
ESSAY FROM FORMER PARTICIPANT OF
148TH INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE

DRUG OFFENDER TREATMENT: NEW APPROACHES TO AN OLD PROBLEM

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One of the best journeys that I considered in my career as a Jail Officer and member of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) for almost 28 years now is to be one of the participants of the 148th International Training Course, which was conducted by the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute (UNAFEI) way back 11 May up to 17 June 2011 in Fuchu, Tokyo, Japan.

Although there were two slots slated for the Philippines that time as sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Asia Crime Prevention Foundation (ACPF), but I was the lone representative of my country joining with 17 other participants, whom eight were from Japan, three from Thailand, two from Maldives, one from South Korea, one from Indonesia, one from Sudan, and one from Afghanistan. We were divided in two groups and in Group 2, I was the designated Rapporteur. Our group was tasked to come-up with an output on Effective Interventions for Drug-Dependent Offenders.

My over-all stay, from day 1 until the completion of the course, was indeed memorable in terms of experiences and productive in terms of learning. I appreciated the Japanese Culture of caring their guests and visitors in various occasions and settings. The training course was conducted and facilitated very well by offering various facets of exposures such as in classroom, field visits and educational tours. Notable to mention that contributed to the success of training were the entire UNAFEI Staffs - from the Director to assigned Advisers and down to Kitchen/ Mess Hall Attendants, including Interpreters and Representatives from JICA.

The Theme of the 148th International Training Course was “Drug Offender Treatment: New Approaches to an Old Problem.” It was very relevant to my job as a Jail Officer. The main idea of pursuing this particular theme was well articulated by no less than Tatsuya Sakuma, the Director of UNAFEI during that period.

With notable inputs from the following: Anne Bergenstrom, Visiting Expert from United Nation Office on Drug and Crimes (UNODC); Country-Study Reports presented by other co-participants; lectures from in-house UNAFEI Professors; and Resource Speakers from various prestigious universities and organizations in Japan – I was able to learn more information about Therapeutic Community; Cognitive Behavior Therapy and various models in the effective treatment of drug-dependent offenders. Various resource materials were also provided to be used as guide and reference.

In applying all my learnings for the benefit of drug dependents or persons with stimulant dependency, my Team under my supervision and direction crafted a Manual on Specialized Psychological and Emotional Component Sessions (SPECS). This was utilized for almost a decade already in 38 jail units under our operational jurisdiction and benefitted more than 2,000 Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) already.

The SPECS Program are series of 12 gatherings that provides a structured approach for individual or offenders with dependency on stimulant drugs and detained in our jail facilities. This is being handled by a professional Counselors.

At present, in close coordination with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) in Western Visayas Region, Philippines, the SPECS Program is also offered in BALAY SILANGAN Projects, which were established by various Local Government Units (LGUs) and benefitted hundreds of mild drug users who seek support from the community for their treatment and rehabilitation.

This innovation of the BJMP Regional Office VI SPECS Team is our contribution to the government's relentless effort in addressing drug problems.

Hereunder is shared pictorial:



In the first and third rows are Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) who completed the Specialized Psychological and Emotional Component Sessions (SPECS) Program in tableau with the Program Implementers and Staffs of Metro Bacolod District Jail Male Dormitory Annex, Bacolod City, Philippines (all in the third row). In the middle of second row is Jail Senior Superintendent Gilbert D Peremne, participant of the 148th International Training Course.



In the first and third rows are Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) who completed the Specialized Psychological and Emotional Component Sessions (SPECS) Program in tableau with the Program Implementers and Staffs of Metro Bacolod District Jail Female Dormitory, Bacolod City, Philippines (all in the third row). Sixth from left in the second row is Jail Senior Superintendent Gilbert D Peremne, participant of the 148th International Training Course.