Cyber bullying and road rage come from not having in-person interactions and feedback loops. Reframing a situation from upsetting to pleasurable has been shown to change the reaction in the brain. Shown a picture of a woman crying outside a church the subject assumes a funeral and feels sad. Asked to think again about the possibilities they think wedding and experience mood lift.

Betsy L. Simmons: A Poem about Young and Old at the AVP Conference



We who are young(er) and we who are old(er) meet to share our knowledge, insights, honor our history, imagine our future.

We greet, meet, wrangle, retreat and return to our process to listen and witness our need for change, need for consistency, wish to grow, wish to belong.

Reved up for the night or ready to turn out the light, we commit to our circle; Our voices and volumes, soft or loud, snap, snap, silent clap.

We speak up for ourselves and each other, so we can hear each other fully

I envision us in a rowboat, pushing away from a sure shore into a shifting sea; we come from different places, but we're all in the same boat now.

We young(er), we old(er) each have an oar, sit side by side, facing open sea and sky

We row forward together, we drift, float, find our way thru smooth and rough waters feeling each other's rhythms, energies, aspirations, apprehensions, gifts.

We listen, clarify, question, share passions, seek change, hold onto roots, dare something new.

Change is exciting, challenging and inevitable. May we all be part of growing AVP together.

We may all have come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.... Martin Luther King Jr.

AVP-MA to Host National Gathering in 2017

We are in the planning stages for the AVP National Gathering that will be held in Massachusetts on Memorial Day weekend in 2017. We are currently gathering information for the theme and have narrowed it down to two:

Theme 1: AVP Journey – through conflict, to self, and BEYOND.

The work of conflict resolution invites the creativity to see where transforming power can help to resolve conflict. As we seek resolution, we discover that part of the needed transformation is of ourselves, considering our own contributions to the conflict, and what about the conflict triggers our own strong reactions to it. We may open ourselves to consider the viewpoint of the other. We may learn of trauma in the lives of our adversaries, and develop empathy for them. Looking even more deeply at a conflict, we may even begin to see larger forces at work – the systems and injustices that created the circumstances that fostered the conflict in the first place. This consciousness can inspire us to seek change reaching far beyond the immediate circumstances.

Theme 2: Upstream in the River of Violence – taking AVP to where violence happens before prison

AVP was founded by men in prison who wanted to make their prison a less violent environment. With help from Friends and Civil Rights Non-violent activists they created AVP. The program has moved out into the world and been effective in many places with a concern to end the present violence in their community. We are also moving into those areas where trauma and violence originate; domestic violence; child abandonment, neglect and abuse; marginalized populations; organizations based on command and control such as police and prison officers. How do we replicate our emerging efforts? How can we enable our prison programs to prepare peace builders to reach out to wider participation inside and when they return to their communities?

As far as speakers for the gathering, we have received verbal agreement from Jean Troustine, author of *Boy With A Knife*, which tells the story of Kool Karter Reed who many of us know from his work as an inside AVP facilitator at MCI-Shirley and Old Colony Correctional Center. Nancy Shippen suggested Jean Troustine, and Katie Green reached out to her with our invitation.

If you have questions or would like to help with the 2017 gathering, please contact Chris Campbell at christopherpcampbell@yahoo.com. Current working groups are Fundraising, Venue selection, Program Planning, and Communications. Logistics will be added later.

A Guided Meditation

This guided meditation was adapted by Gail Rogers and Nancy Shippen from the Advanced Manual, page D-91.

Purpose: To experience four types of meditation which have been shown to build healthy brain circuitry and to impart a sense of self-worth and encourage people to act according to the best in them.

Time: 30 minutes total; probably not more than 10 minutes of actual meditation time. Slow yourself down. Breathe between phrases. Try to be sensitive to the comfort level of the group.

Materials: CD or tape cassette player for soft, calming music to be played in background.
Handout on the four types of meditation to be shared after the experience.

Sequence: Gather the group in a circle and ask them to sit, relax, and close their eyes.
Read slowly. Use the word love or the word compassion according to your assessment of the group's comfort:

1. (Type 1 Relaxation) Pay attention to your body. Feel yourself sitting in your chair. Straighten your body do you will be able to breathe more easily. Close your eyes of focus softly on a spot on the floor. Feel yourself begin to relax. Start with your feet, then your calves. (Pause for a breath or two) Now move on up to your thighs, hips, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, neck, face... (Pause for a breath or two)
2. (Type 2 Focused Breathing) Now bring your focus to your breath at the tip of your nose or in the rise and fall of your diaphragm. Just follow the breath in and out. (Pause for several breaths)
3. (Type 3 Open Awareness) Now open your perception to the space around you. Be aware of the temperature, sounds... Be aware but don't be distracted by them. Let them come and go... open awareness... (Pause for several breaths)

