

"CAN COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE BE PREVENTED?"

A PsychoPolitical Action Project in Indonesia

BLITAR Youth detention center project

"Can Collective Violence be prevented?" is a step-by-step approach to the long-term prevention of violence in pre-crisis areas. It is applicable nationally and internationally within multi-ethnic- and multi-religious contexts. It employs a new approach, where the groups and communities involved agree on incorporating the values of **consciousness of joy, empowerment, empowerment to choose, choice and self help** as basic values for various hands-on projects, chosen by the participants.

The project consists of two major components:

One: The actual hands-on project, on location involving and training key persons, bringing the project into the community and engaging others to participate. The community or group in cooperation with the key persons choose the type of support desired. Psychological and skills training, financial and material support will be provided.

Two: In-depth psychological assessment and evaluation of survey statistics. The purpose of this component is to demonstrate how the combination of value and psychological principles with financial and material support and skills training leads to the prevention of violence.

THE THEORY

This model can be used to prevent individual and collective violence as well as working with traumatized populations. It consists of a combination of psychological interventions, material, and financial support as well as skills training leading to empowerment to choose, choice, and self help.

Psychological processes: The aim is to approach collective or group psychological behaviors, such as depression, apathy, fear, aggression, loss of self esteem, etc., using the values of **consciousness of joy, empowerment to choose, choice and self help**. By modeling such an inner attitude, the collective tensions or traumata can be approached through acceptance. The deep emotions connected to it can be made conscious and expressed and the related belief patterns eventually transformed. This in turn allows the underlying potential life energy, temporarily paralyzed, to be redirected and released. More, it empowers the individual as well as the group to translate this potential into creative action (communal activities, rebuilding, etc.).

Catalyzing both, the individual and collective life energy, means to empower the individual as well as the community, and ultimately leading to self help, the **improvement of self esteem** is mandatory. The individual and community are supported to choose the help appropriate to their needs of the moment as well as to develop their own products.

The actual projects are based on the psychological principles outlined above which are modeled by the initiators. Their attitudes and values modeled determine the depth of the transformation the target group's collective may reach. **Initiators and participants work as equals empowering one another**. This creates the foundation for healthy cooperation based on mutual respect and regard. And thus will affect the quality and depth of the various project processes. It facilitates empowerment, which precedes the reemergence of self esteem, individual and collective, and catalyzes both, social and economic growth and allows to say no to violence.

Each action taken by the initiators or group is complemented by an equivalent input on the part of the community or group.

Psychological assessment: Once this point has been reached the life energy of the collective has been stimulated and redirected. The initiators can slowly withdraw from their involvement with the group. A continued support can be handed over to the appropriate organization.

THE PROJECT, Blitar children's prison

This pilot project is a part of the collaboration of PsychoPolitical Peace Foundation and with Dr. Yusti Probawati, Faculty of Psychology of Ubaya University, Java, focused **on the prevention of collective violence**, to introduce empowerment to prison youth, as well as using the model, to allow the youth to develop trust through our regular visits and self esteem by choosing a training activity. This in turn gives rise to self confidence and usable skills available when being released from prison. The empowerment of some of these young people and their re-introduction into a productive life after prison will have a profound effect on the other inmates and children, as well as their respective village community.

The following is a description of the actual action taken during the period of 1 ½ years, starting in July 2003 at a three month interval, and the results.

First visit

The first visit in a **youth detention center** in the Southeast of Java, where about one hundred children, mostly teenagers, were imprisoned for various crimes, including robbery, theft, and murder, was impressive. I had the opportunity to speak to some of the youngsters in the presence of the wardens. I was told that the youngest ever to have been here was eight years old.

The facility is a simple, a large array of buildings facing the courtyard. It looks clean, painted in white. Five to six boys are in a room with white tiles on the floor, barred glassless windows opening into a central courtyard. I saw some small carpets on the floor. When arriving most of the boys were out in the courtyard. They are locked in their cells from four pm in the afternoon to eight am the next morning. Many are teenagers in puberty. One can only imagine the tensions arising while they are locked up together. Presently no girls are detained here. Several rehabilitation possibilities are available, yet not fully used. The wardens complain about the youth's lack of motivation. When speaking with several of the inmates, I got the distinct impression that their hearts could be reached and a lot of potential could be activated here.

A whole group of youngsters expressed the desire to play guitar and drums. Playing drums as well as guitars would be a very appropriate way to help them express their feelings. The PsychoPolitical Peace Foundation will provide the requested guitars and footballs during the next scheduled visit.

In order to build trust with the youths, we asked each time that the wardens left us alone when talking to our group of youngsters.

