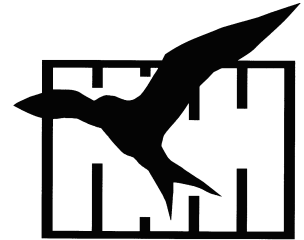


THE PRISON PHOENIX TRUST
P.O. Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF
Tel. (01865) 512521 & 512522
Fax. (01865) 516011 www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk

Charity Reg. No. 327907



The Effectiveness of Prison Yoga

Jane Harrington September 2004
with PPT Yoga Coordinator, Dr Roland Sypel

In January 2004, The Prison Phoenix Trust, a UK charity based in Oxford, sent blank class register forms and student evaluation forms to all 77 active prison yoga and meditation teachers in the U.K. and Ireland, asking them to keep records of attendance in their classes and to give out to and then collect the evaluation forms from prisoner students. Around half the teachers (33) returned their class registers, providing a good sample. This work was funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Results from the period January-June 2004:

How many are going to yoga / meditation classes?

Of the 33 classes, a total of 841 prisoners went to between one and three sessions. Of those 841, 344 attended between four and nine classes; 92 attended 10 classes, and 74 attended more than 10 classes.

At the time of writing (September 2004), there were 106 prisoner yoga and meditation classes. Extrapolating the above data for those 106 classes, we have an approximation of 2701 prisoners attending at least one to three yoga sessions; 1105 attending between four and nine times; 296 attending 10 times, and 238 attending more than 10 times.

How is yoga affecting inmates?

203 prisoner students filled out the evaluation forms. In response to the first question, 'Have you begun other classes or activities as a result of starting yoga or meditation?' roughly 33% (68) ticked 'yes,' 55% (112) 'no,' and 11% (23) ticked 'It's hard to say.'

In response to the second question, 'Has yoga or meditation made you feel better about yourself or given you a better feeling about your future or what you hope for?' 88% (180) ticked 'yes,' 2% (3) ticked 'no,' and 10% (20) ticked 'I'm not sure.'

Caveats and considerations for future surveys

The number of yes answers to the first question may only be 68 because many prisoners don't have opportunities to start other activities. They may have jobs in the prison that prevents them from starting up anything new, or there may be few opportunities for them to pursue in their particular prison, or they may have very little time outside of their cells.

"Bringing Hope and Healing to Prisoners"

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If this questionnaire were being distributed again, the phrasing of the first question could be changed to account for the lack of activities available for some prisoners. In other words there may be people who want to start other classes or activities, but it is not available to them for one reason or another.

Many teachers did not collect data for the entire six month period, so the estimates for inmates who attended yoga classes is lower than reality. Some teachers only collected data for 10 weeks, for example.

It would be possible in future surveys to make the questions more specific. For example: Has it helped you relax? Has it helped any physical conditions? Has it improved your mental state? But for the purposes of this questionnaire (gathering information for potential funding bodies) and to keep the form from being too long and therefore daunting to prisoners, some of whom don't read and write well, we decided to keep it short and easy to complete.

Staff classes

Teachers returned registers for six staff classes. 75 staff members attended at least one session. Of those 75, 39 attended between four and nine sessions, nine attended ten sessions, and six attended more than ten. If we extrapolate for the 17 staff classes presently running, we have an estimation of 212 staff attending at least one session, 111 of whom went to four or more sessions, 26 attending ten sessions, and 17 attending more than ten times.

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