In this state of openness hear what I will read. Just let it in without resistance, or judgment:

I am me.
In all the world, there is no one else like me.
I have this one life to live.
The way I live can make a difference.
To the people close to me,
To those I live with — play with — work with,
To the community I live in,
And to people I may never see.
I can use the love/compassion given to me to help others.
Sharing this love/compassion makes me happier and others happier.
When I am unkind to others in words or actions, I destroy something in myself.
Love/compassion brings people together and builds.
Let my life be built on love/compassion.
Let me find the good in myself and the good in others.
Let me be a part of making this world a better place.
Let me be the REAL ME.
I am me.
I am a valuable person.
There will never be another me. (Pause for several breaths)

4. (Type 4 Compassion): Now envision yourself bathed in a gentle light. Appreciate all you have attained. Know that you will go on growing in wonderful ways. Think of those around you. Send them the same affirming energy. Explore how you can enlarge this circle of affirmation... to your family...others living here... maybe even someone you find difficult. Gently recognize the struggles of all and wish them strength and community.

Pay attention to how you feel now. Recognize the feeling of relaxation and connection. This is a state you can return to, a place of calm and clear vision.

When you are ready, think of what you might be willing to share about this experience when you return to the group.

5. Debrief: What was that like for you? If you grew sleepy, know your body is sleep deprived. Go over handout, 4 Meditation Practices. Point out each in the above sequence.

Four meditation practices that have been shown to build positive emotions:

These may be practiced alone or together. In any meditation it is good to settle the body first. At the end it is good to focus again on the body to recognize and remember the relaxed peaceful state. Doing this will help get to this level more easily. Many people also spend a few moments on dedication or intention arising from the meditation. "May this meditation help me to stay relaxed; think more openly; bring more compassion into my world..."

1. **Body Scan Relaxation** – This is linked to several health benefits; blood pressure, heart rate, anxiety... Lying down or sitting, successively relax each part of your body. Start at your feet. Focus for several breaths on relaxing each part of your body, working up to your head.
2. **Focused Attention Meditation** – This helps with attention and focus generally. Focusing on one spot has been shown to build attention. Pick a single point; breathe at your nose, breath at your diaphragm, a spot on the floor, or candle flame. Relax and breathe deeply, staying focused on the same spot. Return if distracted.
3. **Unfocused Meditation** – This has been seen to enhance creativity and problem solving behavior. Allowing thoughts to just pass by without dwelling on them, Sit relaxed. Simply be aware of what is around you without getting caught on thinking about it. If distracted, return to awareness of your breath, sounds, and sensations. Notice thoughts arising and then let them go.
4. **Compassionate Meditation** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkec1OZ3EFo>)– this is linked to improved heart health and connecting heart brain connections. Sending and receiving compassion. While breathing deeply, smile and bathe yourself in loving kindness. Move on to those you love, then those for whom you have a concern, then to the difficult people and to those you don't know and/or will never meet.



Helping Prospective Facilitators

Because of the challenge new prospective facilitators face getting oriented and engaged in AVP- MA, we will begin an experiment offering a kind of "concierge" service for new prospective facilitators. Joan Wheeler is assuming this role and will liaise with prospective volunteers in order to keep in touch with them and to keep them engaged in getting through the needed orientations and into participation with the teams at different facilities. If you have someone who might be interested in doing AVP, please include Joan in your correspondence so that she can support and help maintain the momentum of your relationship. Joan can be reached at: joan.wheeler@gmail.com.



AVP Massachusetts
P. O. Box 333
Concord, MA 01742

Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendar and plan to attend the following events:

- **September 8, 2016**, Primary Election Day; don't forget to vote. In some counties, the Democratic primary will determine who the next sheriff will be. The Criminal Justice Policy Coalition has county-by-county information about the Sheriff candidates here: <http://www.cjpc.org/Sheriffs-Election-Project.htm>.
- **September 11, 2016**. "Massachusetts and the Carceral State" conference at Harvard Law School, Wasserstein Hall, 1585 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Open to the public and AVP-MA will have a table there.
- **October 1, 2016**, Fundraising dinner at Christopher's Café, 2 Lewis Street, Lynn, MA, at 6:30 p.m. The evening will include dinner by candle light, music and stories, TED Talk style.
- **October 29, 2016**, Pot luck event at the home of Carolyn Shoet, 299 Bedford Road, Carlisle, MA.
- **November 8, 2016**, Presidential Election Day. Don't forget to vote.

Contact Chris Campbell at christopherpcampbell@yahoo.com if you have questions.