Second visit

We reached the prison after a four and a half hour long drive from Surabaya, the second largest city on the island of Java.

The drive was stressful. We encountered many high speed drivers, and heavy traffic. Java is the most densely populated island in the Indonesian archipelago.

We were received by the head of the prison and had to sign in. It is not a high security prison. In the left hand corner of the building cells for single confinement are contained. They are used when fighting and violence breaks out. The prison school teaches up to senior high school level. Yet, according to the wardens, many of the inmates are not motivated to study.

We offered some of the cake we brought to the wardens and took the rest for the youth. The cake was a very welcome change in their simple diet.

In the Aula, we met with a group of twenty youngsters. Some had been sentenced for murder, gang murder, and robbery. Lo and behold, there was a small scared, very young eight year looking boy with big eyes.

The chairs, set up in one row with a table in front, were quickly moved to form a circle. The wardens, asked to leave, left hesitantly.

Our reason for being here was to find out what these young people might need, what could be helpful to support their adaptation to life outside prison once released, where they would be entering a new world so different from the one they left years ago.

In other words, to stimulate, catalyse and empower them to participate in developing an approach to life outside, thus learning to take responsibility for their action. We hoped to stimulate the youngsters to think further than the day of release. Most stated that this was their only goal. Again, and again the question was asked: What are you going to do when you get out of here in one, two or more years? How can you prepare now in the prison for that time? What skills will you need? If you don't prepare now, you will not be able to adjust out there and will return to the old ways of surviving and then it will be adult prison.

These youngsters are predominantly street children, abandoned by their families. Many had been waiting in vain for their families to come and visit.

The days here revolve around the time when the cell doors open at 9 am and they can move into a dusty courtyard until 4 pm when, again, they are locked up. A few cell doors do not open at all. Presently no girls are in prison even though it has a building for that purpose.

This very young boy, caught stealing, will remain in prison unless his family really wants to get him out. Unfortunately, his mother works in Malaysia, the father does not care, the grandparents can't handle him. Since there is no alternative system available, such as foster parents, he will most probably remain here until age eighteen. I felt the strong urge to hug him as he sat so small on his chair. I spoke strongly to the others, making them aware of their responsibility. They were his family now, everything they did would influence his life and his future.

No one ever spoke to them like this. These thoughts were new, provocative and took time to digest.

In this circle of young faces I saw bright, intelligent eyes. Most impressive was one of the killers, sentenced for inciting a gang murder. He now is in charge of a group of inmates. He is very aware and sorry for what he did, and is up for release in three years. He needs to be able to study, to be given a chance to use his true potential, in order not to have to return to adult prison.

The cake disappeared in no time. The two footballs from Switzerland were applauded and their quality admired.

Their homework until our next visit, was to think how they could prepare themselves for their release.

Our next visit will be in December and the authorities will allow us to bring guitars into the prison.

On the way out, their three daily meals, which they cook for themselves, were displayed in the warden's office.

Third visit

We left at 6 am for the four hour drive to the youth prison in East Java. Four university students accompanied us to do some research, collecting data, taking advantage of this opportunity to speak to the young inmates.

When we arrived at the prison, we were introduced to a new head of the institution, transferred from a men's prison in Sumatra.

In a few minutes, the group we had worked with during the previous visit was gathered in the aula. They had been given homework to assess what they would do when they were released and how they could prepare for their life after their release from prison.

Assessing realistically what awaited them could be a start for a new beginning. The young man imprisoned for initiating a gang murder was asked what he wanted to do. He said that he wished to return to his family and go to school. Did he think his family would take him back? Had he ever asked his family? He broke into tears. No, he had not dared think about that possibility. We suggested he write to his family to find out if he could return to them. Depending upon the answer he could prepare accordingly. A new inmate, twenty years old, was in prison for kidnapping a girl. He had spent the night in a hotel with the girl. According to him, she had wanted to go with him. The parents of the girl, who at seventeen is considered a minor, went to court, accusing him of kidnapping. He was overwhelmed having ended up in prison. He repeated over and over that she wanted to be with him and he feels betrayed by her when she testified against him seemingly influenced by the parents.

The five guitars, which somehow, miraculously survived the trip from Switzerland to Java, were very much welcome. The inmates received permission from the new prison director to take the guitars into their cells where they are locked in, six or seven to a room, from 4 pm to 9 am. The director warned us that the guitars might be broken during fights at night and used as a weapon. We thought that it was most important for the youngsters to have the guitars to play in their cells in order to reduce fights.

Presently we are checking all possibilities to find funding to support the release of these young people from prison into a hopeful future.

