Stress Rehabilitation at Umraniye Prison

By Mina Ercel

Istanbul (Dunya) - Last week in Istanbul's Umraniye Prison, a teacher from Denmark conducted a stress management and rehabilitation training course (SMART) with 40 prisoners. The prison program was applied for the first time in Turkey.

According to Jakob Lund, a world-renowned instructor from Copenhagen who has been teaching this program for many years, Prison SMART is a practical and effective stress management program mainly based on breathing techniques.

The program teaches prisoners to deal more constructively with their often deep-rooted feelings of fear, guilt, depression, despair and revenge. Feelings such as rage, aggression and frustration make way for enthusiasm and a positive frame of mind.

"We focus on people who want to change. Stress is the key to negative feelings and emotions thus reaction", Mr. Lund said. "With this course and breathing techniques, the participants learn to contain feelings and deal with their own stress and emotions with their own power."

Prison SMART provides an increase in self-confidence, strengthens human values and reduces reliance on drugs. The prisoners learn skills to deal with future conflict and stressful situations successfully.

"All the energy you have which is destructive, but the same energy can be used to be constructive" Mr. Lund asserted "It's also important to be aware that deep inside there is a spot that's untouched by 'bad things.'"

The SMART program aims to cut through the cycle of violence as detainees become more conscious of the consequences of their actions, take responsibility, and search for the solutions to their problems within themselves rather than in the outside world.

Thus the prison becomes an opportunity for self-reflection and the program lays the foundation for genuine rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The participants can make use of the knowledge and the set of techniques that they learn during the training for the rest of their lives.

"One of the big problems is that when you put people in prison, they come out even angrier. I personally don't care whether they have killed somebody or have stolen a bike. I focus on their potential - not on what they did, but on what they do," he says.

Jakob Lund came to Istanbul with the assistance of a non-profit organization, Ceza Infaz Sisteminde Sivil Toplum Dernegi (Civil Society Association for Penal Enforcement System), and its talented board of director Zafer Kirac. "Overall I felt very much at home and welcome in Turkey and at the prison", Mr. Lund says. Transformation and state of calmness and being at peace of the prisoners in Umraniye were significant! Umraniye T Type Prison Director Mehmet Citak and E Type Director Haci Aydinc gave Mr. Lund a warm welcome and invited him back to teach again and also to the staff of the prisons.

Mr. Lund invites Turkish companies to become more socially responsible and create social awareness. "Avoiding crime is not just putting people into jail, but rather educating them so they do not come back", he says.

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