

Therapeutic Justice and Peace  
Circles: a restorative opportunity  
for youth drug users in conflict  
with the law

# Juvenile Justice System Brazil

- There are sixty thousand youngsters serving sentences (under eighteen)



Source: National Secretariat for Human Rights

- Fourteen thousand has been deprived of liberty



- Between 1996 and 2006 there was an increase of three hundred twenty five per cent in the rate of adolescents deprived of liberty





- The relapse rate after completion of sentence involving deprivation of liberty is estimated at seventy per cent



Jane, one of them...



- This is a real story, it was build from records of attendances and an interview we had last week
- Jane is a fifteen-year-old girl

- She was born in the city of Nova Friburgo, in the Rio de Janeiro State, a two hundred thousand inhabitant's city

- Jane's mother is a seamstress and his father is a bricklayer

- Her mother reports that she got married to his father only because she was pregnant. He was divorced and already had two daughters from his first marriage. Both daughters are over twenty now

- In her childhood, Jane liked to climb trees, run and play soccer with her friends. She was like a tomboy

- Jane doesn't understand why everything changed so much when she became a teenager



- She began to realize disagreements between her parents. Since then, she sees her mother as a very passive and submissive woman, unable to voice at home

- “Sometimes I feel as I am being her mom, because I fight with my dad to get things for her.”

- “My father doesn’t talk to me. He’s always yelling at me, saying that I will never do or have anything good in my life. When he starts talking, I feel very far from him. I don’t pay attention, I hear nothing ...”

- “ I feel like I have something stuck in my throat, my hands and feet become sweat. He says I am and will always be miserable.”

- “In the moments that I needed my father more, he would say nothing, but just hit me instead.”

- “He also hits my mother a lot. But he never did it in front of me. Once, my mother told me: Jane, your father hit me, smashed my car and hit me. I think she told me that so that I would face him. And that’s because she doesn’t have the courage to confront him, so I have to struggle for her.”

- Jane's first experience with alcohol was when she was only twelve

- Because of her rebellious behavior, aggression, lying and missing school, Jane's mother sought help at the Wardship Council, in 2009



# Wardship Council

- It is an agency, linked to the municipality, created to protect the rights of children and adolescents. The counselors guide children, adolescents and families for programs, schools, medical services, psychological treatment and social follow-up

- The Wardship Council referred Jane to the Girasol Institute

# Girasol Institute

- Is a NGO specialized in caring for young drug users



# Girasol Institute

## Goals

- To motivate, achieve and keep them abstinent
- To improve their self-esteem
- To adopt sustainable healthy lifestyle
- To develop resilience
- To rebuild family, school and social life

- At Girasol, Jane underwent individual and group psychotherapy
- Although the program includes a parent's group, Jane's parents were never committed

- The father says that everything there is rubbish, that her treatment is silly and that since Jane is the only one who did something wrong, she is the only one who should attend to those stupid meetings

- Jane dropped out of school when she was in the sixth grade, last year. She did not fit. In Brazil, public schools are not attractive and the methodology of education is old fashioned

- "At first I wanted to finish my studies, but I started hanging around with wrong people and then I didn't care anymore. I would go to school only to have fun. In school, there are always people calling to skip classes. I went to five different schools, always getting in trouble with my teachers."



- Jane always loved to decorate her Christmas tree. Last year, when it was time, she decided to look for her tree, she couldn't find it. Her mother told her to look for it at her sister's house. Her father had given the tree to her eldest sister and never told her anything about it

- Jane asked to have the tree back, but her sister denied it to her. There were physical confrontations, Jane bit her sister's finger and ended up being arrested to the police station

# Police Station

Although there are legal provisions for having a police station in each town specialized in serving youth, in Rio de Janeiro there is only one, located in the Capital



- "It was disgusting, everyone was interrogating me, the place was horrible. It was terrible for me to sign my own prosecution. At the same time I was thinking, this will represent nothing to me."

- This marked the income of Jane in the legal system. She was prosecuted for aggression. For the first time she faced a prosecutor and a judge

- The court began to follow the assistance at the Girasol, through a program called Therapeutic Justice

# Therapeutic Justice Program

- Initiated in 2008, alongside the Youth Court, the Prosecutor and the Town Government. Provides court-ordered treatment for youths that make offenses and are drug users

- “When I was before the prosecutor it was difficult. I know that as a prosecutor she is supposed to speak sharply, and she did it. She told me what I should do and not to do. It was very boring hearing that, I wanted to go away, I just wanted to leave immediately.”



- “The first time I saw the judge I felt fear, pressure, I was so scared, what do I do? Wow, he will give me a reprimand, a quarrel. I won’t be able to say anything... But, in fact, it wasn’t all that bad: the judge made it easy for me. I was so nervous that I couldn’t speak, I could only answer questions about school and family.”

- “Everything was over me: the judge, the prosecutor, Girasol... there are so many people in the world who do worst things than what I did, why so many people on my back?”

- “I was feeling in a room without light, without anything, so I decided to give my worst...”

