

Jumping Beyond Shadows

METHODOLOGY OF WORKING - theatrical skills within a sex offender's programme.

The approach we took for our programme is based on interviews with therapists and sexologists who work with sexually abused women and men, and our own experience of working in prison.

In common we notice that in sex abuse there is a lack of acknowledgment of the boundaries of their own body and the other person's body. You can say that the boundaries are violated.

The offender is violating his own awareness of his boundaries by violating the other body. In a way the vocabulary of the sex offender to describe their own bodily needs is often very limited. Often this is based on their own historical lifeline. To understand the needs of the body the creation of an awareness is necessary and a place where the awareness can be taught. If there is no language to understand the physicality of the body and its needs, you can also say that it is a form of sexual abuse, since there is no awareness of boundaries

When there is no language to understand the body, you can say that there is a lack of understanding of the other body -or to say it differently- a lack of recognising the other person's needs and boundaries; a lack of empathy. To create a healthy understanding we choose to go back to the basics of physicality. It is a small beginning to try to read the body; it is a start to extend the knowledge of the body and its language.

The approach we took in this week was based on the knowledge that sex offenders often cross borders they shouldn't cross. If you want to act, then knowing the boundaries of your self and of the other actor is very important. There is a need for an agreement before actors can act; an agreement of understanding of what's going to happen. In this way there is a need to understand the process of creating a play.

This means to understand the boundaries of yourself and respect of the boundaries of the other actors. When this is not there, then we see chaos and chaos is not interesting to look at.

Acting works on three levels:

1. Awareness of you own input and physicality and limits;
2. Awareness of the other actor and his/her limits (empathy);
3. Awareness of the audience, the capability to distance yourself from yourself and look from another perspective.

We are aware of the fact that these three levels are in common with the necessity to create a healthy relationship.

In our work we only use theatrical language, this is for three reasons:

a) Often sex offenders in prison know the therapeutic language very well, and know how to please the therapist in what to say, but without making the language their own.

b) Sex offenders who are denying their crime don't want to cooperate with therapy, because there is "no problem". They can always do a theatrical workshop, because it's not threatening.

c) Theatrical language is new for the group. Together we discover a whole new way of looking at and understanding and acknowledging of each other's boundaries.

We think it's good to have a clear separation between therapeutic work and theatrical work, because of the reasons we've mentioned. But of course the participants and the therapist are free to share the experiences of the workshop. In this way we can have an input to the sex offenders program.