Fourth visit

This visit was focussed on empowering the youth to agree on an training which could allow to learn for skills to be uses once outside the jail, to support their re-entry into society. Eventually every one agreed to participate in a motorcycle maintenance class, to be organized and held in the prison. We also learned that the youths were not allowed to take the guitars to their cells as agreed by the administration during our last visit.

Fifth visit

An early departure -- 5:30 A.M. -- in order to reach the youth prison, where we were to organize a **motorcycle maintenance and repair class** for a group of the youth. Legal permission had already been granted. The teacher was to come from outside the prison, to provide a different role model for the youths. A choice was to be made between two teachers. My colleague and I looked very carefully which person could be a role model, different from the wardens and both opted for the same one, who seemed to have an open heart for the children, and a respectful and loving attitude.

In the prison, the class, a pilot program, was set up to run for 3½ months initially, three hours at a time, four times per week.

A young girl, fourteen, whom I met on my last visit, had tried to commit suicide by drinking a whole can of detergent and cleaning chemicals. Another young man, having killed the brother of his girl friend, who had attacked him, was in a deep depression and felt terribly guilty and suicidal about it. Counselling was given to both.

After a lengthy negotiation, a toothbrush and toothpaste to each youth was distributed. It seems that some of the boys can modify the handle so that it can be used as a weapon. It was made clear to each youth, should they use the toothbrush to fight, the permission to bring other articles would be withdrawn by the prison authority. Each gave his word.

Sixth visit

Again, a long drive through dense traffic on small roads to the youth prison in East Java. After the usual time spent on formalities with the various officers in charge, we met with our already existing, and now well established group of youths to discuss the motorcycle repair training, which we organised during our previous visit. A climate of trust seemed to prevail as we invited the youths to voice their needs and wants.

The cakes brought along disappeared quickly during the process. Several of the young inmates wanted to be able to pass their high school exams on the outside, which would allow them to get an official high school diploma. We promised to discuss their request with the head of the prison school as well as with the director of the local junior high school.

During a walk through the facility, toothpaste, and writing pens, a donation from Switzerland were distributed

After a lengthy discussion with the wardens and the organization providing the motorcycle spare parts, we finally left the prison to return to Surabaya.

Seventh visit

The visit to the children's detention center, arriving after the usual strengthfull 4 1/2 hrs drive from Surabaya was very rewarding. Our group of youngsters – after we asked the wardens to leave us, showed real joy, they were very glad to see us. They felt great participating in the motorcycle repair program we had organized. For the first time, the patience, regularity of our visits in the past two years showed its results. They opened up, and expressed their feelings of hope now for a different life after release. They were learning a skill. Whereas at the beginning of our visit most refused to even think beyond the day they would leave. It was very touching and rewarding. They shared their needs and wants, which meant, trust was truly established. They wanted us to bring some chicken for our next visit.

The pens and toothpaste was distributed to all the inmates.

Our group of ten had achieved a goal we had set. To establish trust with us and among themselves, raise their self esteem, honor and respect themselves and each other. The group seemed very coherent now, when compared with the beginning when no one could hold the focus no longer than a minute.

Organically their true needs showed themselves. One to receive psychological care (while in prison). Our regular visits, modelling acceptance and love had evoked miracles.

There is a need for companions for each one, once they leave the prison. To support and assist the adaptation to a more productive existence. In order to be able to use the skill they learned in the prison, to find an employment.

The students conducted a survey during this visit.

The training was considered by most excellent and they appreciated the teacher very much – a person from outside the prison. No classes were missed and they felt quite confident to be able to use the acquired skills once outside the prison.

Several of our goals seem to have been established – building trust by modelling acceptance and keeping our promises and visiting on a regular basis.

Eight visit

Somehow, the children's prison seemed much more fully alive than during our previous visits. A new director, who, on first perception seemed to really be touched by the many sad stories of the children, was very interested in any support he could get from outside organisations to improve the situation.

My colleague and I met with eight of our longterm group – three having left on probation. It was now a very attentive, alert group which was able to articulate their immediate needs and wants. They were simple, and easy to be fulfilled. Their requests were chicken lunches (the prison food being mainly rice), new pants, shampoo and a guitar for the next are to be released in six months.

Official certificates will be issued to each one who participated in the motorcycle repair training we organised previously. Thus being able to demonstrate a usable skill once released.

Several local organisations, not being aware that a children prison is in their town, were networked with, to introduce other skills and programs in the prison.

Our next contribution will be a two day training program for the wardens and rehabilitation social wardens in September in the prison. The director welcomed this project warmly.

Indirect psychological interventions

The following was accomplished:

Psychological assessment: The youths were aggressive, mistrusting, narrow minded and distrusting.

