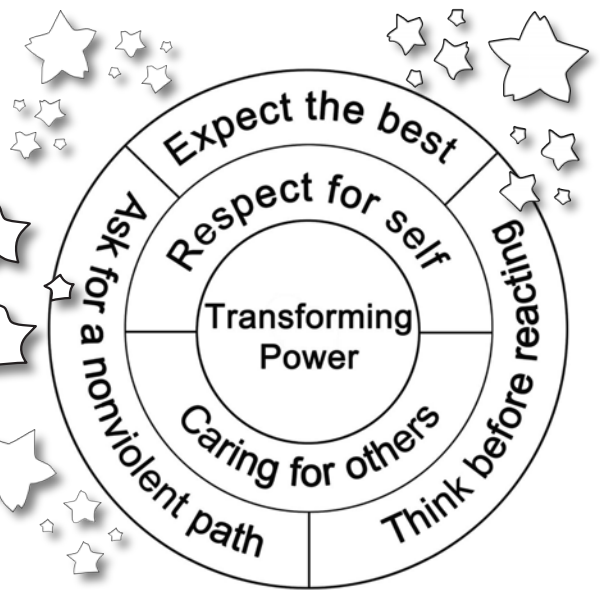


AVP Inside Out

Issue #11/November 2021



Note From the Editors

Greetings friends,

This issue brings clear signs of the continuity of life and the inevitability of change. You'll find updates of some changes with this newsletter and efforts we're making to reach people who are or have been incarcerated. We celebrate Native American Heritage month with one man's story of challenges overcome and a life fully-lived. Difficulties dealing with the holidays are balanced with the story of a circle of care. We also explore personal accountability and connections with ourselves, our family, our AVP community, and the planet which we inhabit. We hope you enjoy this month's issue.

The Editors



The Three Sisters, 2015

By Genuine Judy
Collage, 12" x 17"

Dear Community

Providing updates on AVP actions underway in our community



Dear readers,

We hope this letter finds you and yours as well as can be. It's been a year since we started this newsletter. It's important to us to keep that connection alive. We're planning a small change we'd like to tell you about. Going into our second year, we'll be taking off the month of December, and another month during the summer. This means you will receive an issue this December, but not in January.

We'd also like to provide some narrative to the number of insiders receiving this newsletter. If you're tracking, you'll notice that number is now a few less than last month. Until we are able to return to prison workshops, we are less likely to reach more inside readers. We encourage you to share with others and invite them to subscribe. Meanwhile, though, we get to celebrate the end of incarceration for those being released.

We often hear from those anticipating an upcoming release that they plan to stay in touch and get involved. We want you to know we'd love nothing more! You are a valuable part of our community and we are eager to welcome you. In fact, we've engaged an FNVW volunteer in a new role of connecting the recently released to AVP's community and organized events. When you are out, settled, and ready to take on new things, please reach out to us, using the FNVW contact info in the footer of this newsletter. If you call and have to leave a message, be sure to leave clear contact information. Now that we have virtual events, all you need is an internet connection to participate. Wherever you may be, whatever conditions you're in, we're excited to welcome you!

Until next time,
The Editors

Dear AVP Advising each other through specific conflict by committee

Dear AVP,

I hate the holidays! Holidays have been very important to my family, a chance to get together at least once a year. Now that I'm stuck and don't get to spend this time with my family, it is really tough. I hate hearing about how others are celebrating the holidays, or how pretty the decorations are, or what they're going to do when they get together. I'm depressed and angry at myself for being in this position while other people's lives go on without me. I just don't know how I'm going to get through the holidays this year.



Feeling Left Out

Dear Feeling,

Holidays are challenging for many, whether because they no longer have contact with loved ones or never experienced the holidays as a warm, loving tradition. If you look around, you will likely find that there are others who share your feelings of isolation and grief. If things are not the way you remember from the past, make a change. It might be helpful to shift your perspective to one of joy for their happiness. Then, use the time to reflect on what the holidays mean to you and make your own plans. Consider reaching out to others who may also be struggling. Create new rituals that make sense for where you are this year. Perhaps Native American seasonal celebrations and winter solstice can be used as reminders to distill and filter the past and envision how you will grow into the next year. Make a conscious decision to glean what you need from the holidays, and let the rest go.

