

# “Be true – not violent”

A pilot project ‘Be true, – not violent’, aiming at teaching children awareness of patterns of violence- and how to deal creatively with them, is being introduced in three Auroville schools.

A book called “Be True – Not Violent” has recently been introduced to Auroville. It was compiled by two women, Rita Erben and Astrid Kummer, to teach children, youth and adults around the world how to solve their conflicts peacefully. The book is intended for schools and social institutions and can be used to teach children as young as the age of six.

Work on the book started during the ceasefire in the north of Sri Lanka in 2004. At that time, the idea was to write a Peace Handbook for Tamil children in Sri Lanka. During the 20 years of war in Sri Lanka, these children had never known anything other than violence. Because the ceasefire failed and war broke out again, work on the book had to be stopped and all the international

NGOs had to leave the country. In 2008 the forgotten manuscript was revived and completed with the help of an international team and the international *Federation Terre des Hommes*. It was decided at that time that the book should not only be written for Tamil children, but also for children and adults of all nationalities.

“Be True – Not Violent” has since been translated into six languages (English, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish and Tamil) and translation into other languages is under way. The book is structured so that it can be used for children living in trouble spots, in developing countries, and also in Western countries.

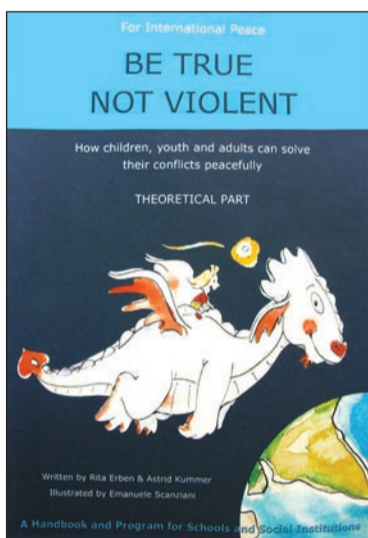
The book is divided into three different parts.

Part One contains the theoretical basis for the work, written for adults, parents and teachers. It provides an understanding of how conflict and violence evolves and how it can be solved. It encourages the reader to reflect on their feelings and perceptions of conflicts as well as on their own conflict behaviour. One of the chapters deals with the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, gender equality and, finally, with the most important thing in life: true friendship and love.

Four different categories of violence are defined: physical violence, psychological violence, verbal violence and violence against things. It is explained that violence is the expression of an underlying sentiment or frustration; this can be anything from anger, disappointment, fear, helplessness to a lack of attention. In order to



Rita Erben presents her project to the children of Udavi school



prevent and transform violence, the root-cause has to be discovered, then methods have to be employed so that the children can express their feelings safely.

Part Two demonstrates how to teach this information to children. It provides the material for 33 group sessions. With the help of different games, the children learn how to recognize their feelings and to express them in a healthy and positive manner. In this way, they become sensitized to their limits and boundaries and learn to think about the feelings of others. The group sessions with the children are nearly always done

in the same way as children love structure which helps them to feel safe.

Every lesson begins with a game to bring the group together and get playfully into the session. There are a large variety like movement games, trust games, role plays and theatre as well as games for the senses. The topic of each lesson is introduced with a story and then there is activity or role play in groups, reflecting actively on the story. Every session concludes with breathing exercises and relaxation to slow things down and bring the children back into the present.

Part three is a beautifully illustrated comic-style book by Auroville’s Emanuele that takes the child through “The Adventures of Papui, Draggy and Something Else.” Through numerous colourful illustrations, the three friends fly around the world and contribute to peace on earth.

The pilot project of “Be True – Not Violent” is now being tried out in three Auroville Schools – Udavi, New Creation and Transition – as well as in schools in Peru, Mozambique, Haiti and Columbia.

“We want the book to be Auroville’s gift to the world,” say its creators. **Dianna**

## Dealing with conflict in Restorative Circles

“...[We start] from the premise that conflict is natural, normal, and recurrent in community life. When conflict occurs, it doesn’t mean anyone has failed. In fact, we need both community and conflict to reach our full potential as human beings. Much as we value individual choice, we are formed in community and work out the ramifications of our individuality in relation to others. And though we may resent it when our preferences, practices, or beliefs are challenged, we would never grow without conflict.” Ron Kraybill & Evelyn Wright

On July 13th at the Town Hall a presentation on the principles and practice of Restorative Circles was offered by L’aura and Jason, followed by a question and answer session. Over the years they have been excited about living nonviolence and learning about processes that help communities create cooperation and harmony. So last November they attended a Restorative Circles workshop in the US, and spending time with Dominic Barter, the founder of the process, was rich and rewarding. They returned both moved and impressed, and are now motivated to share the practice with Auroville and interested people in India. A group of Aurovilians is meeting weekly to practice the skills with the possible intention of one day creating a restorative justice system in Auroville.

