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"I COULD FEEL MY WINGS"

Río Abierto Solidarity is an Argentine foundation that has, among other things, undertaken community action based on its mind-body work to help face the economic and political crisis.

In the year 2000, when the Argentine nation was in the throes of a deep crisis, the Río Abierto Foundation carried out a sui-generis program in the shanty towns of Buenos Aires. The difference between this program and others at the time was that it was based on mind-body techniques – vital expressive movement, music, voice, massage, meditation, artwork, and that these expressions led to solidarity work within the community. The aim is to recover and strengthen the "creative power" of the human being by tapping the vast resources of the human body, in order to overcome an external reality that hit not only individual and marginal groups but the nation as a whole – and it hit hard. However, this program did not start completely from scratch. At the end of the 1990's, Río Abierto had participated in "New Roles". This was a project financed by the government of Buenos Aires to address the problem of unemployment in the Argentine capital first, by capacitating mind-body therapists and later, the population in general – bearers of the AIDS virus, housewives, young people, unemployed professionals – in innovative new roles such as "family aides" for example, trained to attend different situations of basic necessity within a home (first aid, plumbing, care of the ill, electricity).

Most of those individuals who participated in this program with one of the 40 other non-governmental organizations, remained unemployed. Whereas the 5 programs carried out by Río Abierto registered greater success: 83% of the 200 participants found jobs almost immediately in diverse activities. What was the key factor here? María Lanata, instructor in Río Abierto Buenos Aires – on visit the city of Mexico to attend the 5th International Encounter of the Foundation presently being held here, answers: "We did what we know how to do. We complied with the format the authorities required, but basically we worked with our system. We made the way easier for the people by nurturing their confidence in themselves."

Besides working in "New Roles" during 2001 and 2002, Río Abierto put its solidarity to action by collecting food and clothing for institutions attending the most needy. This was at the peak of the crisis that hit all of the Argentine society. Throughout the year 2002, thanks to donations from people in Buenos Aires and Italy, and students who had participated in preparatory courses, Río Abierto Solidarity brought continuous help to the Arturo Illia neighborhood, in the Bajo Flores area, opposite Shanty town N° 1, perhaps the largest and poorest in Buenos Aires.

"At first, food, diapers and clothes were bought and then, with the money that arrived from Italy, a much grater help became possible. At that time, as always, our intention was to go beyond a mere provision of things, to go beyond the idea of charity through actions that would tend to enable the undertaking of small community enterprises and fundamentally, to find a way to carry out our work with body movement and work on oneself, that is to say, to transform thought into awareness and awareness into action of solidarity", says Viviana Britos, supervisor for the program. This intentional work became material reality in 2003. Collaborating first in the installation of a baker's oven in the Sol Naciente's Soup Kitchen that could bake 75 kilograms of bread every 25 minutes and later, in the renting of a vacant factory that would be used for various purposes: as a home for single mothers and their babies, to set up a diapers factory to be operated by the mothers themselves, and as a space for group classes in vital expressive movement and massage.

Regarding this experience Ms. Britos tells us: "All the people were there in the Soup Kitchen of Sol Naciente. At 9:50 AM we formed a circle, we took each other by the hands, we looked into each other's eyes, we recognized our energy, and joy filled our meeting."



“Then, it was movement, our bodies in movement, and that became our real inauguration ceremony; women, men and children, with or without embarrassment, with or without fear, with or without money, with or without work, all of us moving together, meeting each other through the movement of our bodies, the music and sounds, through the loving contact of massage and reciprocal support back to back.”

When the class finished and before the day's work began, Manuel, a 10-year-old said, “When I got the massage I felt like I was flying and since I was little I've always wanted to fly. Today, for the first time, I could feel my wings.”power and money.”

A New Paradigm

Río Abierto is a proposal of mind-body techniques for human development that arose in Argentina in the 1950's as a result of the work of Susana Milderman who led “groups of growth” in which a wide variety of techniques taken from different sources were used: drama, voice, massage, expressive movement, yoga. María Adela Palcos embodies the direct continuation of this experience. After participating in one of these groups, she studied psychology and created the Río Abierto Foundation in Buenos Aires, which she presently presides as directress.

In the opinion of María Adela Palcos (72 years old) humanity is undergoing a change in paradigm. We are emerging from an authoritarian style to become more inclusive. She considers, “We need to live complementarily; not pretending to be equal. Realizing we are different doesn't mean we are opponents. We are learning that the difference complements us.”

She believes that listening to the body is the way to live in harmony with each other. “We come from a culture that only listens to the intellect, but the wisdom of the body is the organic intelligence that keeps us alive and it manages thousands of equilibriums at the same time. We don't deny the value of intellectual intelligence but we needn't put it in opposition to intuition. We need to integrate the two.”

How to stimulate this process? Through body movement and the expression of one's emotions, says Mrs. Palcos. “With music and action, the mechanical intellect with its conditionings is relaxed, it seems to loosen its control. And then, our creative mind begins to work. As regards expression, when someone says ‘I am afraid’, he is already transforming this fear into something else: into sound. These are different roads that lead us to the possibility of becoming aware.”

At present this system is in practice in Brazil, Uruguay, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the USA and Mexico. Since the year 2000 this program has been officially recognized by the Argentine Ministry of Education as a technical course of study, an educational proposal that attempts to reconstruct the human being as a unity – body-mind-feeling – as a road that leads to the inner reality of man in a globalized world where the social and economic gaps grow wider day by day and where human values have been shunted aside by an insatiable search for success, power and money.”