



**Gefährdetenhilfe Scheideweg e.V.
(Cross-roads Prison Ministry)**

Friedel Pfeiffer, Dieter Röhrig
Unterscheideweg 1-3
42499 Hückeswagen - Germany
Tel.: 02192/2011 Fax: 02192/2015

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Integrating criminal drug abusers into family, abstinent peer-
groups, employment and church: Development and basic deci-
sions of the organization "Gefährdetenhilfe Scheideweg
e.V." (Crossroads Prison Ministry reg. charity)**

The work of Christian Prison Ministries began at "Scheideweg" a suburb of Hückeswagen in the district of Oberberg, between the cities of Cologne and Wuppertal. Crossroads Prison Ministry got its name from this village. Friedel Pfeiffer who has genuinely witnessed the development, reports as follows on the foundation and 20 year development of this organization.

"Public interest grew in the course of the so-called 'Movement of 68' in Germany in social centres of conflict and through that, also in the penal system. There was a growing awareness of the fact that the offender needed help in order to overcome his problems.

At this time, I along with my friends had recourse to Maoist ideas. After the disappointment of events in China I devoted my time and energy with my wife to my business. A personal conversion to Jesus Christ changed our way of thinking and plans in life. We began to pray that God would show us some mission or other.

2.1 Initiation of Contact Group work in the Penal System.

We were approached by the detention centre in Siegburg while I was working as a sport's group leader in the local church. The prison Director and minister showed great courage and initiative. At that time the prison had over 1000 young prisoners and opened its doors wide for voluntary citizen action.

We made a visit there on 12 March 1972 as young Christians. One of our first impressions was that it could not remain as a one-off meeting.

I was already familiar with the penal system personally from another angle: at the District Court in Wuppertal I was a lay judge (juror) and had played a part in sentencing young people to imprisonment. It was then I learned about the desperate situation in finding alternative answers to the penal system.

In the prison of Siegburg and also in other institutions there arose opportunities for prisoners from various social organizations which shortly became known as "contact groups".



The work done by contact groups became for a short while after its inception an integral component of the penal system. Within this framework large groups of visitors entered penal institutions and it was necessary to obtain legal regulations for this work. The top legal authorities approached the prison directors asking for an account of the activity of the voluntary workers. The Ministry for Justice of Nordrhein-Westphalia officially recognized the existence of this social initiative and our working methods in the penal system. The decision makers in the Landtag and in the legal system looked upon it favourably.

The Minister of Justice, at that time Dieter Posser, instructed the assistant secretary in charge, Erich Czaschke, to draw up the blueprint of the rules pertaining to the participation of voluntary members. On the basis of this blueprint, on the 1 August 1976, a general decree came into operation from the Minister of Justice in Nordrhein-Westphalia.

The work done by contact groups was thus given legal status. However the representatives of the contact groups were not able to accept some of the legal conditions. Above all we disagreed with the minimum age of 21 years for people working in the contact groups and the admittance ban on helpers who had served a sentence in the past five years.

We were persuaded that young people could mature into good workers and that people of the same age could be a good counterpart for those in the prison. Those, who had sat behind bars and had got rid of their old life were just as able to give those in custody an example of hope and spur them on to a new way of thinking.

On 22th and 23th June 1977 there was a full hearing in the Landtag in Nordrhein-Westphalia. Prison directors, representatives from the Ministry of Justice and representatives from the contact groups, including myself, introduced the concept of the work of contact groups to the parliamentarians and put forward their critique of the ministerial regulations as well as suggested amendments. This led to the granting of a revised decree from the Minister of Justice which today forms the basis of this work. It contains amongst other things the following regulations which were achieved by our efforts.

- The minimum age for helpers in contact groups is 21 years. In detention centres however it is also possible for the prison director to admit other younger helpers.
- Previous prisoner can be involved in the contact groups, as long as their last term of imprisonment dates back at least 2 years and that they are no longer under probation or any supervision order.
- As far as the conversations made in the contact groups are concerned, it is only necessary to inform the wardens if a violation against § 138 StGB (planning of crimes) is concerned or anything constituting a serious jeopardizing of safety and order in the prison. This condition guarantees the extensive confidentiality of the conversations.

Today workers, white-collar workers, housewives, students, industrialists and ex-prisoners are involved in our contact groups. They became interested through other contact group helpers, through church services, newspaper articles, radio and TV reports or various informative events. We work in 14 different judicial penal institutions



with 18 contact groups. In this way we reach men and women, young people and adults, prisoners waiting trial and full-time prisoners.

2.2 Structure and financing of the association.

We think of ourselves in this involvement as a movement and not as an institution. That is why we want to keep the organizational super structure and administration as small as possible. Standard regulations and organizational structures have become however inevitable as the work has grown.

