

HOW AVP HELPED TO INSPIRE MY FAMILY

By: "Audacious" Andre' Boston

My name is Andre' Boston, and I am a 40 year old man who is presently incarcerated at the Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, California. I have been incarcerated for approximately 24 years and housed throughout various institutions and security levels within in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

I recently had the opportunity to participate in the Basic and Advanced Workshops of the Alternative To Violence Program (AVP). My initial thoughts when I heard of AVP were that it would be just another run of the mill group session where prisoners listened to lectures and speakers. I expected to complete the program with perhaps another certificate for group participation under my belt. However, to my utter amazement from the very first moment that I walked into my Basic AVP Workshop, I realized that AVP offered "workshops" and not just "sessions." In my eyes the difference between a workshop and a session involves the degree of participation by the parties. What I found with AVP was that everything was geared towards the total involvement of all group participants. Each moment of my Basic Workshop seemed to be a new experience that enabled me to drop the prison façade that most prisoners accustom themselves to wearing in this seemingly unreal environment. The Workshop provided an atmosphere that made it appropriate for everyone to open up and really be himself. It was through my participation in these stereotype disarming exercises that I found myself able to open up and absorb the splendor and beauty associated with the AVP experience. For once I began to see every member of my workshop as something more than just a nickname, or a number, or the homeboy of a homeboy. For once I got to see each individual as a "man". I got to see them as loving fathers, dedicated grandfathers, caring brothers and supportive husbands. I was given the opportunity to really realize that every face I have ever seen beyond these walls, have similar circumstances and basically we are all the same. I began to realize that prisoners share the same fears, insecurities, problems, concerns and issues. It was through this realization that I began to realize even further that there were many people who I previously saw as just another face in the crowd that had valuable input, insight and wisdom on a variety of problems and concerns. Most importantly, I began to realize that communication is an amazing tool when it is utilized effectively. After my experience with AVP I walked away craving the opportunity to complete further workshops that could enable me to one day become a facilitator and help inspire the lives of others through the AVP experience. The one thing I did not realize is that the person I might inspire the most was very dear to my heart.

Shortly after my Basic and Advanced AVP Workshops I received a visit from my wife and was able to share some aspects of my AVP experience. While many of the things in an AVP workshop that I have experienced defy the confines of mere word description, I was able to convey the depth of some of my experiences. My wife was able to see my appreciation for the gifts that I discovered through AVP. A few weeks later, my wife told me that my son who was a teenager had realized that he had a problem with anger and wanted to get some help. Having my Certificate of Completion for AVP Workshops, my wife demonstrated her complete resourcefulness by going to the AVP website and scheduling my son for participation in an AVP workshop in our community.

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While awaiting to attend his scheduled workshop, my son would ask me what the AVP experience would be like and all I could tell him was that he would have to wait and see because words failed to do justice to benefits offered by AVP.

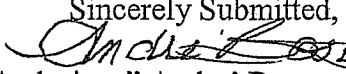
My son kept his appointments to attend the two weekend workshops for AVP that were conducted in Santa Monica, California. Following his attendance in the AVP Workshops, my son seemed to walk away with a different perspective about communicating with people. My wife didn't really prod my son into discussion about his AVP experience, and recognized that he was not forthcoming with any discussions. When I next spoke with my son, I asked him about his AVP experience. I knew that because I had also gone through a similar experience we could relate together about our experiences in AVP. Our discussions were informative and together we laughed about our affirmative names. My wife observed a change in my son's ability to recognize when he is angry and to take a moment to relate to the emotions stirred by his anger and why it might exist. My son now seems to have developed additional skills that enable him to think before he acts out of anger. I find myself immensely pleased with the knowledge that my son has become a better person as a result of his AVP experience.

My son has since joined the military and is presently in Boot Camp undergoing his basic training. I am very thankful that prior to going off for Boot Camp my son acquired some additional communication skills to assist him in all the things he will face in his future. I have no doubt that the skills he has learned will aid him in his military service no matter where he is ultimately stationed.

Words also fail to describe the joy, honor and pride I feel from knowing that something I experienced in life to help me become a better person, could also reach out and assist my son in the same manner. I guess that I am most happy because my son and I could both have this bonding relationship of having gone through a similar workshop to develop skills to help improve our and interactions with others.

My family is very thankful for a program like AVP and already it has made a significant impact in our lives. I hope that this program continues to reach all the many individuals who could benefit from the skills and insight offered through AVP.

Please feel free to utilize our story as an endorsement for the AVP program, and to be shared by facilitators with any interested party.

Sincerely Submitted,

"Audacious" Andre' Boston