



ABSTRACT

“FEFI/Finding Education for Female Inmates” is a multilateral EU-project within the Grundtvig program with the project number **538856-LLP-1-2013-1-DE-GRUNDTVIG-GMP**. It has a duration of two years from November 1st 2013 till October 31st 2015. FEFI partners are from Germany, France, Belgium, Malta, Italy, Turkey, Cyprus and Finland.

FEFI program started with a survey targeted to female inmates (questionnaire 1) and the staff members (questionnaire 2). The survey was executed in June 2014. The questionnaire 1 was proposed to 78 female inmates in Hämeenlinna Prison, Turku Prison and Vanaja Open Prison.

About 1/3 of the prisoners were remand prisoners. The rest were sentenced prisoners with the sentences mostly over one year.

The data analysis showed that most of the women had completed primary school. Half of the women had a profession but most of them didn't have employment history. Almost all of the women value education important or very important in general and would see it meaningful in a personal level, too. The reasons for deciding to participate in prison educational activities were for example to do something useful, to learn about a new subject, to satisfy ones desire to learn, to better cope life after prison, to improve ones' self-esteem, to avoid committing crimes after release, to get a job and to earn money.

The overall reason for participating in prison education seems to be willing to change a way of life and the biggest motivator for studying in prison was a thought of a better life after prison.

When comparing positive and negative experiences in prison education, the positive experiences were connected to utilize the education after release and feel better about themselves (self-esteem). The biggest problem associated in prison education was that the programs were not suitable to a person or prison didn't offer any educational programs. Also the access to ICT equipment was seen problematic.

According the survey only two didn't want to participate in any activities. This tells us that at least on a paper inmates want to take part in activities. Most of the women said they did receive support from staff and the support was received from all staff categories.

The questionnaire 2 was proposed to 36 staff members in Hämeenlinna Prison, Turku Prison and Vanaja Open Prison. The biggest occupational group was security staff.

According the answers there is a variety of education provided in prison but the current offer doesn't meet the real needs of female inmates.

Staff saw that the circumstances should change to encourage female inmates towards successful release by offering for example more education, vocational training, social and psychological therapy. Also more personnel and especially qualified personnel is needed.

Conclusion

The main findings of FEFI-surveys are 1) female inmates need more individualized support in releasing process, 2) there is a lack of resources (personnel and financial) to offer individualized support.

Female inmates have announced that they are motivated to take part into activities but the wishes, needs and circumstances don't meet each other.

What should be done: Prisons for women where the personnel is specialized for women's needs, more activities and courses planned especially for women, more resources to carry out the functions during prison time and more individualized support in gradual release process.

When making a personal plan for the time spent in prison, notice the heterogeneity of the inmates (the length and type of the sentence, security issues, etc.) and the differences and possibilities between open and closed prison. The health issues, the substance abuse intervention, social relationships, behavioral and self-esteem related problems should be taken care of before the inmate is ready to proceed to educational and employment orientation.

In regard of these survey findings Hämeenlinna Prison is looking for innovating ideas to better support female inmates in releasing process. Hämeenlinna Prison is going to test two new methods: Retreat Program starting on May 2015 and Service-user Involvement Program which started on March 2015.

Service-user Involvement Program is called "A Mentor Program" which answers to an exact need of getting individualized support in releasing process. A mentor is a former female inmate who has been released some years ago, and has adapted into the normal way of life as an equal citizen of the society. The group has been selected from Hämeenlinna Prison's highly-motivated female inmates who have a potential to benefit from this type of support. The mentor meets her group in Activity Centre "Monikko" located in an industrial area few minutes walking distance from the prison grounds.

A development of FEFI processes are still continued and further reports will follow.

The final conference will be in Hämeenlinna 24.9.2015.

In Hämeenlinna 1.4.2015