

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Montessori Inside Mexican Prisons

Eder Cuevas, AMI Administrator Trainer

Can you imagine how it is living inside a prison for the first three years of life?

Current prison regulations in Mexico allow mothers deprived of their liberty to keep their children until the age of three. Afterwards, the relatives must keep them and if this is not possible, the government is responsible for finding the best place for them.

Proper education depends fundamentally on the correct environment. Therefore, Montessori México (AMI Affiliated Society), through Horme (the Mexican network for Montessori social programs), joined forces with several organizations to create prepared environments inside prisons. We provided the opportunity to experience Montessori education in this transcendental time of their lives.

Mazatlán and Chihuahua prisons are the first two experiences where we created child-centred communities with wonderful results. After two years, more than twenty children are enjoying an education for life and, in alliance with Montessori Stoppani AMI training centre, nine women deprived of their liberty are proud to hold the AMI 0-3 Orientation course to run their own programs.

If we strictly believe that Montessori is just about schools, there will be no possibility of social reform. Montessori is a philosophy of life; therefore, we cannot limit it to being practised only in schools. As Mario Montessori said, "And if educationally we base ourselves on what is important for life and development, then Montessori Education will always live."

Just as in schools, where parents are part of their school community, here in prisons the involvement of the mothers is necessary for the success of the program. Working with the mothers implies working on their self-development. In consideration of this, we are looking to ensure continuity in a more fluid and organic way. The work with the mothers sustains the change through the development of a new mindset.

We are observing they have a new perspective on education and therefore life, including their families and the other women inside the prison. They are witnesses to a beautiful new journey. The children are surrounded by freedom to explore, clear and consistent limits, and an environment full of love and support. These children are laying the foundations for independence, self-confidence, and self-esteem which are so critical at this age. We are working the foundations of a social change, writing a new story to succeed once their time to leave prison arrives. A community was created around the child, a ray of hope for disadvantaged communities.

This is the beginning of a new way to aid life in difficult situations. We are learning an incredible number of lessons getting into the prisons. The most important is related to Maria Montessori's quote in *Education and Peace*, "The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind" and it doesn't matter where they are born, they are special and deserve the opportunity to find their way to contribute with their personal cosmic mission to the world.

The adventure continues, as we are about to open the program in Culiacan and Ciudad Juárez prisons, seeking to reach more and more children who need to develop in an environment according to their needs.

Today it is necessary to understand even more and very clearly the message of Maria Montessori and turn with devotion to who she observed and where her method began- the child. The world needs Montessori more than ever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eder Cuevas has 20 years of experience in Montessori education and serves as the Executive Director of Montessori México, an AMI-affiliated society. Additionally, he is the development director at Montessori de Chihuahua. Eder is also an international speaker and advisor on various topics related to Montessori education, including school administration, parents' education, and Montessori sports.

Eder holds an AMI elementary training diploma from Bergamo, Italy, and an AMI-NAMTA orientation certification for adolescents. He studied Education and Physical Education and holds master's degrees in Sport Psychology and Education. Previously, Eder taught at a university in Chihuahua for fifteen years and was a professor at the Universidad Autonoma de Chihuahua, teaching in the areas of Sports Science, Education, and Psychology. Since 2015, he has participated as a staff member in the AMI-NAMTA Adolescent Orientations in Chihuahua, Hershey and Chicago. He currently trains on the AMI Administrators Course.

From the Voices of AMI Training Series
Association Montessori Internationale © 2024
Please credit Association Montessori Internationale
and the named author(s) if using text.

