Nonviolent Communication CBL Presentation Notes

Alison:
St. Lawrence County Correctional Facility

Hello my name is Alison and we are here tonight to tell you a little about our experience at our CBL. To my left/right I have Dom, Kendra and Will accompanying me.

How many of you know that there is a jail 1.5 miles away from our campus? Did you know that the jail houses inmates from all over St. Lawrence County, which is 2,680 square miles? (explain the map A is SLU, B is Jail (blips in middle are mainstreet). The four of us along with our community mentor Eddie (who facilitates the group and has worked with the our fellow students in the jail on their non-violent communication skills for four years) seem to enjoy our time at the jail. In the classroom we had the privilege of participating in this Non-violent Communication class working on Non-violent Communication activities and discussions. The four of us went to the jail every Wednesday for two hours to participate in this class, we also facilitated the class for three weeks while our mentor was away. We were not only students that were working in the community, but became a part of something even bigger. This CBL has provided us with the opportunity to work directly with community members in a way that is unconventional and unique. This experience was very worthwhile and we were able to learn something that we may have never known if it wasn’t for venturing to the other side of town once a week.

Dom:

A major point in NVC is understanding that we all participate and share within the same human experience. One’s gender, ethnicity, public record, or personal preference has no bearing on the humanity that we all take part in. One of our fellow students, Adam, mentioned two weeks ago that “we are human too, we made mistakes but we don’t want to be looked at for just those mistakes.” This shared humanity is one of the biggest things that I have personally taken away from our CBL experience, and something that we hope to bring to the audience this evening. Behind me are pictures of two books essential to both the concept and the practice of non-violent communication. In order to establish an equal and objective shared humanity within the classroom we used some of the principle NVC exercises – Listening for the meaning and establishing basic human needs. In the first few weeks we established a list of activities that made us happy, by finding the commonalities in this list we discovered the basic human needs within all of us that allow for our shared humanity. However, just having similar drives does not make for objectivity; we have been heavily prejudiced by our upbringings forcing us to categorize and ‘other’ people intentionally or otherwise. As we practice truthful listening and listening for the meaning, we were then able to further connect with our fellow students, creating a shared human experience.
Kendra:

This experience was very important to us and also our fellow non-slu students.

For us,

- It put life into perspective
- We realize that the stresses on campus are not as important as the situations that these men are dealing with
- After just the first time in the jail, we saw these guys as humans that have families and loved ones, and who struggle with real life issues like we do
- For example, at the start of every meeting, we would go around the room and check-in to see how everyone was doing, the guys spoke about being nervous or anxious about upcoming events, angry about various situations, sad about a loss or hardships, and they all spoke about Valuing Family
- These responses made us realize that we are all human beings that experience similar feelings and value similar aspects of life. If you could only hear the responses from our group when checking-in and couldn’t see the clothing that we were wearing, there would be no indicator of who was incarcerated or not.
- When asked, one of our fellow students, Adam (that Dom mentioned before) said: “We are sons, brothers, fathers, we are just like other human beings that made a mistake, but we got caught for it”

For the guys,

- We know that they truly appreciate us taking time out of our Wednesday’s to come in and spend time with them.
  - They are always curious about what was going on in our lives (like what we did for fun over the weekend, how Alison’s games went, what I will be doing after graduation, etc.)
  - They also look to us for advice and sometimes just want us to listen to their hardships
- The end of each meeting is always difficult because we can never guarantee that all of the guys will be with us again the following week. It’s sad for us when someone leaves our group because of the relationships that we have built, but we have to be happy for their opportunity of getting out and getting another chance.
**Will:**

Why Volunteer?

- Public schools are a good analogy for describing jails and prisons. We pay for public schools with taxes, as a result we have parents and community checking in on the schools making sure kids are learning and doing well. Jails and prisons are also paid for with taxes but there is very little checking in going on, it is much more out of sight and out of mind. Instead we should be helping to build up inmate’s skills with classes such as nonviolent communication and helping them to become productive members of society rather than turning a blind eye.

- Quote from Mike: “There can be more groups, we are willing to participate and we would be beneficial to each other.”

- Inmates come willingly to classes, they are not obligated or forced.

- If you are nervous about volunteering, we (slu students) were nervous too, but the inmates were just as nervous as we were.

- Quote from Sean: Sean was nervous and embarrassed when we first came in to the jail because he didn’t know if we would see them as humans or monsters. “I want to be acknowledged as Sean not just a dude in stripes.”

- If we were in their shoes we would likely feel the same way as Sean.

- **Big thank you to Eddie, Liz, and Jenny!**