AVP

Celebrations

Spotlighting outstanding individuals of diverse backgrounds
through the lens of current events

Follow the Red Road* | By Compassionate Chris

During the Mahkato Wacipi (Pow Wow) this fall I interviewed my friend, who is a Native activist and Elder. I asked him about his life, what he has learned and the advice he would like to share with readers. He has asked that I not use his name.

Like many Native children in his generation, he was taken from his home at age five and placed in a Catholic boarding school. He was not allowed to speak his language or practice his family traditions. Although he was traumatized and mistreated at the school, he tried to get along and follow the rules.

A few years later, he learned of secret meetings in the woods where the children were told to resist the teaching they were receiving. The leader had a small tattoo on her forehead and she encouraged the children to do the same to show they were part of the resistance. My friend showed me his tattoo, which is just a tiny circle.

He stopped cooperating with school staff and started to try to escape. He heard that if he worked hard and passed 8th grade he could leave, which is what he did. He enlisted in the military as soon as he could. He had to enforce actions where military personnel were sent to stop protests by the American Indian Movement (AIM). This tore him apart because he was sympathetic to those protesting to reclaim their fishing rights. He became committed to resistance and was at Alcatraz when the Natives took it over and claimed it for all of the tribes of North America in 1969. He was part of the Red Power Movement and the Yellow Thunder Camp in the Black Hills.

His life changed drastically when he was involved in a fight and killed a man. The next few decades were spent in prisons, including South Dakota State Prison, Leavenworth and Marion. These are dangerous places to do time. While in prison, he lost everything. His wife and several members of his family died. He decided to use all of the resources he could while in prison, follow the Red Road, and find ways to make peace with himself. He also vowed to help younger Natives learn their tribes and traditions.

While he was in prison, the son of his victim reached out to him to ask why he killed his father. He wrote back, and that started a correspondence that lasted for years. The son forgave him, and he was also able to forgive himself.

He was incarcerated 33 years. After release he earned a degree in chemical dependence studies, began a business to bring more money into his tribe, and actively participated in events to increase awareness and change legislation concerning Native people.

Life hasn't always gone smoothly since he was released. He tries to recognize his mistakes and go back to the right path. He gives the following advice to other Native people who are incarcerated:

- Connect with yourself. Forgive yourself. Forgive others
- Practice reconnaissance. Always be aware of who is around you and the dynamics. Have a strategy
- Get as much education as you can, either formally or on your own
- Remember your spiritual and cultural practices
- You will have times when you regret your actions. Return to the right path. Don't give up

*The Red Road or the Red Path is the Native spiritual path. Walking the Red Road means living in the moment connected to all that surrounds us, respecting all of our relations and Mother Earth and Father Sky. ... Simply put, the Red Road is a road of respect, humbleness, truthfulness, and spirituality.

Practice AVP ...in our everyday lives

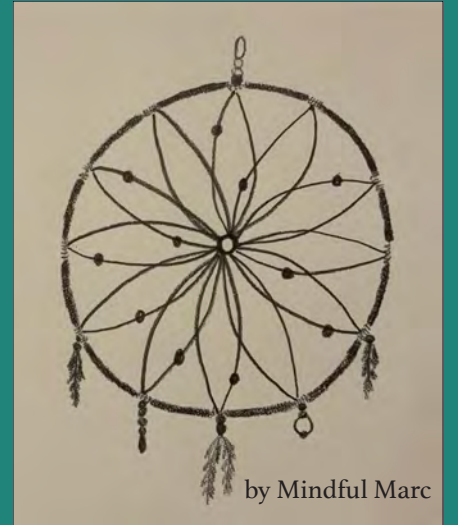
We have an exercise in the Advanced AVP workbook called Speak Out. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a person from a marginalized group to "speak out" about what they experience as a member of that group, and for the rest of us to learn and empathize with them.

