

*Evaluation Comments from Basic AVP Workshops with “Lifers”
at
California Men’s Colony*

Tell something you learned about yourself during this workshop.

- Compassion is infectious.
- That the “self” has a voice that can be heard.
- That like it or not, I am part of a bigger community. It’s not all about me.
- If life were a pool I’ve been swimming in the shallow end. Time has come to jump in the deep end.
- ...there in hope for me just for a better life here and beyond. That my compassion for those in pain is great. That I can open up my inner self. Not to live guarded.
- I feel I’ve come to learn that it’s ok to be me. Accepting who I am has allowed me to open up and express honesty - how I feel without being afraid of how I would be judged.
- I learned not to be cautious about sharing my feelings.
- The walls I’ve built are temporary.
- I learned that I can be open to new ideas.
- That I don’t have to hide my feelings.
- I learned to share my feelings in front of a group and to bring down the wall not worrying about what people will say or if I will be criticized for it.
- That I could enjoy and learn something at the same time. Through role-playing and different exercises I grew and re-affirmed my desire to continue on my journey to a life of continual self-improvement.
- I’ve learned not to be so quick to judge.
- I’m not afraid to cry in front of others; I’m able to sympathize with others - trust others. I’m able to deal with aggression without getting violent. I can listen to others.
- I learned that I’m not the only one with problems; whether from the past or present, and that it’s ok to open up and talk about such things without fear of ridicule or reprisal.
- I learned that a close community can be created in a relatively short time frame, and among people I wouldn’t have expected it from.
- That I don’t have to shut down my trust. I don’t have to hold things in. There are so many alternatives to everything which I don’t always think of.
- That I’m open and willing to seek others opinion and ideas.
- That I can empathize with others, and also I that I can speak on issues that I couldn’t speak with others who may judge me differently.
- That I am able to be trusting enough to open up and share personal facts about myself.
- I work better alone than with a group. I grew in patience with others with whom I was teamed.
- I need more people skills.
- I learned that there is always room to learn more, not to judge someone on appearance alone, and tools to manage everyday affairs that I am faced with in new ways. I also learned that I need to work on being more open and caring with people.
- I’ve always known I’ve had the ability to change. Being here has helped me to see the different ways to handle the changes I may make in my life.
- That I need to work on not judging people by their outward appearance (book by it’s cover) and that I have so much more to learn in life.
- That I care deeply about people.

- That I can still be a good person and be able to help others
- That I am sensitive and open... This has caused great pain and hurt in the past - but with the tools I'm accumulating and transforming power being available, I can utilize this gift for good healing and further growth...
- Its ok to be real by being myself.

Tell about something you learned in general during this workshop.

- That we are all the same beneath all that life has given us to experience. That no matter what persona or mask we wear, that we can be reached, loved, and healed. Only a group of this nature can provide us with the safe environment to remove this mask or persona.
- That no matter how much you think you have it all together, you can still experience groups, workshops, or people situations that make you think and re-evaluate your path in life or interactions with family, friends or co-workers.
- Not to put so much value on materialistic things. . .
- I'm still that little kid that dreams about so many beautiful things.
- Lifers have a lot of pain. Most of us know we did wrong and feel bad about it.
- In spite of my circumstances I can still find joy in my life and be a kid at heart.
- I can be of service to others.
- Honesty comes a lot easier than one might think.
- I can be more open if I let myself be.
- I can still function as a human being while incarcerated; allow myself to remain free to express myself; think outside of prison mind set.
- It's ok to play and laugh.
- Awesome transforming power within me.
- Showing how it can be as a victim - really puts you looking at them as what and how they feel.
- In general everyone is more similar than different.
- Something I've learned in general is to increase my level of love, especially in the midst of my frustrations with others. Certainly their need for understanding may be greater than mine at any given moment.
- It's a two-way street, strangely. Also, in helping yourself grow you end up helping other too.
- That there are alternatives to physical violence, there are other ways of dealing with situations and I've learned to use the tools I've gathered in my tool box.
- That I still have a lot of good in me, and that I also have a lot to offer to anyone willing to make a change in their life.
- Everyone has their own personal life experiences that makes them special and unique.
- That sincerity feeds the same in others.
- That people can continue to amaze me.
- That there are two sides to everything which will always come together as one, even when one may be so different.
- I can touch someones life just by listening to someone. That nonviolence is the only real solution to violence.
- I learned to listen and not feel as if I needed to solve.
- I am just a cog in a wheel and that listening is more help in resolving problems than action is.
- I've learned there is good in everyone. No matter their beliefs, color, gender or age.
- There is more love around than first meets the eye.
- That there are really a lot of transforming people and experiences in this world no matter where we are, which gives me a sense of new hope for our civilization.

- Always be positive and look within yourself to resolve conflicts. First, see what “I” am doing to contribute to the conflict before I act out.
- There is more than one way to deal with a situation.
- How can one touch upon the depth of an understanding that is endless.
- You have opened the eyes to the soul.
- Empathize with others. I don’t need to explain much.
- To evaluate my own thoughts and others needs.

