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# scottish justice matters



## HEALTH AND (IN)JUSTICE

Edited by Andrew Fraser and Maggie Mellon

Featuring: Health Inequalities • Older Prisoners  
Mental Health • Drug Misuse • Neuroscience

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Moreover, there is immense value in the experience of working together in the safe harbour of the 'community in microcosm' that forms over the three days. Workshops are offered at an introductory Level 1 and for those who wish to go on to do so, a more in-depth Level 2. At this level the participants choose the topic they wish to focus on, a process that inevitably involves exploring what consensus is and how to achieve it.

After completing three workshops (with at least one having been at level 2) interested and able participants can undergo a process of guided self-assessment then go on to train as facilitators if appropriate. It remains a core principle of our work that all our facilitators are volunteers that have followed this route. After training, volunteers initially operate as 'apprentices' and work in teams where they will be supported by experienced colleagues to ensure consistency, high standards and reflective practice. Each team is led by a very experienced facilitator who has received additional training for this role. The apprentice will also be able to access a mentor whom they can turn to for advice and support.

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## Our starting point is that conflict is an inevitable part of life, and we can all get better at dealing with it

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In 2012 and 2013 we ran 27 workshops for 214 participants in Scotland. A number of these were community workshops open to people who either self-referred or were signposted to us by their GP, social-worker or solicitor. We receive no funding from any statutory body and participants have to pay a fee for their place. Although full-price fees are exceptionally good value at £95, and AVP offers concessionary rates, it is recognised that this is still a substantial barrier to many people. Utilising a grant we received from 'Awards for All' in 2012, we were able to ensure that 89% of community workshop places were free at point of receipt for people who could not afford a place, and we are currently seeking funding to carry this practice forward.

The remaining workshops were planned and delivered together with partners including HMP Addiewell, Circle Scotland (Families Affected by Imprisonment Project), PositivePrison?PositiveFutures, SAMH, Redhall Gardens (a SAMH project in Edinburgh), GAMH, Jobs and Business Glasgow, Addaction and Parent Network Scotland. Our programme at HMP Addiewell is continuing throughout 2014 and we are delighted to be piloting our first workshops in partnership with HMP Perth this year. We also provide a six week distance-learning resource called Facing Up to Conflict, designed for use in prisons. So far we have only had learners at HMP Addiewell completing this, but we hope to extend availability to other Scottish prisons.

Taking a statistical 'snapshot' of participant feedback in Scotland for the period September 2012 to September 2013, we found that:

- ❖ 91% reported they could communicate better
- ❖ 97% stated that they understood and believed in themselves more, and
- ❖ 93% reported that they felt better able to handle conflicts and solve problems.

More widely the statistics tell a similar story. For example a longitudinal study of community workshops in Walker in Newcastle found in a post-workshop follow-up that over 90% of respondents had retained greater understanding of feelings and actions, used more peaceful ways of resolving conflicts, trusted people more and worked better with others (Redpath, 2011). There is value in looking beyond the statistics however. Workshops do more than help people learn new ideas and skills; they enable them to discover and enhance their self-efficacy, to develop positive social ties, to perceive themselves in new and positive ways, and to uncover and develop their capacity for self-determination.

These wider outcomes have benefits that overlap across several different areas. Desistance research tells us that it is asset-based interventions of this kind, which help people to see themselves in new, positive ways, raise social capital and exert personal agency towards change that are the most effective (McNeill and Weaver 2007). If we focus on health, violence and family conflict are known issues that contribute to mental illness (WHO, 2004); while influences such as staying connected, learning new things, mindfulness and helping others (all fostered through participation in workshops) are recognised protective factors that promote mental wellbeing (SAMH).

More than this however, Alternatives to Violence is quietly but unashamedly a social movement that dares to envision a non-violent society. There is more to this than just living in communities free of violent criminal assaults or homicides, highly desirable though this is. When people at workshops discuss the violence inherent in things such as war, poverty, inequality and the abuse of power; they are exploring the idea that a truly non-violent society is one that seeks peaceful solutions and is devoted to social justice. I can't say for sure, but I think Roger Namu Whitfield and the other pioneers of AVP would approve.

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Redpath, R. (2011) *Handling Conflict in Walker, Newcastle: A review of the longer term impacts upon workshop participants*, Newcastle Conflict Resolution Network.

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SAMH (web page accessed 30.4.2014) *Five Ways to Better Mental Health* [www.samh.org.uk/mental-health-information/five-ways-to-better-mental-health](http://www.samh.org.uk/mental-health-information/five-ways-to-better-mental-health)

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World Health Organisation (2004) *Prevention of mental disorders: effective interventions and policy options: Summary Report*.

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**The Alternatives to Violence Project Scotland is based at the Alliance, 349 Bath Street, Glasgow, G24AA.**

**The dates for our regular community workshops can be found on our website at [www.avpbritain.org.uk](http://www.avpbritain.org.uk).**

**We welcome enquiries from individuals and from potential partners by email at [scotland@avpbritain.org.uk](mailto:scotland@avpbritain.org.uk) or by telephone on 078 6077 0581.**

**Des Fik is a former police officer and at the time of writing was the development worker for AVP Scotland.**