**Social circus project in prison / Leuven-Belgium **

**14 – 21 th June 2015**

“Cirkus in Beweging” (Circus in Movement) is an open house for circus education. Artistic and social circus activities, developing the whole person, come together and lift each other to a new form of art education.

In 1993 “Cirkus in Beweging” was founded as the first circus school in Flanders. Today we are with our 1050 students and a large artistic range, one of the biggest educational circus houses in Europe, offering a well-structured educational and artistic practice. Every week we have 54 groups training in our school .

Next to our weekly classes we organize circus workshops for people with less opportunities.

* Inclusion of 1 or 2 kids with social , physical or mental impairment in our 54 weekly groups.
* Weekly workshop in Fabota, playscheme for ethnic minorities ,on Friday.
* Social –artistic project with stilt group “gevleugelde ruiters” .
* Teaching weekly juggling classes in prison in Leuven.
* Intensive training of social workers to use circus arts in their playwork.
* Specialised circus training during Easter holiday for teenagers with mental disability.

We educate

* in circus movement
* through circus movement
* about circus movement

**In** doing circus movement, the physical actions and experiences, we gain confidence in ourselves and learn all the motor skills we need in live.

**Through circus**  movement we also learn about the others, we relate with them and form our personal social and emotional development.

**About circus** movements : we teach children and teachers why we do what we do and how to do it; we educate them about the benefits of movement and circus.

**International circus project in prison**

We set up a 5 day full time circus workshop for about 12 prisoners and 12 circus teachers /artists in June 2015.

Cirkus in Beweging started teaching circus skills in the prison of Leuven in September 2013.

Every week one teacher works with 6-8 prisoners. The main skills they do are juggling , rolla bolla and stilt walking..

The project is in collaboration with the VZW De Rode Antraciet” an organization that sets up projects and activities in prisons.

The Rode Antraciet vzw is a non profit organization (VZW) for socio-cultural and sportive participation in the penitentiary sector. Participation is a right for all. The Rode Antraciet vzw wants to increase the possibilities to participate in socio-cultural projects during detention and focusses here on the live after the detention.

The Rode Antraciet vzw respects the dignity and the possibilities of each individual and takes the sense of responsibility of each person as a starting point. She organizes cultural, educational, sportive and community projects for and with prisoners, giving attention to their social environment, The Rode Antraciet vzw emphasizes in this work the importance of collaboration between individuals, organizations and government.

Personal growth, networking , (re)activating in society and social integration are reference points for their own varied and specialized offer and for a constructive collaboration with the sportive and socio-cultural partners from outside the prison walls.

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We believe this work is very valuable and worthwhile; every week we create a small world apart for some prisoners. Prisoners in this prison of Leuven are allowed out of their cell only 2 x 30 minutes a day for a short walk and all the other time they spend in isolation. Meeting each other and learning a skill as juggling together brightens up their day and gives them a moment of “non-worry”. We have had a very successful year ; some prisoners come every week to the workshop , proving they really like it and feel it helps them.

We persuaded the prison direction to purchase some juggling balls and so some prisoners also practice in their room.

This success makes us want to do more : we set up a 5 day full time circus workshop for prisoners in June 2015. This workshop is led by an external physical theatre director WIM Oris and the circus teacher with the 2 year experience Rika Taeymans. An international group of circus teachers from the project Social EDUCIRCATION (Erasmus for All program) will join this team and will work together for 5 days.

**The purpose, goal of this workshop is multiple** :

* Offering a full time intensive workshop circus ( 5 days) to a group of prisoners .
* Offering the prisoners a whole range of circus activities ( not just juggling and stilts)
* Making the prisoners work together on a communal project .
* Achieving self confidence and trust in themselves and others.
* Working towards a circus show that can be performed for an audience .
* Giving the prisoners an International experience working with teachers from 7 European countries.
* Giving the circus teachers an experience of working in prison; getting to know this world apart . With this experience teachers can start to set up projects in their own country.
* Opening out the hidden life of prisoners through a public performance.

We will set up a program that will be adapted to the population of prisoners at that moment.

Starting by getting to know each other through circus games, we will focus after that on the following skills:

* Tightrope walking
* Rolla bolla
* Stilt and ball walking
* Juggling
* Acrobatics
* unicycling
* Circus theatre

The first three days we will do a lot of group work and we will be teaching the circus skills in small groups with a lot of individual attention; the circus skills have the physicality of sports but exclude competition; through working with circus we work on developing coordination and balance ; increasing concentration and building on self-confidence;

The last days we focus on the performance.; in this we focus on collaboration : the group is greater than the individual. Leadership and social skills are being developed through working in group towards this performance.

The director of the performance will be someone who is an experienced in working with special target groups , theater and storytelling . Encouraging stage presence through circus is going to be one of his tasks.

**Target group / Situation in Prison**

This prison is called Hulp gevangenis and is an Arrest House ; this means that people are waiting for their trial and are waited to be convicted. So there is a lot of anxiety about the future and a lot of long days of waiting and not really knowing what is going to happen.

A lot of new prisoners are coming and going, never knowing how long they are going to be there. The place has no calm atmosphere where activities and work can be set up on a regular basis. Always things are changing and teachers and staff are constantly adapting to this as well as the prisoners.

All prisoners have a very different background and history. Most of them have a low self esteem . On the other hand they are survivors and know how to handle difficult situations.

**How will we try to achieve our goals ?**

* We try to create situations where the prisoners feel they learn something.
* We will start from where they are and build up from there.
* Make them believe in themselves by encouraging them and by focusing on all the things they can do and learn .
* Be calm, honest and authentic .
* Give them “good ”moments to remember .

**Why we believe social circus projects like this work ?**

**It supports personal growth and social learning:**

* It is open and accessible to all , regardless of age , ability and mobility.
* It connects people from all backgrounds and abilities
* Circus is non-competitive , non-threatening.
* Builds trust and empathy .
* Can break down barriers and challenge prejudice.
* It engages those on the margins and provides an alternative to traditional sports and art forms.
* circus offers something different, unique, ‘cool’, interesting and outside of the norm to be part

of.

* Offers a willingness to try new things and build up physical strength.
* Stimulates teamwork and respect

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**Participants:**

**rode antraciet**: Elke Stallaert en Ine Melis

**cirkus in Beweging**: Stef Langmans ,Rika Taeymans, Wim Oris

**International participants from social Educircation** ( Erasmus +)

* ILARIA CIERI ( italie)
* LUIS RECHE MUNOZ ( spanje)
* Gotz Martiny ( germany
* GLYNIS HULL-ROCHELLE ( usa)
* HANA CERNA ( Tsjechie)
* Palmai Balzas (hungary)
* Jack Rees ( UK)
* Lia Geropoulou( GREECE)

Invitations for the performance :

* Jan de braekeleer en kathleen ( wisper vzw)
* Marijn van de weghe ( 30 CC )
* Annemie van daele ( VZW De wissel)
* Dirk de Lathouwer ( Fabuleus)
* Grundtvig
* Bieke Verlinden
* Denise van der voort
* Ridouani
* Paul thys