

## **Enhancing Literacy and Uncovering Hidden Talents in Sri Lankan Prisoners: A Project in Welikada Prison**

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### **Introduction**

People are imprisoned for committing a criminal offense and punished after being convicted in front of the law. It is one of the responsibilities of the prison administration to rehabilitate and socialize the imprisoned people after transforming them into decent. Education, rehabilitation, and effective use of time can be used as a method for socialization. The optimum rehabilitation process can be done by developing literacy skills, spiritual harmony, and artistic skills of prison inmates. This can contribute to their reintegration into society and overall public safety. The objectives of the project were to improve literacy skills among inmates; to identify and develop their hidden personal skills that can lead to suitable employment opportunities after release; to develop the self-confidence of the inmates; to strengthen community and family relationships with the inmates by having positive attitudes towards them in the entire society.

### **Project plan and Methods**

In the discussions held with the Prison Commissioner and Control and Rehabilitation Officer at the Welikada Prison Headquarters, it was introduced that there are inmates with different talents. Among the inmates introduced in this way, an inmate who could write books and has written manuscripts for several books was identified. Interviews and conversations were conducted with him. On the approval of the Commissioner of Prisoners Administration/ Rehabilitation and Skills Development, five manuscripts were submitted to Nanila Publications Institution. They agreed to publish one manuscript first after submitting the manuscripts to a panel of writers at their publishing institute. Nanila Publications Institution published the manuscript of the novel as a book, titled “Anusaya Aasawa”(2019). The publishing institute organizes awards for the books published by them every year. This novel was also nominated for the same awards. The panel of judges recommended this prison inmate's novel as the best novel published by the publishing institute for that year. Accordingly, this book won the “Nanila Prakashana Award” for the best novel among the novels published that year. Plans for enhancing literacy skills to assess individual needs; Provide tailored education programs; Hire and train skilled educators; Incorporate technology; create a supportive learning environment; Engage inmates in program design and promote family and community involvement, are in progress.

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### **Findings and Discussion**

It was revealed that it is essential to direct prison inmates to a proper rehabilitation system. Thus, the hidden talents of prisoners were identified. It was realized that the development of the inmates' reading, writing, and literary arts skills was taking place and there was a remarkable growth in the interest and effort shown by the other inmates. By participating in the ceremony of receiving the best novel award, for his book, personal motivation, and self-confidence developed in him, and he was respected by society and his family.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

By setting an example to other prisoners, it was possible to recognize that they too have talents, self-strength, and self-confidence. This made it clear that prison inmates also have many opportunities in society and that they too are valuable members of society. It was concluded that this writing work also helped to remove negative thoughts, frustration, unease about society, etc.

Projects like these, not only improve the inmates' reading, writing, literary, and artistic skills but also teach them essential life lessons. It is appropriate to implement such programs to convince that they are also indispensable people in society and can contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development of the country by introducing projects that can identify the talents of the inmates in all prisons, giving them proper guidance for that, and taking necessary steps to convince them that education can transform their lives.

**Keywords:** Hidden talents, Prisons, Literacy skills, Information Literacy, Sri Lanka

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