What were some of the most valuable aspects of this experience?

- Learning that my perceptions of people or events may not truly be right, so, I must take a moment to learn more before I act.
- Learning to communicate better by actually listening.
- My involvement with the exercises. Giving me new skills to help deal with situations I may find myself in.
- To accept the group’s personal experience as valuable information to my life.
- The communication and the sense of community.
- Caring for everyone. Being in unity. Sharing with those whom you don’t know. Breaking down walls.
- Realizing I have so much further to go and knowing it can be done. I can and I will do it.
- Everyone deals with problems according to their level of life experiences.
- Feeling a part of something. Feeling grateful.
- Humility is good in general and you can choose to be good if you want to.
- Not to be frustrated or uncomfortable about taking risks.
- I learned that it is ok to ask for help.
- Seeing the men allow the child in them come out and play.
- That if we as inmates look at our common likenesses, we are not so different. We can come together as one human community.
- How separate from (the) or (a) community I feel.
- That we are all just kids at heart.
- To trust. The honesty with each other.
- Interacting with everyone on equal ground.
- The role playing, the open sharing and the pairing off in groups to work together as a community.
- Sharing. Empathy. Sympathy.
- Trusting others and letting ones guard down to experience new things.
- I’ve gained insight and confidence.
- We are not alone.
- To be able to laugh with others. to trust and enjoy that my self-trust when shared can and will have equal value to others.
- Team work. The communication and the sense of community.
- Being able to get together with many others of the same or similar people and sharing our experiences collectively. I have seen some real growth in some of my close friends.
- That I need not any longer discard a lost soul simply because they act, or talk evil or violent... Because I know that underneath the veil there is truly a scared hand reaching out to me..violent or not.
- Unity of group. Openness to others. Willingness to try something new. Support from each group member.
- Stepping outside myself in the role play. To listen, share and find common ground with others (?). to find unity and a great degree of trust.

- The openness, honest, compassion for each other and with each other. Being there for them and having them be there for me and my hurtful needs.
- Having the opportunity to drop the mask. Learning to communicate better by actually listening.
- Learning that my perceptions of people or events may not truly be right, so, I must take a moment to learn more before I act.
- To accept the group's personal experience as valuable information to my life.
- Ok to play; not to stereotype; step back and look at the bigger picture.
- The benefit of didactic groups, religious groups while incarcerated.

How do you think what you've gained here will affect your life?

- I think I can take all races of people and know that there are true good mixed in with all the bad. I need to stop judging everyone from a different race. I can do this - If I Try!
- Life is in constant change and affected by everything. This group of volunteers and the workshop are just about the best thing that could have come along. My life is richer because the seeds of a "sense of community" have been planted and a bell rung cannot be un-rung.
- Listen to what others have to say.
- I will remember the principles learned here and try to incorporate them into my day which in turn will aid me in becoming a more productive member of not only the prison population but society and humanity as a whole.
- I believe that everything I have gained here will stay with me throughout my entire life.
- This experience is a powerful tool which will be used in my future. What I have learned will be a part of what I give back.
- I can now solve most of the difficult situations with a smile. (Drawing of a smiling face)
- It will affect my life by making me more knowledgeable in the fields of Human interaction and conflict resolution.
- A better understanding of others; a greater sense of humility; and a feeling of love for the people in this group that blows my mind. Thank you!!
- I anticipate a more peaceful way to express myself and draw others to do the same.
- 100% Positives
- I think that what I've learned will affect me for the rest of my life because I was able to open up to total strangers in ways I never have opened up before. Also to heal and listen to other peoples experiences in life and how they have been affected brought to an understanding of how so many of us have been so emotionally troubled, not realizing it before - always trying to cover it up.
- I will be more tolerant of the opinion of others.
- I'll have friends that I can turn to.
- I will likely be more open and giving to people, although it will still take much effort on my part because trust is implicit (trust is what I've given before in my life many years ago and I've been hurt way too much by people I trusted).
- It may provide me with the ability to transform the lives of others and myself for the positive. It is my desire to help mend the torn spots where everything is ragged from abuse, especially in those I've hurt and in those I love.
- It has neutralized my faith and trust in people and what we can accomplish together.
- I'm a part of something special that I'll never forget.
- I think I can trust others a lot more than before this program. Become a better listener.
- To just be me and be non-judgmental while respecting others.
- It will make me a better person.
- I will be more aware of others and that peaceful solutions to problems are there if sought.

- I have gained a deeper awareness of the affects we have on each other.
- It will allow me to reach out more to others with the understanding that they are potential partners in life.
- I will become a better person and have more knowledge and insight to share with other people.
- What I've gained here will continue to energize me in my journey to put others before myself and to trust the creator to make me complete with His love.
- The experience will also make me accountable to love others through my actions of giving.
- I think it will affect me greatly. I see that there are so many ways out of my problems. That non violence does not mean being weak or passive. It's a power that can be transferred and be used to diffuse any violent situation.