- Jane began to leave home and spend days away, using drugs and prostituting herself, until a friend took her back. A few times her mother went out to look for her, but mostly her parents were only wait for her to return home, without giving much effort on finding her
- Jane used to come home skinny, dirty and haggard

- “I just felt good with a man when he gave me something.”
- “Once, my friends and I made a bet to see who would sniff more cocaine, who was going to handle more. I won, but I was in bed, broken. It made me feel very bad, because I was ill and no one was caring. My friends were just instigating me to drink and sniff more.”

- In this moment of her life, Jane wasn't going to the Girasol Institute, she was missing her treatment
- Once, her mother took her unconscious to Girasol, due to drugs overdose. They took her to a hospital instead

- This year, one more referral happened at the Jane's life. She was sent by the Judge to a new program, a restorative practice that was being implemented at the Court

- Kay Pranis was in Brazil last year and we took a course with her about peace circles. Since then, we have been studying the circle's process in order to work with the youth, who didn't adhere to treatment



# Peace Circles

## Core Assumption

- The true self in everyone is good, wise and powerful



# Core Assumption

- The world is profoundly interconnected



# Core Assumption

- All human beings have a deep desire to be in a good relationship



# Core Assumption

- All humans have gifts, everyone is needed for what they bring



# Core Assumption

- Everything we need to make positive change is already here



# Core Assumption

- Human beings are holistic



# Core Assumption

- We need practices to build habits of living from the core self



# Peace Circles

- In the circle we are all equal, we have equal voices, we don't use titles





# Talking Peace

- Object that guides the use of speech equitably

# Goals of the Peace Circles

- Feed the positive potentials of human beings



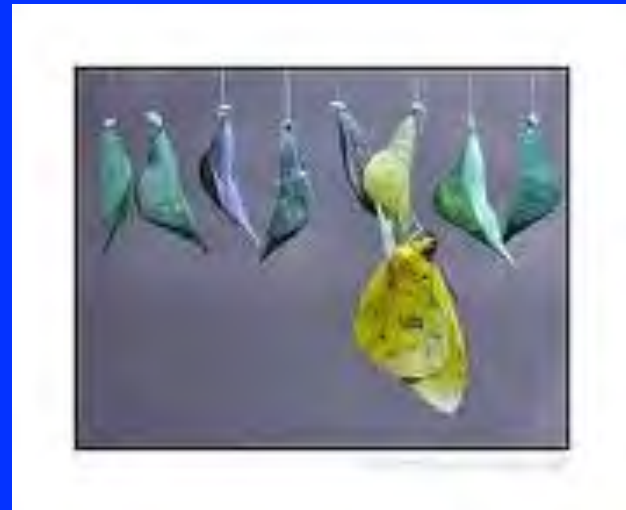
# Balance

- We always keep in mind the goals of individual accountability and at the same time offering support



# Hope

- Life is always in process. There is always another chance, there is always the possibility of making peace



# Guidelines

- Honor the talking peace
- Talk from the heart
- Hear with the heart
- Confidentiality

- The format of the circle symbolizes shared leadership, equality, connection and inclusion. It also promotes focus, accountability, participation and empowerment

# The peacemaking process is intended to

- Develop emotional literacy and mindfulness
- Heal the trauma and to promote resilience
- Deal with society's unfairness
- Build healthy relationships
- Build healthy partnerships between families and systems

- Jane, her father and her mother attended to their first circle in March. The coordinator of Girasol, a social worker and the facilitator were also in the circle
- Since then, we have met in the circle in each two weeks



- We work on peacemaking process and, at the end of each encounter, we build a plan, by consensus, to be implemented in the coming days. Jane chooses someone in the circle to provide the necessary support

- It seems that the horizontality of relationships in the circle allowed Jane to realize that there could be people willing to work with her, instead of taking decisions about her and charging her for results

- “I considered everything a nonsense: Girasol, the youth court, the judge, the prosecutor, the wardship council, but then I began to understand that a person who has a broken leg is not going to stand up by herself and needs help.”

- “At the circle, I realized that people wanted to work with me. Until then, I saw that everybody wanted to coordinate my life, one thing that I don’t want.”

- “At the circle we talk, we share feelings sincerely, I feel more opened to speak, I don’t feel fear. Each person shows a little bit about itself. I think that when somebody does something bad, this person should have the opportunity to be in a peace circle, first of all.”

- Jane's story doesn't end at this moment. In fact, we hope that her story is just beginning and that the peace circles bring support, accountability and personal growth for her and for each person in the circle

- “Today, I am beginning. I wish my mother could improve her behavior. But now I know this is her, this is her way. I am trying stop drinking, the more I drink, the more I feel anxious. I’m not using cocaine. I’m trying to be good for myself. If I’m ok, I will not fight with my dad. Today, I am beginning.”

# Some questions

- What are your feelings and concerns, having heard this?
- Has justice been done? What does justice require in Jane's situation?
- Jane's problems with drugs have worsened even after going through police, prosecutor and judge. What elements of Jane's speech demonstrates the reason for the ineffectiveness of the system to change her behavior?





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