The last question that is asked of the representative speaker is "How can we, who are not of the same race/religion/gender, be your friends and allies?" Today we share the answers to this question that Darwin Strong, a Native American, veteran, and survivor of the boarding school system, provides.

How can those who are not Native be allies and friends to the Native community? First, acknowledge that the history

you were taught was biased and one-sided. Educate yourself. Darwin recommends books and articles about Native history written by Native authors, as well as *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown.

Listen to Native people. Do not tell them to "get over it" regarding what has happened in the past. Many of the wrongs perpetrated years ago continue today. Understand that the justice system is not fair to all. Many Native people on reservations live in poverty and don't have the money for private attorneys when they get in trouble, which means they are more likely to end up incarcerated. Support Native organizations that are working to right these injustices. Darwin suggests NDN Collective (ndncollective.org) for more information.



by Mindful Marc

Finally, if you are Native and currently incarcerated: find out who you are. Not just who your parents and grandparents are, but the generations before that. Know where you come from.

We are grateful to Darwin Strong for these suggestions on how to be an ally and a friend to Native people.

Centered Cindy

Communication Corner

Applying the subtle skills of nurturing true communication in everyday conversations

Verbalize Personal Accountability
Part 8 in a series of Guidelines for Improving Communication
by Pespicious Fish

With the previous article in this series, Volunteer Self - Only, we laid out the supposition that one takes responsibility for personal growth, and takes action in ways true to self. But personal responsibility doesn't end with volunteering oneself for an action or committing ourselves to do better. Communicating one's accountability is a critical quality in this ongoing list of guidelines to improving communication.

Commitments involving others place highest in priority; where our responsibilities affect others,

we want to strive for consistency and reliability. When an exception comes about, as it surely will, acknowledge it with those affected. If warranted, assure them that it is important to you. Workshop a solution, and follow through.

In our innumerable interactions, we will at times react in ways we later regret. Sharing our internal process, and acknowledging verbally the behaviors that don't align with the self we strive to be, will begin to heal wounds and nurture connectedness.

Do not think or speak badly of oneself, that is not the objective here. Rather, train self to respond to challenges as if they are opportunities. Realize that we are not yet perfect, but are striving to grow, and welcome opportunities for growth. If we choose to learn from our mistakes, and follow through, then we have not failed.

Though personal accountability is largely demonstrated in action, sharing openly when we're processing a recent mistake makes closer, healthier relationships.

If you are in a position to donate in any amount, please consider Friends for a NonViolent World to support the printing and delivery of this newsletter to insiders.

Thoughts From the Inside

Insider reflections of AVP actions

I want to say that I never imagined AVP would have such an impact on my life. I took the group not knowing how much of an inspiration it has offered my life, to know that there really are other people in the world that are similar to what I have been through. I have come to realize that sharing your life experience can have a great impact on someone else's life.

Thank you AVP,

Talented Tina

I fought so hard to think I didn't need anyone else but being so isolated from everyone is a different kind of mental struggle. I had pushed people away for many years because I was hurting inside and had never really known unconditional love, at least until I found AVP. I hope to convey that same feeling and belonging that was afforded me. Thank you for all you've done and continue to do.

Shirley Shea



“Tell me and I will listen, show me and I will understand, take me in and I will learn” (Lakota proverb) *by Black Elk.*



TP in Action

Stories of times Transforming Power (TP) was used to solve a conflict

This is a story about an incident that happened sometime in the late '90s at MCF-Faribault. Another outside facilitator and I were half way through a basic workshop in Fern when we noticed the sky getting very dark. A few minutes later, a correctional officer came in and told us there was a tornado warning and everyone was to head to the basement immediately. He escorted our group to the basement stairs.

Fern is a very old building and the basement is not a desirable place to be. It was damp and poorly lit with only a few bare lightbulbs. In addition to our AVP group, all of the men who were in the gym and the weight room were sent into the basement. There was just one correctional officer and the atmosphere was very tense. It was hot and smelly and we were crowded. Then the power went out and we were in total darkness for several minutes. It didn't feel at all like a safe place to be.