In January 1975 the "Cross-roads Prison Ministry" reg. charity was registered in the official register for societies and associations in the local community court. The associations received the recognition as support for young people and joined the union of social welfare work done by the Protestant Church in the Rheinland called "Diakonisches Werk der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland" as its leading organization. Along side the welfare union the Rheinland "Landschaftsverband" as non-local social support and the administration of the local and municipal authorities showed themselves to be close collaborators. The committed involvement of the mayor of Hückeswagen and other local government politicians have considerably helped in the development of the work.

We consciously did it without any financial help from the state. We want to tread new paths beyond the narrowly restricting groundlines of support agencies. This gives us the possibility to blaze new trails and to adapt better individual plights of people in our care. The Government Ministry of Youth included us as model project in the area of 'social involvement' in their Government Youth plan. The Ministry of Employment in Nordrhein-Westphalia has termed us as a 'model labour market and political project'. The work is financed predominantly by donations. As well as that we receive money from fines, self earned proceeds and financial contributions from central government, state government, or local government for construction work. We have around 400 members today.

2.3 Giving young offenders a home.

Consistent Christian involvement in the penal system demands that the relations that have been formed are continued beyond the time of the convicts release from prison. Therefore the first young people, who had been released, soon moved into flats that we had rented and furnished close by. We also found jobs for them in conjunction with the job centre. In their spare time we took them into our groups and our families. In so doing however we were too remote both geographically and personally. Crises could not be noted straightaway and dealt with and led to relapses. Therefore the workers in the contact groups decided to take young offenders into their own families and integrate them completely into the family unit.

In our family we took in a young man, whose criminality was closely associated with his homosexuality. At this time we had two small sons. In trusting that our family was in God's hands, this step was made possible. Many young offenders have lived in our family since then. These meetings were helpful as far as the upbringing of our children was concerned. They are meanwhile now adults and are themselves involved in Christian prison ministry work.



In 1978 the association in Scheideweg acquired a house, which was able to house young people released from prison. The purchase was accompanied with massive protests from neighbouring citizens under the motto: "we want no ex-convicts in our backyard!" This climate of rejection in the neighbourhood later changed into friendship and interest, as the expected disturbances of the peace and thefts did not transpire.

The warden - himself an ex-convict - moved into the house in 1979 with his wife and daughter and other young Christians, who had had no previous criminal record. The offenders taken in became members of an extended family. This character of a very personally formed long-term relationship between young people from different walks with wardens as focal point has been retained in our communities to this day.

Further communities followed suit in rented or acquired houses in the following years.

We were able in February 1981, in the neighbouring village of Strassweg to rent a house as a second community. House Strassweg is only 2 kilometres away from Scheideweg. There are 10 rooms in the house as well as a cellar used for recreation and table tennis.

The association acquired in December 1984 a disused factory complex in the outlying area of the neighbouring town of Wermelskirchen. There we furnished a community for young women from crisis situations. Drug addicts, psychologically insatiable, suicidal, single pregnant mothers, or girls and women out of a young people's home live there.

An old baker's was made in 1986 into our forth community. A married couple working for us has allowed us to use this.

I would like to especially mention the project "Hope for many" in Hückeswagen-Scheideweg. The foundation stone for this was laid by the German Bundestagspräsidentin Mrs. Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth in 1989. Here the idea of connecting work and living was fulfilled. On the circa 12.500 m² project ground the customer orientated "functional firm" Garden Centre Scheideweg originated along with a metal workshop, the material and machine store rooms for our garden and landscape building firm and two communities. The major part of the construction was done by the young offenders and honorary workers.

Since the beginning of 1991 we have also been using a house in the town of Hückeswagen for young women at risk who live here, some with their children.

As well as the communities, today other families working with us take in individual people who have been released. Significantly married couples have also experienced in these families such help when they themselves, many years previously had got out of the criminal or drug scene.

2.4 Integration into work and recreational areas.

Integrating young offenders into outside employment foundered because of their criminal and addictive pasts. On their lack of motivation to work or their inability to cope with an 8 hour day. Further difficulties were found in the relationship to superiors or



colleagues or deficient practical skills. A preparatory work training programme urgently became necessary.

Due to this one of our honorary involved co-workers left his job became a full-time worker with us and instructed young people during the day in various skills. The "working community" came into being and endeavoured to make competitive bids: transport, small painting and building work, cutting down trees, moving laurns etc.

Later we founded a functional firm for the public good, which served through tax-deductible undertakings to reintegrate the young offenders into a work situation. These enterprises take part in free competition and competed also with other businesses. Therefore realistic working conditions and demands of performance were met.

Since the quality of work is measured by the acceptance from customers, we consciously set up enterprises that were customer-orientated - especially the garden centre in Scheideweg.

A metal workshop also emerged. Metal processing is of a great economic importance in our region. Two of the young people, unable to be placed in jobs on the free labour market, are finishing a training programme there at the moment as assemblers which will lead to the awarding of a certificate of proficiency.

All other young offenders are put into jobs by us in conjunction with the job centre after a work training phase from three to twelve months. They are put into apprenticeships or a contractual relationship with the employer. Due to the bad economic employment scenic we have added a further aid in helping integration into the job market in recent years. Some of the young people staying with us receive following the work training scheme a one to two year duty, for which they receive income support and are supervised by us in our functional firms. Their chances of being placed in a job in the free economy is very significantly improved in this way.

