

# Notes from an ICDP trainer

Lima, November, 2024

## ICDP IN SANTA MÓNICA WOMEN'S PRISON

*In April 2024, ICDP trainer, Honorata Herrera, resumed her ICDP work at the Santa Mónica Women's Prison, located in the Chorrillos district, in the city of Lima, Peru. The ICDP meetings are held on Tuesdays from two thirty in the afternoon to four thirty. To date participants include twenty-four boarding mothers. The following is from Honorata's own notes:*



The ICDP meeting is a safe place for participants to express themselves and for me to listen. It requires patience and perseverance to run each ICDP session, recognizing that the process is very slow with these mothers...but it is also an opportunity for growth for all of us.

Introducing the ICDP guidelines, in their order and structure, allowed me to organize the topics and leave the mothers free to share their experiences and family stories that arose spontaneously.

Together we managed to create a place of trust, where each mother felt valued and was seen as an equal. I am continually encouraging them to connect with the brightest part of their being. Mothers felt that the ICDP meeting is “a magical place,” “it is our therapy,” “we share laughter and tears”.

However, the mothers' attendance at meetings fluctuated for various reasons: due to appointments related to their confinement in prison, such as having to meet with a psychologist, social worker or lawyer. Some fail to attend due to emotional reasons, like when receiving a sentence beyond what was expected, or going through their own criminal process. Except for one mother, who is always there, happy to attend.

After I introduced the first of the 8 ICDP guidelines (which is: How do you show love to your child?) mothers started to share their experiences. Then I proposed that they also show love and affection to each other. Lucia responded immediately, very adamantly, “I don't love myself.” Her reaction made me reflect and I decided to ask the mothers to direct the ICDP guidelines towards themselves, so as to first experience the meaning of each guideline through their own personal experiences. They were eager to share their own stories.

At the beginning of the session on Empathy, one of the nine participant mothers recalled that upon entering the prison her cellmates welcomed her by saying “Welcome to hell”, she described how this made her feel. On the same day, a participant mother called Wendy joined us very late, towards the end of the meeting. To my surprise the nine mothers shouted out in unison, pointing at the register in front of me: - Don't sign the attendance sheet for Wendy! Surprise, discomfort, and annoyance appeared on Wendy's face. After a few minutes of asking for their attention, I asked the group to reflect about what thought or idea went through their mind which led them to act that way. They all remained silent for a few seconds, until one of the participants responded that it was just a joke. Immediately they all confirmed that it was a joke. I asked Wendy how she felt and she said, “Attacked at first, but then I thought it was a joke.” Afterwards we talked a bit longer about the meaning of empathy, attunement and affection.

In our fifth session, we were supposed to work on the ICDP guideline four, which is about the meaning of praise and appreciation of efforts. At the beginning of the session, we stood in a circle greeting each other, when I saw one of the mothers whispering in the ear of her companion Mara. Mara was crying silently. I asked Mara what had happened to her. Mara told the group that she had had an altercation with another mother in her ward. This mother had insulted and verbally assaulted Mara, accusing her of stealing her baby's bottle. She concluded her story by saying: Honorata, most of the people are here for theft. I am not a thief. I am here for Illicit drug trafficking. At that moment, a very upset inmate entered the workshop space, saying that her roommate threw her new shoes in the rubbish bin. Mara told me that this was in revenge, because this inmate had betrayed her roommate... With all this happening, there was no time left to work on the guideline four. To date, Mara has not returned to the ICDP meetings, but whenever she sees me, she greets me affectionately. Last Thursday she gave me a blessed rosary and a small red heart-shaped keychain.

During the session on guideline 8b, (which is to plan actions step by step), I asked mothers to share a personal story with respect to making plans step by step, and here are two of their stories:

Story one: Before entering prison, all I thought about was how to dress up in beautiful clothes, but nowadays, I do not care for such things anymore. My biggest concern now is to be released, to become free so that I can return to my five children, all waiting for me. My mother takes care of them now. When I am released, I plan to sell food. I have done it before and they tell me that I cook well. I also prepare a delicious chili.

Story two: When I was fourteen, I had my first daughter Sofia. My mother kicked me out of the house. I looked for my daughter's father. He was nineteen years old and we started living together. Sofia was my doll. I was very happy with her. I learned to be a mother. But when her father came home from work, the tension would build up, he was violent towards me. The beatings became more and more frequent; black eyes, blows to my arms. Seeing my five-year-old daughter tell her father not to hit me was too much for me, so I decided to run away. But now I just want to get my daughter back and return to my village. So, this is what I plan to do.