

PrisonSMART Report - March 2005

We have completed another course, this time with 14 members of prison staff of all nationalities. Again we had a wonderful course that ended with singing, dancing and laughing. It is such a joy to see how ethnic and other barriers are melting away. Usually, at the beginning of the course, the Albanian group is sitting on one side of the hall and the Serbs and Roma people on the other side. Every course started in this way. And every course ended with the feeling of belongingness and care for each other regardless of ethnic background.

Apart from ethnic barriers, there are others, like those among men and women. The mentality for most does not allow men and women to look into their eyes and hold their hands, like we do during eye gazing. During this course, we had a husband and wife participating on the course. The husband was checking his wife all the time if she was looking into the eyes of her partners. The wife was looking down and would not hold the hands of her partners. One woman also could not look into the eyes if the man was sitting in front of her.

After the process, we sat and discussed the experiences. The majority of the group found the process beautiful and the next day, everyone went through the process, dropping prejudice and barriers. In the afternoon, we had sessions with 16 prisoners who have mental disorders. Most of them have killed members of their families, children and other people. They look like children, very simple and innocent, but capable of doing horrible things when the madness comes. We have short sessions with them because they cannot sit and listen for a long time.

They have all agreed that they should reduce smoking and watching TV and spend more time doing exercises. Every day, we did some simple yoga and breathing exercises. Some of them are showing happiness and enthusiasm for learning new things.

We will continue working with them one more week, having short sessions and we will see how much we can teach them. We are happy to inform you that more than half of the prison has done the AOL course and that the rest of the staff and prisoners are now looking forward to taking the training as well.