

VOORLICHTINGS-PROJEKT
 DELINKWENTIE
 EN
 SAMENLEVING

ANTI-BIAS PROJECT "CRIME AND SOCIETY".

General information.
 =====

Purpose.

The purpose of the anti bias project is to reduce prejudice in society with regard to ex-convicts by organizing information meetings. An essential asset of the project is that ex-convicts play an important role in it. At information-meetings as a rule ex-convicts act in combination with professionals in the penal domain: lawyers, probation-officers, police-officers etc. Also with regard to the management of the project ex-convicts play an important role. Ex-convicts are co-ordinators. At the moment schools and adult education form the main object of our activities. By and by the project hopes to be able to reach those who on account of their function or position can directly influence the position of (ex-) convicts, such as regional labour exchanges and social services.

Area.

Since the foundation of the project in 1975 four regions have been formed, each served by its own co-ordination-centre. From these centres parties interested in information meetings are actively sought. The remaining parts of the country are served as well as possible, and only on request, from the central co-ordination-post in Groningen.

<u>Central Co-ordination-post</u>	<u>Region North Holland</u>
Verlengde Hereweg 120	Wagenaarstraat 189
9722 AJ Groningen	1093 CN Amsterdam

<u>Region South-Holland-South</u>	<u>Region South-Holland-North</u>
(Rotterdam and environs)	(The Hague and environs)
Catharina Beersmansstraat 57-b	Finnenburg 102
3025 EC Rotterdam	2591 XT Den Haag

Region North (three northern provinces)
 Schuitendiep 88-1, 9711 RH Groningen

Scope of activities.

In the season 1984/1985 637 groups were served by the project, totaling 1140 information meetings in which 24405 persons were reached. The groups served can be broken down as follows:

schools	: 79,5 %
adult education:	12,5 %
various	: 8 %

SOME EMANCIPATORY EFFECTS OF THE ANTI-BIAS PROJECT
"CRIME AND SOCIETY".

One ex-convict volunteer/instructor gave as his motivation to participate in instruction-meetings that he had nothing else to do and "went to the wall". He felt a big urge to talk with people about his experiences. Moreover he felt society should know what life in quod is really like. In this case not so much out of rancour but more out of perplexity over what he had suffered. He was in difficult personal circumstances and greatly suffered from "quod-syndrome". The latter became apparent only later on. During talks we had he told us that he was still hooked and used great quantities of valium. The latter was a remnant of jail-life. He lived under great stress. His family suffered with him.

After he had participated in our project during more than a year he told us that he did not use (hard)drugs any more (except for one backsliding which he discussed with us because he felt guilty about it) and even was clean from valium. He credited this development to his participation in our project. By talking about his experiences before an audience he was able to do away his "syndrome". Moreover he discovered that people are prepared to listen to him, even as an ex-convict. And he dares to cope with direct contacts again.

He is also able to discuss the problems he meets as an ex-convict with his partners in adversity. As a result of those discussions and also as a result of his contact with our project, he has been able several times to convert aggression, evoked by for example police-actions, into positive selfhelp. E.g. as a consequence of intimidations by the police of his place of residence with regard to his little son, he has spoken with the local police-chief.

While applying for a job he had very frustrating experiences. Owing to the project he was able to talk with people of the firm in question with regard to their personnel management as far as employing ex-convicts is concerned. This did not lead to his employment but that was not the most important part of it. Although he still feels the results of having been in quod, he now knows how to cope with his situation. He credits the project for an important part of that result.

- Another volunteer/ex-convict, generally known as a difficult person, has been active with the project for more than a year. Although there have been frictions, both parties have good memories about the period. He is regarded as having become more realistic by his probation-contacts. He hopes to be able to start a snackbar within short. He still regularly visits people from the project for a talk. He is also active in other self-help-organisations now.
- During the frequent volunteers-work-meetings the ex-convicts not only talk about their experiences during information-meetings but also about personal matters. Because only ex-convicts attend those meetings there is an atmosphere of mutual understanding and acceptance. But another binding element is the joint activity for the project. Both factors interact in such a way that personal frustrations do not lead to private wars but to selfhelp. There is much mutual assistance between the ex-convicts, and fortunately this does not lead to a sort of in-crowd.

Speaking about your experiences as an ex-convict brings to light a great number of the sort of problems anyone suffers from. For example the unemployment problem.

The volunteers-work-meetings have made plans to start their own employment projects for ex-convicts, because it turned out that traditional aidsocieties have not been able to do anything for them. After exploring the various possibilities they have now formed a foundation. The intention is that the volunteers maintain a strong relation with the project so that both parties may profit from each other.

In the meantime in Groningen (Region North) the "Stichting Werkprojekten" (Foundation Work Projects) has been realized. The first employment projects: guarded bicycle-stores in three recreation-areas and one guarded bicycle-store at a school. Further projects are under development.

- One basical principle of the project is that volunteers/ex-convicts should not be exposed for very long periods to the by-effects of talking about very personal and rather humiliating experiences before an audience. Therefore their activities as participants in information-meetings should be restricted in time. If possible they should find permanent employment elsewhere or in the management-part of the project.

In the four regions about 200 volunteers/ex-convicts have participated in information-meetings sofar. About 10% have found permanent employment elsewhere. This will undoubtedly influence their risk of relapse into crime. Not impressive perhaps in bare numbers, but seen as a result of selfhelp exclusively and in comparison with other projects those numbers are remarkable indeed.

Moreover it is to be said that most volunteers/ex-convicts lack the strength to organize their lives by themselves but have decided for themselves to make their choice in the good direction.

It appears that the project serves as a good background to stimulate this choice and to keep to it.

- Several years ago volunteers/ex-convicts from region North Holland have started a housing project in Amsterdam, which has become known all over the country in the meantime: "Vereniging Huis Art. 26 BW"/"Society paragraph 26 Basical law on Prisons". The name refers to a paragraph in that law which says that prison-sentences inter alia should have the effect of preparing the convict's return in society. The society offers temporary housing to ex-convicts which after being released from detention have no address of their own. They have the disposal of two buildings where about 40 persons can dwell. During their stay there the ex-convicts are able to look for more permanent dwellings. But it is equally important that they can assist each other in coping with various problems with officials (social services etc.). The buildings are managed by ex-convicts with some assistance from outsiders. Ex-convicts staying in one of those buildings often participate in information-meetings of the project.
- A regional co-ordinator who after his breaking-in period regularly participated in information-meetings himself, in doing so developed a special relation with a regional school. It turned out that he perfectly knew how to deal with the pupils

of that school, who are regarded as rather difficult. As a consequence he was invited to apply for the post of teacher civics. His abilities apparently qualified him for the job not-with-standing his penal past. He is employed with that school now.

- Ex-convicts working as co-ordinators with the project, are encouraged to follow courses in order to improve their position on the labour-market. Three of them have finished their courses at the Sociale Academie (Academy for Social Work), as social-cultural workers.
- Another regional co-ordinator has a feeling that he recovered quicker after a period of detention because he was able to speak with people who were prepared to listen to him and who regarded him as an equal partner (he thinks in a detention-situation the prisoner is always in a dependent position). He feels he has regained his self-respect and that his self-reliance is greatly reinforced.
- Only very recently one of the regional co-ordinators is appointed as a co-ordinator at the organization "HALT". This is a kind of diversion-project, subsidized by the Department of Justice and the province. Juvenile delinquents in the age from 12 to 18 have to e.g. (help to) repair the things they have smashed up or to clean up their graffiti on walls, in trains and in buses.
By doing so they can avoid prosecution.

June 1985