

# AVP CALIFORNIA NEWS

Winter 2021



## Interview with AVP USA President Richard Chiamulon

by Steve Gelb

*This is Part two of an interview conducted in July 2020. Part one appeared in the Summer 2020 Newsletter.*

**SG: How are you managing to balance being a father of twins, doing your work, taking care of you home, and your volunteer work?**

RC: It can be difficult. We are fortunate to have the support of family and friends. Family and friends help us throughout the week, so I am able to run household errands and work on AVP-USA projects. Currently, I commit about 15 hours a week for AVP-USA. I am spending a little bit more than that now, but I am able to balance my time with the support. My wife is very supportive. She encourages me to do my volunteer work because she knows that it is a part of who I am. When I am unable to "make a difference," I feel that something is missing in my life

**SG: What was the other volunteer work you were doing?**

RC: I have been volunteering for the National Veterans Foundation based out of Los Angeles. They are a crisis hotline for Veterans and their families. I have had to slow down a little bit since the boys were born, but I still handle a call here and there.

**SG: Can you talk about what you see as the priorities for AVP USA?**

RC: One of our main priorities for AVP-USA is building transparency into our policies and how we operate. I have been involved with the AVP-USA board since 2016. We have made some major changes, but we still have work to accomplish to this end. For example, at the National Gathering this year some Facilitators were unaware of the changes in

diversity within the leadership. It is crucial that we share the stories of the Board members with Facilitators so that people know that we are working toward a more diverse group whether it be by age, by gender identity, by race, or ethnic cultural backgrounds. It has been incredible to just be part of creating more leadership opportunities for Facilitators.

Another priority is continuity by creating leadership opportunities so that AVP-USA will have Facilitators ready to lead the organization ten or fifteen years into the future. I am 50 now and our leadership is aging, so it's important for me that AVP-USA creates the environment so that leaders are given the opportunity to lead our organization well into the future.

The other priority that I believe is important is how does AVP-USA serve the local & regional AVP organizations throughout the U.S. Our focus really needs to be in this area. Many Facilitators are part of the BIPOC community. How do we engage Facilitators that have been affected by the death of George Floyd? Self-care is such a crucial part of the work we do, so how can we support our BIPOC community. Also, we have Returned Citizens. How do we engage them? Typically, it is "please reach out to the organization when you get out." However, I would love to see AVP-USA to reach out to Returned Citizens.

So, my priorities are transparency, developing future leaders, engaging the BIPOC and Returned Citizens communities, and working toward a

united AVP. It will be challenging, but I am committed to working for a better future for AVP-USA.

**SG: What do you think is the significance of having a formerly incarcerated person as AVP USA president?**

RC: Initially, I did not realize how significant it was to have a formerly incarcerated individual in this position or even the Vice President position for AVP-USA. AVP provides the space for people like me to heal and ultimately save our lives. When I came home, it was not much of a thought to "give back" to the AVP community, but rather a part of me. Given the opportunity at the national level has given me hope to support more people, far beyond what I thought was possible. Knowing that my voice is heard and enriches the diverse AVP community is rewarding, but also humbling. I am glad to be in a position to provide a voice for those that have been affected by the Criminal Justice system. The support from the AVP community has been incredible. I really want to thank the AVP community for trusting in me to be in this position. It is very humbling.



Richard Chiamulon

## Upcoming AVP Zoom trainings

### AVP Mini workshops - Weekly

Join us for **weekly AVP Minis** on Zoom! We will be meeting each **Thursday from 4:30pm - 6:00 pm PST** as an opportunity to deepen in AVP community, for facilitators to get Zoom facilitation practice (practicing Zoom features and for experimenting with new exercises), and for people new to AVP to try an adjective name on for size. Send Nova Nathan an email at [nkleban@gmail.com](mailto:nkleban@gmail.com) if you are interested and he will provide details and ongoing updates. There is no commitment beyond showing up when you would like to. See you there!

### AVP Basic Virtual Workshop - Feb 2021

A Basic workshop will be offered by Zoom by AVP-Antelope Valley. This workshop will run on **Fri Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 5pm - 8pm, Sat and Sun Feb 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> 8am - noon, Sat and Sun Feb 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> 8am - noon**. Participants must complete all sessions to receive a certificate of completion. To pre-register, please email [avpav@aol.com](mailto:avpav@aol.com)

### AVP Advanced Virtual Workshop - Feb 2021

An AVP Advanced workshop will be offered on Zoom; Must have completed a Basic AVP. This workshop will run on **Thur Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 5pm-8pm, Sat and Sun Feb 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> 1pm -5pm, Sat and Sun Feb 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> 1pm - 5pm**. Participants must complete all sessions to receive a certificate of completion. For those interested in becoming a volunteer AVP facilitator, this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 workshop trainings. To pre-register, please email [avpav@aol.com](mailto:avpav@aol.com)

