



The Arkansas Coalition for Peace and Justice (ACPJ) envisions a state where our communities and individuals live free of violence and where every person can grow and thrive. The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) can help us realize this vision. We have successfully implemented the AVP in our local prisons and have seen firsthand the positive impact on participants. ACPJ is now extending the AVP program with a focus on reaching the youth in our communities. We invite you to join us!

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)

The AVP is an organization of trained and dedicated volunteers who, through experiential workshops, empower individuals to liberate themselves and others from the burden of violence. Founded in prison and developed from the real-life experiences of prisoners, it became obvious that violence occurs in our lives just as much outside prison walls as inside. Community and Youth programs arose from that recognition to spread across the USA and the world. Today, AVP workshops are present in over 30 states and 40 countries. AVP encourages every person's innate power to positively transform first themselves and then the world.

AVP Programs

AVP programs consist of a series of workshops that use the shared experience of both participants and facilitators to examine how injustice, prejudice, frustration, and anger can lead to aggressive behavior and violence. They explore our innate power to respond in new and creative ways. Using life experiences as a learning resource, participants draw on each other to deal constructively with violent tendencies in themselves and violence in their lives. The programs teach through experiential learning with a minimum of lectures. Practicing nonviolent solutions, for example, is one of the exercises of the workshop. The exercises help participants discover new ways to deal with conflicts nonviolently by being part of and observing role plays, acknowledging that not all violence is physical.

Over many iterations, AVP has evolved a structure and set of learning activities for workshops that model prevention and build from the grassroots up. Affirmation and communication (non-violent) skills are important in these programs. They are about community, working together and without coercion and recognizing the potential we all have to grow and develop, an approach taken by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others.

AVP in Three Formats

Since 2016, ACPJ has been involved with the Friends Meeting of Little Rock (Quakers) in using the **AVP program for adult inmates** at the Tucker Prison Unit near England, AR. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a temporary pause, our program has been successful, acclaimed by participants and administrators alike. When public-health concerns allow, we intend to reinstitute the program and strengthen it.

To strengthen and add capacity to the inmate program, ACPJ intends to begin an **AVP community program** that will appeal to adults in central Arkansas. One of the benefits from such community outreach will be the training of citizens who share an interest in supporting current or new AVP initiatives. Depending on interest, trained program graduates will be in a position to assist a prison or community program, or a program component designed for school aged children.

AVP is one of the most powerful, empowering anti-bullying programs available. The principle of learning from shared experiences has been effective in schools across the country. The school-based program, **Alternative to Violence—Youth Program (AV-YP)** will be overseen by ACPJ with the cooperation of schools that become involved. Based on a peer-leadership model, the goals are (1) to identify and recruit 11th and 12th graders to become acquainted with AV-YP, (2) to invite those who show interest to be trained as facilitators, and (3) request volunteers from this pool to work in Teams of 2 offering AV-YP workshops for freshmen and sophomores in high-schools. This would take place under the care of ACPJ leadership according to a schedule and details approved by participating schools. Teams will be asked to submit a short report about each workshop completed. Although AVP is a volunteer project, we hope to provide stipends to team members for each completed workshop as our means allow.

The ACPJ Vision

In this time of grave public concerns about the violence in our community, ACPJ envisions a reduction in and eventual end to the violence among us. Based on our experience with the Alternatives to Violence Project in the inmate population, we believe the AV-YP and community programs deserve to be brought forward as a resource for our community. You can contribute by: (1) volunteering for training, (2) becoming a facilitator, (3) sharing the initiative with others, and (4) helping raise modest support for administrative costs and stipends.

More Information

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- [Arkansas Coalition for Peace and Justice](#)
- [Alternatives to Violence Project](#)