

## Report On The Whole School AVP Development Programme at Aha-Thuto Secondary School, Orange Farm, South Africa

July 2003 – January 2004

### Executive Summary

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), a division of Phaphama Initiatives, is a conflict resolution, personal and leadership development programme. AVP has been active in South Africa since 1995.

Schools form one major focus of its work in South Africa. In the last four years AVP has worked in ten schools in Gauteng and the Western Cape.

Most of the schools in which AVP has conducted interventions are situated in disadvantaged areas. One such school is **Aha-Thuto Secondary**, situated in an impoverished area south of Johannesburg. Unemployment, crime and HIV are rife in such areas. The learners at Aha-Thuto face tremendous challenges in completing their education, and not being drawn into a lifestyle that is violent and destructive.



*celebrating 400+ people trained in AVP at Aha Thuto Secondary School, 27 March 2004*

## A culture of learning at Aha-Thuto

The success of a school's education programme in South Africa is measured by the final year (Matric) results that are compared to the national average. During the apartheid era, each population group was administered by its own provincial education department. Due to the hugely inequitable government resources allocated to each different population group, it was not uncommon for "white" education departments to boast a Matric pass rate of over 90%, whereas a "black" education departments to have around a 25% pass rate. This was, of course, accompanied by very low morale among both learners and educators.

Since the advent of democracy, however, one national Department of Education has been established, whose task it has been to assist all schools in the country, particularly those disadvantaged by apartheid, to rekindle a culture of learning in the school. This has taken the form of financial, professional and administrative help.

Under the dynamic and far-sighted leadership of an acting Principal, who is now the Principal, Aha-Thuto is one of those schools that has responded very well to the changes in the education system. Aha-Thuto begins their school day at 7h30 in the morning and ends at 16h00 in the afternoon, where a normal school day in South Africa runs from 8h00 – 14h00. Furthermore, the school has a regular programme of extra Saturday classes, which all learners attend. And it is most gratifying to see how many students at Aha-Thuto have received bursaries to continue their education at tertiary level, partly because the quality of Maths and Science education at the school is of such a high standard that industry has been attracted to funding promising learners in these fields. The Matric pass rate at Aha-Thuto over the last few years is reflected below:



*top – learners and educators together in a Basic workshop*



*right – Headmaster Mr. Dlamini with one of the school AVP facilitators, proudly displaying the school's Certificate of Commitment, presented to acknowledge 400+ people trained in AVP at Aha Thuto*

It is a reality too though, that the school still faces challenges from the legacy of apartheid, in that it still does not have certain basics, like a working fax machine and computer. Also, dealing with the poverty of the wider Orange Farm community is a constant challenge, as many learners come to school without having eaten since their last meal at school. For AVP this means having not only to waive the fee for a workshop, but also to provide the funds for catering during the two-day AVP workshops. This is, however, always greatly appreciated by the participants, and we are delighted that one of the mothers in the school has established a small team who assist her with the catering.

## The success of AVP's intervention at Aha-Thuto

Since AVP was first invited to work in the school in February 2002, we have had the unfailing support of the Principal and teachers of the school in this intervention. Each workshop has consisted of learners, across different grades of the school, and some teachers, as well as a number of parents.

In the time period covered by this report, the following workshops have been held:

type of workshop	no. of workshops	no. of participants trained*
Basic	7	118
Advanced	2	37
Training for Facilitators	1	9
<b>total:</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>164</b>

*\* includes people from neighbouring schools and communities who trained at the school*

The greatest measure of our success at Aha-Thuto has been the enthusiasm with which the newly trained facilitators, most of whom are learners, have taken on the role of setting up and running AVP workshops in the school. These facilitators have made it their task to regularly go around and speak to each class, explaining what AVP is and what benefit there is in attending an AVP workshop.

At present, each workshop which is facilitated by a team of three or four facilitators, has usually only needed the support of one experienced outside facilitator from AVP, who has acted as mentor and support to the newer facilitators. A total of 34 facilitators have been trained in the school, and even though some of them have now completed school, they willingly make themselves available to facilitate workshops for their younger peers. It is our belief that these young facilitators will take AVP into their places of learning or work throughout South Africa.

Aha-Thuto was also instrumental in spreading AVP to another school, Tshepo Themba, in the neighbouring township of Sebokeng.

Another success of AVP at Aha-Thuto was the degree to which the courses have bonded the learner and teacher communities. We quote from one of the course reports, written by the facilitation team:



*“We were particularly amazed at how participants in the course managed to transcend the traditional student-teacher boundaries and treat one another with respect and openness. Part of this certainly has to do with the good relationship fostered in the school between teachers and students, and part of it has to do with the AVP work that has been going on in the school. It was really touching to hear one student give his teacher advice on a problem she was experiencing in her life.”*



*drama and group discussions during AVP basic workshops at Aha Thuto*

## Participant quotes

In AVP's mission of equipping people with the skills to resolve conflict pre-emptively and non-violently, we are humbled and gratified to see how the young people at Aha-Thuto take the learning of these skills so seriously, and use them immediately in their lives. The evaluations received at the end of workshops speak for themselves:

- *“this workshop makes one to be strong and also to be able to face challenges.”*
- *“it helped me to know more about how to deal with the TRANSFORMING POWER I have.” (Transforming Power is one of the pillars of AVP, sometimes explained as the creative ability that exists within each one of us to transform potentially violent situations into nonviolent ones.)*
- *“The most important thing I learned is to make use of “I” messages and to be approachable, resolve conflict non-violently.”*
- *The most important thing I learnt was “learning to be more kind and listening to other people.”*

Themes for Advanced workshops are chosen by participants themselves, at the start of the workshop. These are some comments from an Advanced workshop which focused on the theme of **stereotyping**:

- *“Learning about stereotyping was good and challenging in a good way.”*
- *“Not to stereotype other people because I am reflecting the negative side of myself back.”*
- *”Stereotyping people is not okay whether it is in a good or bad way.”*
- *“I don't have to stereotype people because I hate it when it is done to me.”*

Another Advanced workshop focused on **poverty**:

- *“I learned that poverty is not all about money.”*
- *“I have to believe in myself and be trustworthy to other people.”*
- *“learning that poverty is one's mental psyche....”*
- *“It was a success because help us to understand more about us.”*

Finally, a few feedback **comments given to the facilitators** on workshops:

- *“The facilitation team was good, understanding, tolerance and it was working with them, it was really fun.”*
- *“informative, the facilitators were gentle, cool and collected, the environment was warm and welcoming.”*
- *“I feel good in such a way that I wish to become a facilitator too.”*



*trust exercises in the grounds of Aha Thuto Secondary School*

## Lessons learnt

Apart from continuing to support the growth of AVP in the school, as well as to other schools and community-based organisations in Orange Farm, it has become clear to us that with the level of violence facing these young people, AVP will need to forge link with organizations that deal with specialized cases of violence e.g. abuse or domestic violence.

Too often in workshops now, learners have shared deeply personal and troubling stories, which AVP facilitators do not have the expertise to deal with. One such story was shared by the facilitators of one course in their report:

*“We were touched by the story of one participant when we were sharing about a conflict solved non-violently. When he shared a story of his parent; that one day his mom and dad were fighting in his absence. When he arrived at his place he found his mom lying in a pool of blood and he could not continue with his story because he was emotional, touched and started to cry....”*

We firmly believe that unless we can refer such cases on to specialist counselors etc, we are doing more harm than good by opening a space where people feel safe enough to talk, but are then not further supported in dealing with and processing these traumas.

## Ongoing facilitator training

On 27 March 2004, AVP conducted an ongoing facilitator training session at the school, which also served as a feedback forum for how workshops were running at the school. The agenda was as follows:

1. Welcome
2. Gathering – How AVP is changing my life
3. Light and Lively
4. Feedback session – AVP in our school
5. Light and Lively
6. How to spread AVP to other schools and organisations in Orange Farm
7. Presentation of Certificate of Commitment to Aha-Thuto *(picture on right)*
8. Closure
9. Lunch



We include a few comments below from the Gathering:

- *I used to be a lot of a rough person, but now whatever I do, I think AVP, I think about what I preach to others.*
- *At first I was a very shy and short-tempered person. Now I am not shy and I can handle my temper.*
- *I used to be one of those stubborn kids in the school and the community; this year I have been in trouble with my Principal. Now I know where I'm heading, I understand that things are not done by violence.*
- *Sometimes it's hard to use what you've learnt in AVP, but sometimes when it's so hard and I don't know what to do, I think afterwards – Did I use AVP? And still I want to learn more.*
- *I used to have problems in and outside my family; I used to say “use the lokshin (the violence of the townships) way” to solve things. Now I'm able to talk, communicate with learners to solve problems. Even in my family I always tell them about AVP and ask them to join; they still say they are working but they enjoy what I tell them. I no longer use those types of tricks I used to use.*

- *I think of communication and cooperation. I'm a kind of person who used to believe that a Zulu man cannot be beaten; there is a teacher here; a Zulu with a big body who used to gain respect by saying "Ngiꜱokushaya ngempama." (I will slap you across the face). I also wanted to gain my respect this way. I'll say it again; the skill of cooperating with people grows daily. Now in the community people are saying, "Shew! This boy is so sweet, I wish my boy was like that."*
- *At home we are fighting like dogs and cats, because we are divorced at home. After I became a facilitator, I realised Mr Dlamini who invited me to this course, wanted me to improve my behaviour as a woman and a professional. I learnt fight is not a solution to a problem, and to humble myself and accept when I am wrong. Now I'm doing this counselling to others who are troubled. My AVP manual is always with me like a baby in my bag. I come from the darkness; the anger of divorce and have seen the light. In our school, it has helped our Grade 7's – parents say why didn't you choose our children for this workshop? I'm very happy; if I win the lotto I'll give the whole lot to AVP. I love AVP and I love those who invited me to AVP – now I am a person.*
- *AVP has changed my life, especially in my family; my father who is a taxi driver – you know the taxi industry is very violent – after I learnt I-messages, I explained it to him; he said I want to see if this works for me. He tells me he wants to beat someone, I say not, don't beat him; try this and this, now he has thanked me. My friends didn't want to visit me when he was around, now they come and he says hello to them.*

A few suggestions from the learner facilitators in the school:

- *Do workshops also for Grades 6 and 7, not only Grades 8 – 12; bring in more parents;*
- *Facilitators to share experiences with one another; helpful to have an older facilitator in the group;*
- *Punctuality and time, both starting and finishing on time to avoid rushing the agenda at the end of workshops.*