### AVP Basic Virtual Workshop - Mar 2021

A Basic workshop will be offered by Zoom by AVP-Antelope Valley. This workshop will run on **Fri Mar 19<sup>th</sup> 5pm - 8pm, Sat and Sun Mar 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> 8am - noon, Sat and Sun Mar 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> 8am - noon**. Participants must complete all sessions to receive a certificate of completion. To pre-register, please email [avpav@aol.com](mailto:avpav@aol.com)

### AVP Advanced Virtual Workshop - Mar 2021

An AVP Advanced workshop will be offered on Zoom; Must have completed a Basic AVP. This workshop will run on **Mondays and Wednesdays from 6pm-8.30pm in March from 8<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup>**. Participants must complete all sessions to receive a certificate of completion. For those interested in becoming a volunteer AVP facilitator, this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 3 workshop trainings. To pre-register, please email [avpav@aol.com](mailto:avpav@aol.com)

### AVP Advanced - Virtual Workshop - Mar 2021

AVP 2nd Level Workshop, March 2021. Theme: The Restorative Justice Practices, including Restorative Dialogue and Compassionate Witnessing. This will be **on 4 consecutive Saturdays 3/6, 3/13, 3/20 and 3/27** on Zoom from **10.00am to 3.00pm**. Attendance is necessary for all sessions in order to receive a certificate. To register, contact workshop coordinator, Marvelous Mark Thomas: [mark.k.thomas777@gmail.com](mailto:mark.k.thomas777@gmail.com)

### Compassionate Witnessing - Weekly

**Weekly Compassionate Witnessing mini-workshop** on Zoom. **Fridays, 7 to 9:30 PM PST**. The exercises used in this workshop are similar to the Empathy exercise, the Reflection exercise, the Who Am I? exercise, and the brainstorm exercises frequently used in AVP workshops. Compassionate Witnessing is practice which involves participants sharing their experiences, actively listening, and restoratively questioning each other in an empathic manner that benefits all involved. If you are interesting attending, contact Mark Thomas: [mark.k.thomas777@gmail.com](mailto:mark.k.thomas777@gmail.com)

**Information on additional workshops can also be found on the AVP/CA website:**  
<http://avpcalifornia.org/events/>

### Checking the COVID-19 stats for CA prisons

The Pandemic continues to remain uncontrolled, and many lives have been tragically lost. Nowhere is this most apparent than in nursing homes for the elderly and in prisons, which report a high percentage of cases. To view the current statistics reported by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, please use the following link: [cdcr.ca.gov/covid19/population-status-tracking](https://cdcr.ca.gov/covid19/population-status-tracking)

## AVP California Statewide Virtual Gathering Nov 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2020

What a thrill for me to be able to attend our CA AVP Gathering Via Zoom 2020 Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> for all facilitators across the state without the day long travel and expense. By computer we were able to be in large groups seeing familiar and new faces and then in several more intimate groups of five where we answered different Gathering questions where we were able to learn a lot about each other. It felt like being in a real prison workshop, which we have missed attending during this time of Covid-19. The technical job of doing all this online went without a glitch. That afternoon I was in a breakout session "Sharing your Story" led by Quality Quan and Noumenon Nhut. Their transformation stories were excellently shared, and I had just finished reading Quan's new book. We did a picture sharing exercise with new pictures to relate and choose from. I remember one picture about a small child alone clinging to a barrel being tossed at sea that many impactfully related to their lives. There was another session where we did a closing exercise, taking a minute to find and show some object in our home that had special meaning for us. This was also a revealing exercise. That evening it was a joy to participate in the auction with outstanding "Take-a-breath" Toby Laverty who made us laugh while auctioneering. I was happy to have won the bid on Silver Zuni earrings.

Sunday morning there was a beautiful remembrance for Stephen Matchett. It was also great to get the updated news about AVP workshops from others in California. Musical Mando submitted our local San Diego group report on the number of workshops held in Centinela in the past year (more than thirty in 3 different yards), including some in Spanish. We have been creating a newspaper called the Mumbly Buzz to the facilitators inside each month. We also got the numbers of workshops from Donovan where many more workshops occur, but our local group is no longer meeting together. We also welcomed and were introduced to the new leadership men and women of AVP in California. It is in good hands and I am so thankful. *Marvelous Marjie Larson*

