

What is the Alternatives to Violence Project?

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a program that trains individuals to use in non-violent ways resolve interpersonal conflicts, that take place in their homes, schools, job sites and in the community at large. This training takes place in multi-level workshops that uses experiential methods, rather than traditional didactic or seminar methods. The method includes interpersonal exercises, group discussion, role-plays and games.

The Alternatives to Violence Project began in 1975 in the New York prison system. The prisoners requested help in developing non-violent ways in their lives and to help young people also develop a non-violent lifestyle. Quakers responded to the request and began developing workshops to teach the prisoners the live non-violently.

Since that time AVP workshops have also been requested in communities in the United States and in over 50 countries around the world. Although, Quakers started AVP, it is not a religious program nor does it seek to convert anyone to the Quaker faith. Quakers are associated with the program because of our work towards peace and non-violence, which has been our tradition.

In addition to training individuals who can use the methods in their lives, the three level experiential workshop series seeks to train participants to become facilitators, themselves. In this way, AVP can spread as demand for the workshops develops.

The Strategic Plan

Our plan calls for us to train Palestinian organizations in the Alternatives to Violence Project so the organizations can offer these life-changing workshops to those whom they serve. These same organizations can then offer these workshops to other organizations, which can then offer these workshops to those whom they serve. This is how AVP can multiply in the Palestinian Territories.

The goal is to reduce the horizontal violence that exists in the Palestinian Territories, by enabling local organizations to teach participants how to resolve their interpersonal conflicts in non-violent ways. By incorporating the workshop series in their service plans, organizations can more likely afford the cost of the workshops because the facilitators conduct them as part of their jobs. We are also open to consulting and training appropriate governmental entities. We do not engage in political or governmental issues, since we are non-partisan.

The plan for Palestine began in 2007, when we introduced AVP in Hebron. Since that time, we have trained organizations in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Gaza. In 2011, 2012 and 2013, with the assistance of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker humanitarian organization, we trained over 50 individuals, who represented over 12 Gazan organizations. A core of facilitators and organizations, have begun developing AVP workshops on their own.

Our plans call for us the help develop AVP in Israel, as well, which we began in 2013. Horizontal violence exists in Israel as well. Thus far, we have had a positive response to the work that began in 2013.

The Alternatives to Violence Project has developed workshop manuals since its inception. A combined basic and advanced workbook has been translated into Arabic. We have also developed a youth program for which there is a separate manual. Facilitators are volunteers. We are not paid for the work we do. We do this because we deeply believe in the Alternatives to Violence Project as a source of non-violence, assertiveness and understanding that will inform our developing a more peaceful world. Our funding comes from our Quaker community in the US and from individuals who contribute to our work.

Prior to his work in Palestine and Israel, along with other AVP facilitators, Joe DiGarbo conducted the same work in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia between 2001 and 2006.

For those not familiar with AVP we will summarize that the workshops are intended to invite participants to examine the ways in which they respond to situations where frustration, anger, prejudice, and injustice can lead to aggressive behavior and violence. It is not about politics, government policies or focusing energy on things that are beyond our control. Most participants gain the most when they focus on themselves, their families, work place and community.

Both Joe D and Joe M have personally found that AVP has helped us lead a more peaceful life generally and not only when we have been faced with potential conflict.

<http://www.avpusa.org/>