

ANNEX I

CEC APGXXIII” (Educational community with prisoners)

Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII detention **service**

The Association’s founder, Father Oreste Benzi used to say that “We must pass from sure penalties to sure recovery. A man who has recovered, who has been “re-educated to life”, isn’t dangerous anymore.”

Following his example, the Associazione, since its beginnings, has welcomed prisoners into its structures and shared life and time directly with them. Therefore, it could elaborate real responses for their necessities and needs, that mainly come from a state of poverty and a past of violence and misery.



In the early 90’s, the project “Oltre le sbarre” (i.e. Beyond the bars) was born. It welcomed more than 1.300 prisoners and former prisoners into the Associazione structures. The project is addressed to common prisoners only (around 85%) – not to drug addicted, because they already take part in aimed and targeted processes (therapeutic communities).

New proposals for an educational process

To eliminate the causes that lead to “bad” behaviour, the Associazione promotes an educational process; it is targeted and intense, not based on pity or handouts.

In fact, days in the structures are busy and full of activities, causing some of the hosts to come back to detention life. This process has been improved after the meeting with Brazilian APAC (Prisoners’ Protection and Assistance Association), that lead to the development of a project to implement both in Europe and Italy.





The project proposed is called “**CEC APGXXIII**” (Educational community with prisoners of the APG23).

This initiative has been experimented for a few years in Emilia-Romagna and Toscana Regions, respectively in “Casa Madre del Perdono”, “Casa Madre della Riconciliazione” and “Pungiglione – Villaggio dell’Accoglienza” centres. More recently, the project has started also in Puglia (Copertino), Piemonte (Piasco) and Abruzzo (Vasto) regions.

The educational process is addressed and proposed to both on remand and confirmed prisoners. The convicts that ask for reception are selected together with the prison’s management: the **process is opened to everyone, regardless of culture, nationality or religion.**

Supervisors and workers of the CEC APGXXIII are joined by external volunteers, all properly trained and prepared - and by qualified medical staff if needed.

An important element for the success of the educational process is that hosts must voluntarily accept to participate and commit, for everyone’s benefit.

Characteristics of the CEC APGXXIII project

1. **External communities’ involvement.** The principle of Fr. Oreste Benzi, founder of the Comunità, can be applied: *“In someone’s mistake lies everyone’s mistake. To rescue someone, everyone’s commitment is needed”*. The territory is involved through free and active participation to the project’s conduction. Volunteers become real life coaches thanks to their free service. Volunteers are trained with specific classes that they take alone or together with the rehabilitating persons. The project also provides the participation of psychologists and psychiatrists that work with the structures’ staff.
2. **Rehabilitating persons help each other.** Convicts are directly involved into the educational and security aspects. Thus, they can get more responsible and face their educational process effectively and seriously, in order to adopt an attitude and a culture of legality. Therefore, they are given some tasks under the managers supervision, and they attend some thematic follow-up classes together with the volunteers.



3. **Families' involvement.** If possible, reconciliation with families is crucial, especially in the phase when the convicts go back into society; in some cases, it is necessary to follow an educational process together with the families.

4. **Work.** Work training and professionalizing are the key elements to build a new future. Work commitment shows how much the subject have repented, too; work in its first phases isn't payed, so it takes an educational

and compensatory value for victims and society.

5. **Human training.** This step is realized through literacy school for foreign rehabilitation persons, IT classes, singing lessons, and moreover through daily individual and group meetings. Forgiveness and reconciliation processes are developed through specific courses. Not to forget that prisoners are victims, before than being executioners; their rage has been "overrated" by criminal environment to make extortions, burglaries and homicides. That same rage must be processed, but prisons nowadays only boost it. Rage and resignation create a vicious circle of violence.

6. **Religious and value education.** This offers the chance to undermine principles that lead to criminal life and replace them with healthier ones. For the people who believe, it is possible to follow their religious path, too.



Three steps of the process

1. **Step one:** the rehabilitating persons must really focus and reflect on their life; together with volunteers, they must try and look forward to becoming a new person, especially through rage revision and skills promotion.

2. **Step two:** activities are training and professionalizing oriented, always keeping an educational logic.

3. **Step three:** freedom and daily autonomy are experimented, but the subject must come back into the structure at night. He re-enters society gradually, throughout work.



Every single phase lasts depending on the kind of crime and the subject's characteristics. The subject's involvement and commitment in the process guarantee leniency and the progress of phases, according to existing rules. A retrocession of the phases is provided when unfair or against respect of the rules' behaviours occur; in the most severe cases a coercive return into prison is foreseen. However, the experience of the pilot projects already operative show that prisoner's change and recovery are possible. In fact, recidivism of the project's participants went down to around 8% differently from 75% previously mentioned.

We point out that experimentation costs of the CEC APGXXIII project have been almost exclusively paid by the Associazione, since there is no funding for educational, recovery and public security increase projects - such as our activity herein presented.

Why do we consider this proposal valuable?

A man who has recovered is no longer dangerous, while a man who has only been in jail is more likely to choose criminal life again. Society can and must get involved into the recovery of a man who makes mistakes. CEC project is a valid alternative to the actual prisons system, that is expensive and inhuman, inefficient and degrading. It is time to go from a "vindictive" justice to an educational justice. CEC project not only allows a massive economic saving, but also marks the beginning of a new way to deal with a man who makes a mistake and draws the lines of a new humanity.