Providing musical instruments to support emotional expression through singing and playing – reduce tension and violence.

Providing volleyballs and footballs to expand physical energy, to reduce built up tension in a playful way, to prevent violence and fighting in the cells at night.

Hands on project: Motorcycle maintenance training as a means to reach the youth and providing an usable skill for their return to the outside world.

Providing needed items for their physical care: tooth brushes, paste, soap, pens, T-shirts etc. to allow for a better self care.

Psychological interventions: Modelling respect respect and acceptance, giving individual therapy (such as suicidal, depression)

Psychological process: Through our continuous regular presence, respect and deep acceptance trust was slowly established. Listening to their needs and modelling responsibility and reliability, this was deepened and more openness resulted.

Life energy was catalysed and empowerment modelled. The group was empowered to choose a training they decided and all agreed upon which raised self respect and self esteem. This in turn allowed to look into the future differently, with hopes having a skill available to earn money in a non criminal way.

Things to do:

They are unable to leave the prison to continue the six month field training in motorcycle repair now needed.

One person can get out on probation yet needs a guarantee by a sponsor.

They need steady support, a companion and/or family once they leave the prison, to support their adaption to the outside world.

Ninth visit

During this visit to the **children's prison** each participant in our youth group had the opportunity to receive an individual therapy session. The sessions seemed very much needed. They provided an emotional outlet on a confidential, one-to-one level. While I distributed the sneakers donated from Switzerland, two of my Javanese colleagues held short therapy sessions.

The group process that preceded the sessions underlined the important role these young prisoners could play to decrease the outbreaks of violence in the prison by refraining from stimulating conflicts and supporting conflict resolution instead .

Several possibilities for further training within the prison walls were examined, most importantly from the perspective of enhancing self-esteem and improving skills training. It became clear that the motorcycle maintenance skills they had acquired in the previous course needed to be practiced hands-on in a garage. Three of the youngsters may possibly be allowed to work outside during the day, accompanied by a prison guard. This will be the focus of our next visit in June.

There is a great need for the youths to have companions when they leave the prison. They need mentors who can support them emotionally and be available to them during the process of re-adaptation to the new world they walk into.

Poems written by the inhabitants of the youth prison

PLEASE FORGIVE ME
In the depth of my heart
there is an empty space
I want to smile to my world
but I am so weak
to face this anxious heart
The night becomes darker
I bow in the emptiness
I don't know when this suffering will end
while the world still humiliates me
The time doesn't pass
God, I am fed up living like this
I want freedom

Oh God
I can't stand anymore...
Please forgive me

REGRET

In the crisis of my cruel life
My predestination boat arrived to my harbour
Throw down the unlimited regret
As the people underestimate you.
And all these months insult you –
Is it possible? Is there forgiveness?
for a prisoner, like me.
Here, I'm just silent and quiet
waiting the time which is running slowly.
And once a while I feel regret.
Uh ... when can I get out?
The psychic torture hurts my body
the torture of my heart, in this jail.
Then, I react and shout "damn".
This poverty has turned me into a devil.
Is there your forgiveness
for a prisoner like me.
And the tears run down.
God ...! How can I show my regret
my sin which is there every day,
and hurts my heart.
Then I feel sorrowed and bow sadly.
I pray to you, God.

With love.

DUSTY IRON CURTAIN

I'm waiting...
In the back of the window with the iron curtain
I wait until I can get out...
I want to smile like the others
playing, chattering, laughing loudly.
They don't see me
we're just like you, God's creatures
we're just like you, having potential and dreams,
give me a chance, to change myself,
let me be creative.
Please touch my hand, without suspicion.
We're just like you, God's creation.
we're just like you, having heart and feelings.
Please try to open the dusty iron curtain...
there is a light
for the nation and country of Indonesia.

Tenth visit

Somehow, the **children's prison** seemed much more fully alive than during our previous visits. A new director, who, on first impression seemed to be truly touched by the many sad stories of the children, was very interested in any support he could receive from outside organisations to improve the situation in prison.
My colleague and I met with eight participants of our longterm group – three had left on probation. The group was very attentive and alert, able to articulate their immediate needs and wants. Their wishes were simple, and easy to fulfil. Their requests were chicken lunches

(the prison food being mainly rice), new pants, shampoo and a guitar for the next youth who will be released in six months.

Official certificates will be issued to each one who participated in the motorcycle repair training we organised previously. Thus, they can demonstrate a usable skill once released.

We networked with several local organisations that were unaware that a children's prison is in their town. They will introduce other skills and programs into the prison.

Our next contribution will be a two day training program for the wardens and rehabilitation social wardens in September in the prison. The director welcomed this project warmly.