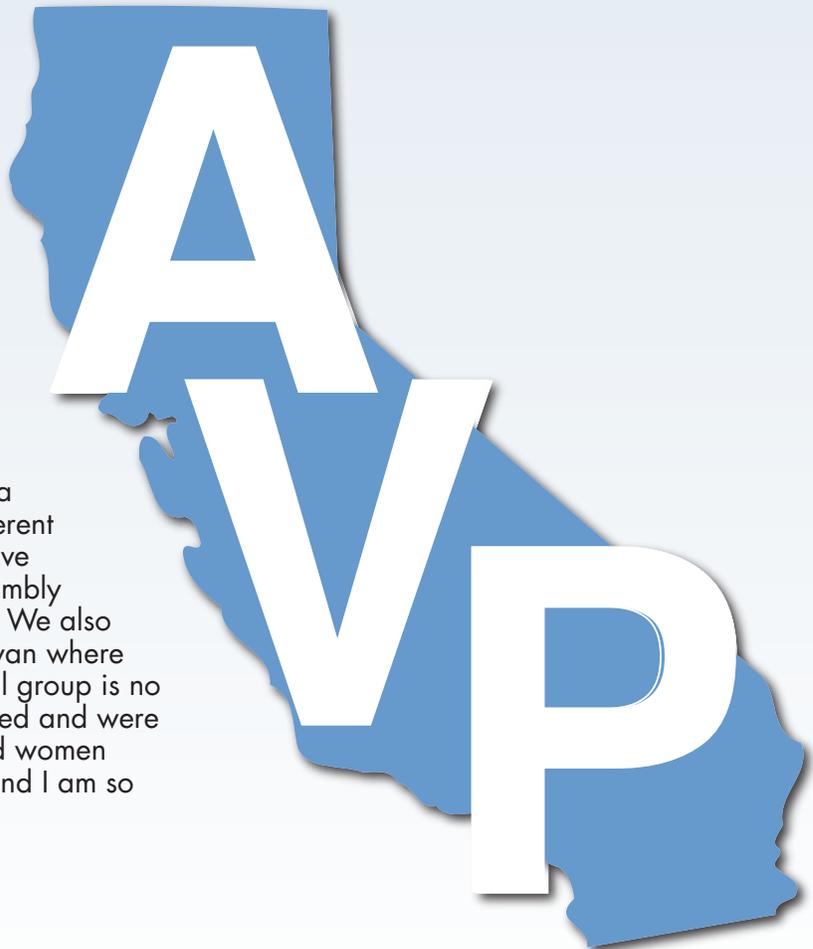
I think what stayed with me was the pleasure of seeing a lot of people I do not normally see in the gathering and the excitement of seeing the stuff people were doing in spite of the pandemic. I am now doing online workshop prep as I got inspired because of the Gathering.

*Adventurous Ana.*

I only attended the first night which was a delight, seeing people with whom I had facilitated. Especially appreciated the number of people who appreciated my friend, Vibrant Vicki, who made quilts for past auctions. I was impressed with the skill and organization of the "IT staff."

Also appreciated hearing all the many approaches our facilitators are making to keep AVP alive in this pandemic. Sorry I had to miss the rest of it.

*Pat Hardy*



## Reminder to all facilitators, please help our community stay connected and updated.

Dear AVP CA Facilitators, One of the most important things we can do to strengthen our AVP workshops and community is to keep in touch with our AVP family. The continuing pandemic has meant that we have fewer opportunities to do workshops in person. As we focus on developing and strengthening online workshops (which really do work; and are needed), we need your assistance in three ways:

1. Go to the website ([avpcalifornia.org](http://avpcalifornia.org)) and sign up for our communications via the link on the right side of the page: <https://vr2.verticalresponse.com/s/avpca->

### [website-signup-form](#)

This will ensure that you receive all of our messages.

2. If you have access to the QEWR database, please enter in all the information about facilitators and supporters in your Council. It is important also that workshop coordinators update our records in QEWR about regular and virtual workshops. There are now fields available in QEWR to indicate a virtual workshop. Be sure to mark all past virtual workshops with the virtual checkbox as well. It is especially important to update records for our returned citizens. In QEWR you can add an email address, change status from inside

to outside, and note Council affiliation. If you need any help with data entry in QEWR, please contact [avpav@aol.com](mailto:avpav@aol.com).

3. If you are organizing an online workshop and are looking for participants, remember to use the AVP/CA Facebook page and the AVP/CA website to announce the details of the workshop: <http://avpcalifornia.org/events/community/add>

Keeping records current helps us create more opportunities to facilitate, participate in workshops, support AVP/CA, and just stay connected - and connection is an important thing these days.

