



Health Education and Peer Support Project for Drug Users convicted of a crime

2005-2008

Probation Foundation in Helsinki started in May 2005 Harm Reduction orientated project in four (4) project prisons in Southern Finland. Project cooperates closely with The Criminal Sanctions Agency, A-clinic Foundations Health Education Centres for IV-drug users and other user service organizations. It is funded by RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association).

The target group in large includes all prisoners who are using or are in risk of using drugs intravenously. Especial interest is to support marginalized users, women, young people, linguistic-cultural minorities and empower these people through training. Health personnel and rehabilitation staff informs, motivates and selects the participants for training groups.

The beneficiaries of the project are various prison staff members and members of project guidance group. Harm reduction ideology should become a part of the basic education i.e. for guards, and as a part of further education for all staff members.

Needs assessment amongst staff will be made through tape recorded pair interviews. Ten drug user interviews have been made in A-clinic Foundations Centres for IV drug users and five interviews through members of user organization Lumme. Four pilot trainings groups have taken place in two of the four project prisons.

The trainings for staff will be organized in first hand by project team and later on as a part of trainings in Prison Personnel Training Centre and Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Drug using prisoners' trainings will be organized by health and rehabilitation personnel in each prison in co-operation with local Health Education Centres for IV-drug users.

The project goal is to create a harm reduction recommendations and model for all prisons with help of

- 1) Action plan for prison units and education for staff to include harm reduction activities in their daily routines
- 2) Accredited operations model/ training programme for prison staff to organize harm reduction oriented health education for drug users based on peer influence
- 3) Manual for peer educators for running a harm reduction counselling and guidance program that leads drug users to care services and for professionals working with drug users convicted of a crime in liberty

The main themes for harm reduction information in prisons are identified as follows:

- transmissions of HIV and hepatitis and other virus, bacteria and parasites can be restricted
- harmful effects and risks of using drugs can be reduced by introducing alternative routes of use and safer sex practices
- drug using person benefits of health information shared in groups, which enables empowerment and behaviour change
- Peer influence and peer support are the most effective ways for empowerment, changing attitudes and behaviour amongst drug-using people in minority and/or marginalized groups.

More information and details of a project progress from project coordinator Liisa Uusitalo (social psychologist, nurse) tel. 050-339870 and project worker Eeva Tamminen (nurse) 050-4124309.