

Peace Education Program: Fresno Inmates Take It To Heart



Michel Klamph, volunteer manager of the [Peace Education Program](#) (PEP), recently interviewed Scott Polenz for The Prem Rawat Foundation (TPRF). Scott resides in Fresno, California, where he volunteers as a PEP facilitator. He is a psychotherapist maintaining a full private practice who enjoys writing, art, music, and baking in his spare time. A cancer survivor, Scott reports that he tries to live each day to its fullest and, “If the feeling of gratitude is relatively close in proximity, I feel I am heading in the right direction in my life.”



Here are excerpts of their conversation:

How did you get involved in PEP?

I was on my own, and I could not find anyone else near me who could help. So, Sally Weaver, a volunteer PEP facilitator from Thousand Oaks, California, touched base with me and said she was coming up my way because she had already made contacts at some of the state prisons in the Fresno area. This was the boost I needed to get the Peace Education Program started! We met with community resource managers at several prisons. I was fortunate enough to pick up the ball and start running with it.

I began the first PEP in September, 2015 at Valley State Prison, Chowchilla. Shortly after that I started one in Pleasant Valley State Prison, Coalinga, and then Avenal State Prison. An intern who has helped me facilitate PEP classes since 2015 is also enjoying the workshops.

I have been asked to do a special PEP for veterans imprisoned at Chowchilla. And I'm also starting a PEP for the larger community on Sunday evenings, too.

In Chowchilla, the PEP classes are rotational. Once we complete the 10-week course, we start over again. There is a long wait list of people who want to get into the class. The word has gotten out. It has been fun. There is no shortage of participants, which is great.

What has been the response of participants to the PEP workshops you are offering?

It has been amazing. There are always going to be some who come to get a prison credit for attending. About the fourth or fifth week you can feel a shift, where people start to realize the workshop is about something valuable. They become enthusiastic and eager. They are already

lined up when I get there.

There's a tone that starts the first night. It evolves over the ten workshops. The inmates have the whole week in between classes to contemplate, read the supplemental articles, talk among themselves, and talk in the yard—part of the word of mouth that is going on.

I have had participants tell me, personally, how much the PEP is affecting them and changing them in practical ways. They give specific examples of how their behavior or response to a situation is based on what has been expressed in the workshops, and what they hear Prem Rawat say in the videos (on topics such as inner strength, contentment, self-fulfillment).

The inmates are taking it to heart. It's contagious. In the classroom, there's a reflections segment, where they have an opportunity to talk about their understanding. Hands go up, and then more hands go up. Before you know it, there's a lively discussion among the participants. I love that. The less I say, the more they get going. To me that's what it is about. It's cool.

Is there any advice you'd like to give people interested in facilitating a PEP?

I'm not one to give advice, but I'd say try to be clear on your own intention and commitment to what you are doing. Be aware of the impact this can have on the different individuals hearing about the possibility of inner peace.

At first, I wasn't comfortable being a facilitator, talking in front of a class of 50 people. But it gets easier as time goes on. Be real, if that makes sense.

Thank you for sharing this with us.

It was my pleasure. As a psychotherapist, I work with a lot of people who struggle with problems, and deal with that during the week. In contrast, the PEP is very different and lighthearted, so I'm appreciative and grateful for the opportunity to spread a little good cheer and a little love.

Image of Fresno by Dave Coppedge