



AUTHENTIC TECHNOLOGIES

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Phoenix House Experiences the Art of Balance

by Karen Laudadio

It was a typical Saturday morning at the Phoenix House, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in Santa Ana, California. A flurry of activity by the residents announced the beginning of another busy day. These men and women live there, in most cases, as part of a mandatory program to address their substance dependencies. Also typical that day was the “June gloom” which cloaked Orange County in a humid, grey blanket.

By the end of that day the gloom would be replaced by the sparkle of sunshine – in the eyes and hearts of those who attended the special program called “The Art of Balance”. The program was part of a twelve-month series, “Making Life Work”, provided for the Phoenix House by Working Wardrobes in partnership with the International Coach Federation of Orange County. The goal of the program series is to provide residents of the Phoenix House with a diverse set of tools and skills complimented by transformational experiences designed to inspire confidence and a sense of possibility for a new future. The series is the brainchild of Karen Boskemper, a Life Coach and Corporate Trainer. She conceived and coordinated the event with the support of Jerri Rosen, founder and Executive Director of the Working Wardrobes Organization and the Phoenix House. The Trainer and Speaker was Raphael Natale, author of the inspirational book, “The Art of Balance” and founder of Authentic Technologies, a nationwide human resource development and training firm dedicated to accelerating productivity and growth for individuals and organizations. These individuals had generously donated their time and materials to support the “Making Life Work” program.

I had been invited by Karen Boskemper to assist for the day. Along with the capable and cheerful support of several residents, the program was underway. At first there was a sense of mystery mixed with a little trepidation about the nature of the program, but this turned into anticipation as Mr. Natale began to engage the audience. He soon revealed his background as a product of the “mean streets” of the East Coast, and emphasized his connection to his humble beginnings by producing a brick from his old neighborhood. Within a short time, he used that brick to make an important point at the heart of “The Art of Balance” training: we often confuse our perceptions with reality.

With great vitality, expertise, and humor, Mr. Natale led the group through a series of writing and sharing exercises, punctuated by delivery of material on various topics relating to our view of ourselves and of the world around us. These included emotional triggers, coping mechanisms, accountability issues, goals and much more. As the day progressed the participants’ initial reluctance began to thaw and the level and intimacy of the sharing increased dramatically. Given permission to be themselves, many participants expressed thoughts and feelings with a candor that was palpably freeing and healing. I was moved to observe

several residents, including some very imposing and serious men, exchange tearful revelations and, later, smiles, handshakes and hugs. Two exercises in particular had a profound effect on the participants. One challenged people's inherent resistance to recognizing the "humanness" in each other and their common needs, and the other exercise provided an opportunity for sincere recognition and acknowledgement of one another's unique attributes. In the end, Mr. Natale's loving message came through: we are each a gift to the world. At the close of the event, he distributed a small red heart to each participant embossed with the reminder **"YOU ARE THE GIFT"**.

As we were packing up to leave, many participants demonstrated the impact of the day's events with heartfelt thanks and hugs for Mr. Natale and those of us who assisted. There were many expressions of elation and excitement, but one young lady in particular summed up the power of the program when she said, "I got my life back today".

As with any educational opportunity, the true value occurs with encouragement, repetition and follow-up. The "Art of Balance" program opened a door for the residents of Phoenix House. By applying the skills and strategies they learned and referring to the materials and workbooks from the program, the residents can continue to realize the valuable influence of the course in their lives. Future programs, provided with the support of Karen Boskemper and Jerri Rosen, will provide an on-going source of enrichment and inspiration for these men and women struggling to overcome formidable life challenges. We were told that there was a barn dance scheduled for the residents that evening. Judging by the new energy and affectionate interaction among them, it was clear this dance would be special. Karen Laudadio is a part-time writer living in Mission Viejo, California. She can be reached at: kmlmail7@yahoo.com.