When Dominic moved to Rio de Janeiro 17 years ago after falling in love with a Brazilian, he had no background in handling conflict. He found himself moved by the imbalance of power between those who lived in the slums and those who didn’t, and he began to talk to people. He noticed they frequently wanted to discuss the conflicts in their lives, and expressed that they felt disempowered and unable to handle them. So for the past 15 years, Dominic has been working with Brazilians to develop this process, so that they could trust their communities to handle their conflicts without needing outside authorities to intervene. At first he thought of himself in the field of ‘conflict resolution,’ but he has come to realize that conflict is part of coexistence and that, rather than trying to fix conflicts, he wants to encourage them to fully blossom. For this, Dominic refers to creating dedicated ‘fight rooms’ so that everybody involved can take responsibility for finding the roots of the conflict and empower themselves to create solutions.

Also, the way most people perceive conflict is overly simplistic: one victim and one offender. Many people may be affected by a conflict and



Jason and L’aura

many of them may be experiencing themselves in a state of ‘victimhood’ – that is, the power to affect their wellbeing is out of their reach. In a Restorative Circle, all the parties participating in the process get a chance to express themselves and be heard not just for the words they speak but for the meaning they want registered. It’s not about who’s right or wrong – it’s about understanding how people feel now about what happened and what their motivations were when they chose to act. Ultimately, it’s the recognition of a shared humanity. From that foundation, the Circle can try to find a way forward which serves everybody.

So, how does it work?

A Restorative Circle brings together the three parties in a conflict – those who have acted, those

directly impacted, and the wider community – within a specific context to dialogue as equals. The first step is for a person experiencing conflict to contact a facilitator. The facilitator then holds a Pre-Circle with that person to identify the act in question and to understand how the person feels about it now. The facilitator then makes sure that the person understands the Circle process and asks if he or she wants to go ahead. If yes, the facilitator asks who else needs to be present in the Circle. He or she then proceeds to have Pre-Circles with all of the other parties, and invites them to describe the conflict and how it impacted them, and asks them who they think should participate in the Circle. Finally, the facilitator invites everybody to the Restorative Circle, where they get the chance to

share how they feel about the conflict. From here, the focus of the dialogue shifts to understanding the underlying causes of people’s actions. The Circle ends when the participants reach a practical, time-framed action plan which they believe will start to restore trust and meet the needs of everybody involved.

A Post-Circle is scheduled after the action plan’s completion date, and the parties get a chance to discuss how these actions impacted their wellbeing. If needs have been met they can be celebrated and if there are still unmet needs, new actions can be agreed upon. Dominic describes the intended outcome of the Circle as each participant being more willing to co-exist with the others than before they entered the Circle.

During the question and answer session, one of the participants was inspired to share a story of hope about handling conflict. While walking in Australia, he and his wife were witness to a scene of violence involving an Aboriginal man who ran after them enraged, threatening violence. His wife turned and walking directly to the man, took his arms and said: “When you bleed, it’s red. When I bleed it’s red. Do we have to hurt each other?” The man replied, shocked: “Do you really mean that?” And she said: “Yes, I really mean that.” He ended his story sharing: “Arms went down, and he went away, and we went away.”

We don’t have to be afraid of conflict – it can be a way of uniting us and helping us to enjoy each others’ differences.

At the end another person asked, “Due to all the diversity, pain and history in Auroville, do you believe it will work here?” L’aura responded, “It would be foolish of me to promise yes – but, I trust this process and I’m willing to try.”

For more information on Restorative Circles visit [www.RestorativeCircles.org](http://www.RestorativeCircles.org). For more information on initiating a Restorative Circle in Auroville contact [RestorativeAuroville@gmail.com](mailto:RestorativeAuroville@gmail.com). **Elaine and Alan**