

Peace Education at Osceola County Corrections in Florida



Steve Ahsmuhs is a volunteer with the [Peace Education Program](#) (PEP) in the Orlando area of Florida. He had a severe stroke in 2008, but found that while helping with PEP, he has been able to use many abilities he thought he had lost for good. Working as part of the Orlando PEP team is a truly humbling and enriching experience, he says. In this blog he shares his perspective on facilitating the program for inmates at the Osceola County Corrections Department. (Steve is pictured to the left above, and to his right are fellow PEP volunteers Miriam and Emmanuel)

Things got off to a slow start when Emmanuel Christian and I presented the first PEP course to male inmates. Only one participant showed up. He walked in with an air of being tough and dangerous, not interested in talking. He had no comments during the “Reflections” period of the workshop. At the end of the hour-long session, he surprised us by telling us that he had come to check us out, and he would bring lots more guys to the next class. He did.

Since those first few weeks (two workshops per week are presented), there haven't been any more tough and dangerous attitudes entering the class. The guys who have attended previous workshops come in relaxed, smiling, playful, and happy. The new fellows (there is rarely a class without new attendees showing up) come in calmly, taking it all in. Many of the workshop videos are met with applause as they end. When the class is over there are always a number of men who thank us for volunteering. We always tell them, "You're welcome. It is our pleasure to be able to do it."

And it is. It is an amazing experience to be able to help with these wonderful workshops. People come in, almost all having never heard of Prem Rawat, and at the end of the first hour listening to him, they are reflecting, expanding on what he says, and talking about the workshop's topic with wonder and enthusiasm.

Also, with the help of Miriam Christian, Emmanuel's mother, we offer the workshops to female inmates twice a week. The ladies show their enthusiasm for the classes even more readily. They often comment on Prem's wisdom and humor. They discuss how to incorporate what they learn in the workshops into their day-to-day lives.

One lady told us that she calls her children and tells them what she has learned in each "Peace Class" since they last talked. She said she knows it will help them because it helps her.

One of the men had attended the sessions for months. He told us that he already had all of the workshop handouts and articles but that he wasn't being greedy by taking more. He took them to send to his children because he didn't want them to end up in prison like him.

Participants have told us that for the first time in their lives, they are sure their life is valuable.

Here are a few of the specific comments we've jotted down from participants during the workshops:

"We create our own reality. It's not anybody else; it's up to me."

"Don't just live your life. Be an active participant in your life."

"Try to keep peace when you have it. We need to accept it, not go on being stupid. It's important to understand."

“I am about to be released. I am so glad I’ve been able to attend this class. It really gives me hope that I’ll do things right now when I’m out.”

“I share with my daughter what I learn here. She always asks me.”

“Peace is hard here except when I’m in this class. I’m learning to appreciate. I miss what my dad does for me. I appreciate him more now.”

“This class has made a difference in me.”

“The fact that I’m alive is a miracle.”

It’s easy to wish the best for these people after they have opened their hearts to share what is in them. The hard thing is to miss one of these classes, and the opportunity to learn from the participant’s touching comments.