

## Newsletter ~ Building Bridges Project November 30, 2015

### Introduction – the Building Bridges Conference



An exciting milestone of the project Building Bridges has been passed: the final conference in Rome on November 19 & 20, 2015!

In early 2014 we read in the project description that one day this was going to happen. To imagine all that would happen before this moment and to have an idea what the conference program would look like, was something far away.

But it took place, we reported to about 90 delegates what we did and learned throughout the project, with the aim to motivating them to start Building Bridges activities in their own countries, throughout Europe (and beyond).

The conference took place within the domain of Restorative Justice. The focus of the first part of the conference (Thursday afternoon) was on Restorative Justice with (opening) speeches from well known speakers (Dr. Martin Wright – *What Restorative Justice Offers to Victims and Offenders* - , Dr. Cosimo Maria Ferri – *Overcoming the Logic of Punishment* - , Professor Luciano Eusebio – *The Response to the Crime as a Project, rather than as Retaliation* -).

For all of the second day, the subjects were directly related to Building Bridges. There were four speeches by Building Bridges project partners focusing on the project aspirations and achievement, the scientific evaluation, the training and programme organization, and sustaining reforms, followed by a number of workshops (preparing victims and offender for an open dialogue, introduction to facilitating Building Bridges, building bridges with stakeholders organizations). In corridor conversations many discussions took place as well and information has been exchanged. In one of these conversations PF England mentioned that the BB material on the project website has been used already to rewrite the STP training for England.

During the day we listened also to Dr. Giacinto Siciliasno. He testified wonderful things as a result of Building Bridges in his prison in Milan.

Many delegates from all partner countries attended the conference: associate partners, delegates from justice departments, prison directors, and restorative justice organizations. For partner PF Italy it was an excellent opportunity to invite many persons from their network to join and participate in the conference. Special thanks and appreciation need to be expressed to partner Prison Fellowship Italy who organized this important and successful event! Only they know all the details of what had to be organized: the PR, the logistics, the decisions to be made, the (last-minute) changes, the one thousand questions to be answered at the same time.



Very exciting news has been shared by Prison Fellowship International. In the last speech at the conference Dan Van Ness shared their very ambitious plan to work towards 100.000 STP/BB dialogues (Sycamore Three Programme / Building Bridges) by 2020.

One of the conference delegates represented an important financial fund that is very positive about what is

done and aimed at in STP/BB. This might help new organizations in the near future to fund new Building Bridges programmes. In the description and execution of their new plans they will make use of the Building Bridges project results such as the scientific evaluation.

### ***Fifth transnational meeting***

Prior to the conference 2 project meetings were held on the evening of November 18 and the morning of November 19.

In meeting 1 the conference plans were discussed. The focus of the second meeting was on all remaining project activities. Two important outstanding project deliverables are the scientific evaluation of the 14 pilot programmes and the completion of the Building Bridges book, which is mainly the task of partner 'University of Hull'.

Another subject that needs to be mentioned is the revision of the Building Bridges guidebook. Apart from some minor textual adaptations, a few appendices will be added. By doing this, as much knowledge as possible will be in the guidebook and made available online to each organization who wants to use it.

February 26, 2016 is the date the project finishes officially. The final report has to be completed not later than 60 days from that date.

It's a big challenge to include in the report the impact of the project: impact as a result of the dialogues in lives of victims and prisoners; impact also as a result of many dissemination efforts. The project has been discussed in TV and radio interviews and newspaper articles. It has been referred to in magazines and in many meetings with other organizations and institutes.

To prepare the final report, a lot of administrative work has to be done also. Whilst not the most exciting part of the project, partners are well aware of the importance of completing this to a high standard..

It is hard to measure the effect of the project in the longer term. Looking at the effect on the short term and the concrete plans of several existing project partners and the ambitious plans of Prison Fellowship International, underscores the importance of all efforts to date.

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