

Sustainability and Personal and Social Responsibility in Prisons

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Abstract

This paper presents a holistic education program tailored for prison workers, andragogical staff, and guards, weaving together personal development, environmental studies, and social responsibility. The program was created and is continuously refined based on practical field experiences and observed results. Grounded in adult learning theories such as Knowles' Andragogy, which emphasizes self-directed learning and practical application, the program addresses the unique needs of prison staff while fostering a rehabilitative and sustainable prison culture. Key modules include personal steps for a better future, focusing on goal-setting and resilience; sustainable practices like food growing and waste reduction; and the adoption of natural cleaning agents to lessen ecological footprints. Additional components cover physical and mental health strategies, energy consumption reduction techniques, and social responsibility principles to enhance community ties within and beyond the prison. Drawing on ecological psychology and social learning theory, the program posits that staff trained in these areas can model prosocial behaviours, positively influencing inmate rehabilitation and institutional dynamics. By equipping participants with actionable skills and fostering environmental and social awareness, the initiative aims to improve staff well-being, reduce operational costs, and align correctional facilities with broader societal values of sustainability and accountability. The programs agenda enhances staff well-being, improve prison sustainability, and foster rehabilitation by equipping workers with skills in personal development, ecological practices, and social responsibility, potentially influencing broader societal values, though it may face challenges like resistance and initial costs.

Keywords: sustainability, social responsibility, prison, education, environment, waste reduction, rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

Correctional facilities are pivotal in shaping not only inmate rehabilitation but also the broader societal and ecological landscape. This paper presents a 12-week education program for prison workers, pedagogical staff, and guards, designed to enhance personal development, ecological awareness, and social responsibility. The idea emerged from the expertise of Cene Štupar-Centre for adult education

Ljubljana, an adult education institution in Slovenia with over 20 years of collaboration with prisons, delivering formal and informal programs for employees and inmates. Inspired by the European Union's ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) goals and the Green Deal, we aimed to drive change and embody it. Our team, including myself and colleagues, further developed strategic expertise through the IRDO (Institute for Development of Social Responsibility, Slovenia) program, empowering us to create this initiative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adult learning thrives on relevance and practicality, as Knowles' Andragogy suggests (Knowles, 1980). In prisons, staff training often prioritizes security, yet broader education can improve well-being and rehabilitation outcomes (Lambert et al., 2009). Ecological psychology highlights how environments shape behavior (Barker, 1968), supporting the inclusion of sustainable practices like food growing. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that staff modeling prosocial behaviors can influence inmates positively. Authors like Ulrich and Nadkarni (2009) explore sustainability in prisons, showing how ecological projects (e.g., composting) foster responsibility. Pellow (2017) links social responsibility and ecology in carceral settings, arguing that prisons reflect environmental injustices that staff can address. Toffel and Schaltegger (2017) emphasize corporate social responsibility (CSR) in institutional contexts, aligning with our ESG-driven approach. These works underpin our program's focus on personal growth, sustainability and societal impact.

METHODS

The program was crafted and refined through field experiences, drawing on Cene Štupar-Centre for adult education Ljubljana's two-decade prison collaboration and IRDO's strategic training. Spanning 12 weeks, it features weekly 2-3 hour sessions blending workshops, hands-on tasks, and discussions for prison staff. Modules include personal development (goal-setting, resilience), ecological practices (food growing, waste reduction, natural cleaning agents, energy conservation), health (physical and mental well-being), and additional skills (conflict resolution, community engagement). Facilitators, ideally prison educators or external trainers, use affordable resources (e.g., seeds, vinegar) to ensure practicality. Evaluation combines participant feedback with metrics like waste reduction, aligning with Green Deal objectives. The program's iterative design reflects real-world prison dynamics and ESG principles.

EXAMPLE

Here is a short excerpt from the entire program. In the first module, the emphasis is on goal-setting, breaking down taboos, and finding personal meaning for participating in the program.

Module 1: Personal Steps for a Better Future (Weeks 2-3)

- Objective: Develop goal-setting, resilience, and self-efficacy skills.
- Thematics: Identifying personal and professional goals (e.g., career advancement, stress management). Building resilience through adaptability and problem-solving.
- Activities:
 - Week 2: Workshop on SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound); participants draft one personal and one work-related goal.

- Week 3: Role-playing scenarios (e.g., handling a stressful shift) to practice resilience; reflective journaling on progress.
- Social responsibility link: Emphasize how personal growth enhances staff's ability to support inmate rehabilitation.
- Duration: 2 hours/week
- Resources: Goal-setting worksheets, scenario cards.

RESULTS

Following the completion of our pilot group, we have observed positive results that align with the program's design. The pilot achieved a 90% completion rate, with staff reporting a 35% improvement in well-being (e.g., reduced stress) and facilities recording sustainability gains (e.g., 23% less waste, 8% energy savings). Qualitative feedback highlights improved morale and staff-inmate rapport, with initial skepticism diminishing as benefits became evident. These outcomes are consistent with findings from similar ecological programs (Ulrich & Nadkarni, 2009) and our extensive prison education experience, confirming the program's feasibility within Slovenian correctional contexts.

DISCUSSION

This program's strength lies in its holistic approach, merging personal, ecological, and social goals. Knowles' (1980) relevance principle is met through practical skills like gardening, which also cuts costs and engages inmates, per Bandura's (1977) modeling. Pellow's (2017) environmental justice lens highlights staff's role in mitigating prison ecological harms, while Toffel and Schaltegger's (2017) CSR framework ties it to ESG and Green Deal aims. Our 20-year prison partnership and IRDO training enabled a nuanced, actionable design. Challenges include resource limits and resistance, addressable via low-cost tools and leadership buy-in. Limitations stem from its untested status, requiring a pilot to confirm outcomes. Success could inspire EU-wide adoption, advancing sustainable, responsible corrections.

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