As well as these job areas, we also have good garden and landscape building works that are working to capacity as well as a printers and carpentry workshop.

The connections with the local inhabitants have clearly deepened through these enterprises. Locals become our customers, experience a friendly service and good quality of what is on offer, often carry out conversations with our young people and are able therefore to break down prejudices vis a vis offenders.

A similar effect is enjoyed by the recreational groups. A considerable number of young people from the village or surrounding area take part in programmes for the public, the youth choir, sport groups, youth trips or in other activities offered by us.

Offenders and non-offenders build up relationships through these activities and break down barriers.

These groups are specifically aimed towards the integration of offenders. In our sport associations, the carer, who takes the responsibility for the group in social matters is of great importance next to the trainer.



We have tried to connect public youth work and group youth work. Our coffee bar forms the main focus of our public youth work. Around 200 people meet together every Sunday evening. Many are looking for conversations about and help with their addiction, criminality or loneliness. The unpaid youth club workers are trained in speaking to people experiencing a crisis in life.

A special opportunity is created by our discussion groups: around 8 young people from different backgrounds meet every fortnight in approximately 10 different groups to talk about personal matters. Experience and problems are exchanged and people read together in the Bible and pray.

It is important for us that young people can use their own skills in these situations. That is why people take turns in offering musical and creative, sport, conversational and experience orientated skills. Youth work creates both a scope for experience and calls for international communication. Young people from many different kinds of cultures take part in the programmes. Our youth choir travels regularly to different European countries and countries outside of Europe.

We look for engagements for example in Italy, Hungary, Switzerland and Poland. The choir arranges concerts in African prisons, Indian slums and South America drug aid centres.

These activities and trips convey at the same time perspectives: Whoever wants to take part must pay for the journey out of his own pocket. This is a strong motivation for those working in a job. The experiences in other countries help people both to relativise their own problems and to become conscious of their own possibilities and perspectives and to make use of these. Young people helped by us, some who came out of the penal system or the drug scene have later travelled out to Africa, Asia or South America as missionary helpers.

2.5 Multiplying Effect.

Our work in Hückeswagen operated as an initial ignition for the foundation of 18 partner organizations in Germany and abroad or greatly influenced their development. We are closely connected with each other. However the groups developed essentially as independent associations according to the conditions in their area. We support the development of current associations and the formation of new ones at the "International Contact Meeting of Christian Prison Ministries", that takes place yearly. In 1994 the "Federal association for pastoral care prison and rehabilitation ministries" was founded. Through training, reciprocal visits and the dispatch of our workers we are connected with countries outside of Europe - Kenya, India, Brazil and Mongolia.

We have set up two training centres for further education: "House Kreckersweg" in Nordrhein-Westphalia and "Schloß Wendorf" in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Judges, prison directors, doctors, politicians, probation officers, co-workers in the "Gefährdetenhilfe Scheideweg" and other experts arrange programmes, that take place spread over the year. Guests from all over Germany and abroad take part in them.

A strong, multiplying effect about our work has resulted especially from TV reports. In 1987 ZDF beamed out a 45 minute programme called "Tailboard - that was once me"



during the best viewing time. In 1992 a 30 minute ARD report followed, "Life after the clink". The work of the Gefährdetenhilfe is regularly reported on in radio programmes or in the local and national press and on TV.

We have a special relationship with Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In 1987 during the GDR time the ZDF TV report "Tailboard - that was once me" was seen there. As a result of this even before the wall came down, there was intensive, reciprocal contact with this region. We countered the obvious lack of training in the area of prison help work by offering various seminars. We prompted the setting up of contact groups in prisons in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Three contact groups are run today by us.

In 1992 we began to renovate the dilapidated manor house "Schloß Wendorf" in the Müritz-region. For the symbolic price of 1 DM we were allowed to have the commune of this building next to a 4,5 hectare large estate. Together with young ex-convicts we renovated this manor house to provide communities, room for youth work and the training centre. There are a lack of opportunities for youth work in this rurally structured area. Our activities there are aimed at the prevention of addiction and delinquency.

Being responsible for this work we founded in 1991 the "Waren Prison Ministry" which is a limited company. Sole shareholder of this limited company is Scheideweg.

"Schloß Wendorf" was inaugurated in May 1994 by the German Minister of Youth Mrs. Dr. Angela Merkel.

Daily we receive on average four applications for admission from desperate young people or their relatives. It upsets us that we can only offer help to a small number of these. Therefore we want to create a multiplying effect and try to use every opportunity to pass on ideas and information. Therefore we make it a point to interchange with citizens interested in our work or social powers that are of importance to helping prison work.

We believe that social politics must support such honorary engagement by

- publishing it
- opening the prison institutions for it
- supporting the training of honorary workers
- giving it a well accepted status in the law codes.

The groups and organizations of honorary workers need independence and inner motivations as - in our case - the christian belief gives.