When the lights came back on, we were surprised to discover that the men who were in the workshop had moved into a tight circle around the outside facilitators. There had been no words exchanged. Somehow the whole group just moved into position to be sure we were safe. We went from feeling afraid to feeling totally safe and cared for.

The men in our group transformed what seemed like a scary situation into an experience that neither of us facilitators will ever forget.



Compassionate Chris



SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES



Exploring the divine in ourselves and one another.

AVP is not religious, but we are spiritual!

Affirmations, Part 7 in a series on Becoming
by Perspicacious Fish

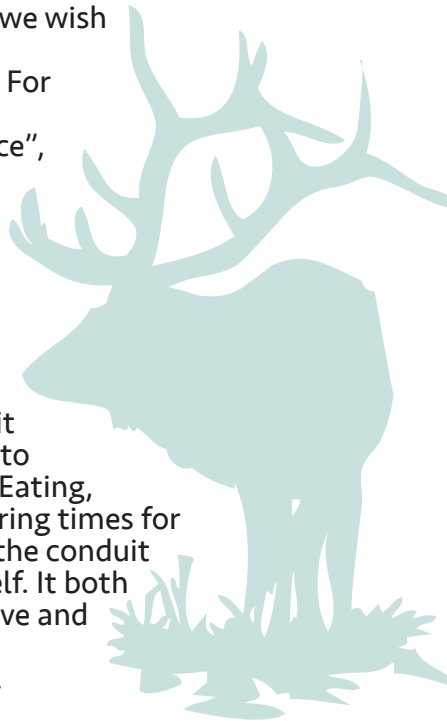
Like lungs, our brain is an involuntary organ that one can learn to master. Left untended, a brain will fulfill its function, more or less. But given a broader point of view, an observer can focus the transforming power of thought. When we re-direct our thoughts to more affirmative patterns, we feel happier, fulfilled, and accepting in our daily lives. Over time, our internal conditions begin to manifest a reflection in our external reality.

When earlier in this series we drafted a spiritual compass, the spiritual and mental ideals that we wrote for ourselves are what I mean here by Affirmations. When we outlined a meditation practice, affirmation again played a critical role. Here, we spotlight that role in this series.

We will each very often need a way to return from states like frustration, condemnation, or depression. Our untended brains spiral quickly into these states, we react emotionally, and the spiral feeds itself. Instead, whenever we observe ourselves becoming angry or hurt, we can say an affirmation as an aid in helping us return to our center.

It can be a word or a couple sentences, broad or specific. But it is something that speaks to the divine within us – as we are or as we intend to be. It affirms those qualities we wish to nurture in ourselves, like patience, gratitude, forgiveness, or compassion. For example, if we choose to develop our patience, we can say the word “patience”, or a sentence like “I am awakening patience within,” or a quote like “Love is patience manifested.” The affirmation is said just once, mentally, to then feel that vibration come alive in our physical selves.

I use my affirmation when I’ve reacted to a trigger to redirect my focus. I use it when I take a few moments in my day to close my eyes and observe my breath. Eating, walking, and waiting make good recurring times for this. I use it when I meditate: it clears the conduit between mind and body, and higher self. It both asks and supports my higher self, to love and care for the wellness of every being, energetically, mentally, and physically.



About this Newsletter

AVP Inside Out is a newsletter created by MN AVPers to support our communities and to keep AVP principles in action. Our communities include incarcerated and non-incarcerated citizens, referred to as “insiders” and “outsiders”. As of October 18, 2021, 475 insiders in 9 facilities, and 1465 outsiders receive this newsletter. Please note that editors cannot respond to correspondence, but we are delighted to hear from our readers and grateful for all feedback. **We occasionally publish excerpts from correspondence (using adjective names); please indicate whether you give us permission to do so.**

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Perspicacious Fish.

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are artistic fonts.

AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) is a program of FNVW (Friends for a NonViolent World).



Seeking Creative Works

Share imagery of your
creative works for
publication
- doodles welcome