## The AVP Experience: Building an Inclusive Community

*By James Higgenbotham, Ironwood SP, AVP California*

**Building** is a term usually applied to a fixed structure. Building anything takes planning, labor, and commitment!

Being **inclusive** requires being involved, embracing, chipping in, listening, and being present. Reflecting on our AVP workshops prior to Covid19 restrictions, there were always those magical moments around lunch break, after we were about a third of the way through the workshop, when you would witness a shift take place in the participants. All of a sudden, the lights turn on, the participants "lean in," and a community is formed.

**Community** is defined as a group of people forming a social unit that is formed in AVP by participation in our weekend workshops that develop fellowship within the group. Look around you, your district, city, yard, facility... community is about where we live!!

There are a lot of moving parts in every AVP workshop. Even our correctional officers and staffers are part of our community. It takes time, effort, and character to pull all of us together. That is why people do not just jump into a facilitator role or team

coordinator without training and developing a team of volunteers. We create a place where all can feel safe enough to grow and fall apart, which is all important to the process and the nature of our workshops.

Once participants step through the doors of the workshop into the broader community of AVP, they begin to find common ground. Introductions take place, everyone steps into their "adjective names" and you can feel the excitement, the electricity surging through the circle. Something exciting is about to happen... the stage has been set and now it is going to begin to get serious about rebuilding ourselves and our community.

AVP manuals provide the blueprint that guides facilitators and helps them to plan the workshop. Workshops guide participants in developing their direction and finding their personal path. This is one of my favorite parts of the weekend. Often there are people in the workshops we have never seen or spoken to before. It is at this point of the weekend that judgements often surface about bullying or other kinds of behaviors such as theft or other rule breaking actions.

*(continued on page 5)*

*...continued from Page 4, AVP Experience...*

Honestly, I have been that guy at both ends of that spectrum: skeptical and withdrawn yet looking for something and wanting to share. Challenging assumptions and working on ourselves are the top reasons we come to the workshops. Once we embrace ourselves and others, and seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground, we open ourselves to our inner power to transform. The building begins once we are open to altering those first impressions, remaining open to change. Initially it might feel uncomfortable.

During my first workshop I lost most of a night's sleep thinking about one question that was posed, "Are you willing to suffer for what is important?" I needed to find out more.

After deciding to make this my new norm, I showed up for the next day of the workshop bright and early. Everyone was reaching for that something good in others.

Using the adjective names with eye contact helped the community building. As we assembled in our circle, we all shared the realization that each person sitting with us, is part of our community. We each took a turn sharing ourselves in the "whip," - "We are

building an inclusive community and I am going to bring \_\_\_\_\_ (potential responses: love, a church, new ideas, dinner...) As another day began, we were all in!!

Patience and persistence help us to readjust our attitudes to create the "safe space" required to build the foundation of our community upon. Some of the exercise experiences were very serious. In those moments, we found it was best to base our personal positions on truth. Looking each other in the eyes, sharing our truths, and opening up was worth the risk. Risking being creative rather than being violent helped us take down pre-existing walls to let in a sense of community. Learning to trust our inner sense allowed our actions to take form. It is this inner sense that ultimately allows us to act on the Transforming Power we have within. We built a community based on honesty, respect, caring, commonalities and consensus.

We discovered that Transforming Power and the AVP principles work. They have enhanced our lives and helped us build an inclusive community wherever we live.

To contact the Steering Committee, please send a message to [steeringcommittee@avpcalifornia.org](mailto:steeringcommittee@avpcalifornia.org)

**Your AVP/CA Steering Committee:**

<b>AVP/CA Steering Committee</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>
Joyce Banzhaf	Liaison for Fall Gathering Organizing Committee
Guarionex Delgado	RAC
Tondria Hall	Finance and Fundraising Committees
Stacy Hughes	Communication / Tech committee and Webmaster for AVP/CA website
Terrance Hunter	New member
Rabia Khawar	Liaison for Newsletter, Finance & Fundraising, Special Training and Tech
Toby Laverty	Communication/Tech, Fall Gathering Committee, Fundraising Committee
Lydia McClosky	Prison Coordinators Committee, Fundraising Committee
Betty McEady	Special Training Committee, Newsletter Committee, CLARG representative
Rob Osak	Liaison for Communication/ Tech Committee
Mark Thomas	Special Training Committee, Newsletter Committee
Nancy Vimla	Liaison for Special Training Committee, Fall Gathering Committee
Gary Wolff	AVP CA Treasurer

The AVP/CA newsletter is edited by Bountiful Betty McEady, Marvelous Mark Thomas, Jason Guinn and Radiant Rabia. We welcome your submissions and comments. Please email us at [rabia\\_cali@yahoo.com](mailto:rabia_cali@yahoo.com).