

# Heart-and-Soul Programme for Violence Prevention

Social intervention by means of courses in self-defence and mindful communication

Draft document

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## Violence in the world

Millions of people suffer in the face of interpersonal violence<sup>1</sup>. Many experience physical and psychological trauma, which partially or totally isolates them, often keeping them from being active in their own community and increasing the likelihood of their developing destructive behaviours or debilitating psychosomatic diseases. This breakdown of the social fabric at the hands of violence is well documented, witness the systematic rape<sup>2</sup> used in the Rwandan and Yugoslavian genocides in order to split up families and force their flight.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*, it is possible radically to diminish interpersonal violence in our societies by putting in place prevention strategies with the help of education and victim support. The Report acknowledges that Canada is a leader in the field when it comes to establishing such strategies<sup>3</sup>. But then why continue to put tools in place if we are already doing so well? Because, quite simply, violence is still everywhere, and remains "a public health issue capable of affecting

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1 "The *Global status report on violence prevention 2014*, which reflects data from 133 countries, is the first report of its kind to assess national efforts to address interpersonal violence, namely child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner and sexual violence, and elder abuse." [Online], [https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/status\\_report/2014/en](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/status_report/2014/en), page consulted January 19th, 2020.

2 "Wednesday October 20, 2010, The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) submitted its report on the use of rape of women as a weapon of war (1). The publication coincided with the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council, which had sought to put an end to sexual violence against women and girls during armed conflicts, launching an appeal for more participation of women in peace initiatives (2)." FERLAND, Maxime. *Perspective monde*, Université de Sherbrooke, <http://perspective.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/servlet/BMAnalyse?codeAnalyse=1300>, page consulted August 27, 2019.

3 WHO (World Health Organization), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014*, Luxembourg, WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, 2014, p. 110.

permanently the well-being and development both of individuals and the groups to which they belong”<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the problem persists worldwide, and we need to act globally if we want to reduce it globally.

## **Heart-and-Soul: Presentation of the Programme**

Private or group therapy work is often necessary to empower victims of violence to take hold of their lives again. There are quite a few self-healing techniques which can be brought to bear through social intervention, along with methods of violence prevention and, above all, ways to avoid reproducing the generations-old cycle of aggression. Several of these can be taught on a large scale and require only scant teaching material. One of the tools acknowledged for helping in the healing of individuals after an aggression is a course in self-defence. Most self-defence programmes currently offered in society, though, concentrate only on physical aggression. We believe that violence has many forms and cannot be countered merely by physical defence. **That is why we are introducing you to a complete ‘heart-and-soul’ programme of violence prevention, a self-defence course which also covers mindful communication as a social intervention tool.**

Of course we understand only too well that people not yet in a position to deal with their basic physiological and security needs are not fully open to following a workshop, but we think that if these workshops are offered for free, and bring some comfort and some tools for self-help and self-defence, they can have a significant impact in the victim’s ongoing life. In fact, this is what we observed among groups of women living precariously but seeking to re-enter the workforce and society, when we offered the first model of this programme over a period of two years, at Place à l’emploi, Longueuil, Québec, Canada.

Though we cannot eliminate wars and aggression (Too bad! That would be best), we can propose to offer our programme for free to vulnerable and/or marginalized populations, who will find in it:

- theoretical concepts on aggression (verbal/psychological abuse, intimidation/harassment, pursuit, cyberintimidation, sexual touching/forcing, armed attack, encirclement by several adversaries, conjugal violence, etc.),
- a toolbox of techniques for defending yourself in case of aggression,
- methods for developing self-confidence, knowing your limits, responding to your own needs, the principles of peaceful resolution of conflict, of mindful communication and training in benevolence,

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QUEBEC PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTISE AND REFERENCE CENTRE (INSPQ), Quebec Report on Violence and Health, National Library and Archives of Quebec, 2018, p. 337.

- physical defence techniques (blocking/deflecting, ground defence, defence against a knife, club or gun, blows to the face or the legs, releasing of grips, striking with elbows/knees).

Internalizing the training is effected by many routes: lecture-based teaching, role-playing, modelling, and the practice of our physical exercises. The workbook of the social aid-giver of the Heart-and-Soul programme is roughly 60 pages long. It lends itself easily to being adapted, translated and taught. Our goal is to distribute it as widely as possible. We hope to train workers in all the sites we target to put them in a position to give the training on a weekly basis. The workshops should invite principally adults so as not to sow anxiety or fear of being attacked among young children. Besides the aid-giver's workbook, we will supply a participant workbook as well as videos showing the execution of the martial arts techniques.

As we would like to be complementary to pre-existing programmes, here are the communities in Canada which we are targeting:

- city and village populations living precariously in difficult circumstances, and with little schooling (people on social assistance or below the poverty line),
- populations of towns and villages where the crime rate and level of violence are high (particular districts of large cities, and certain indigenous villages, for example),
- isolated refugee or migrant groups.

Those we are targeting on the international field :

- populations of villages, districts or ghettos where the crime and violence rates are high,
- war refugee camps,
- migrant camps resulting from natural disasters, etc.

The courses should be given by aid workers who have the skills for accompanying victims of violence, and should be offered in a language the participant is at ease in. The aid workers should be warned that the experience may trigger a strong emotional crisis in the participant. For this reason it is preferable to have two aid workers, so that one can stay with the distressed participant if the person needs to leave. Also, since the programme sees itself as a tool for the participant's empowerment and progress in personal emancipation, it would be wise to ensure that the participants are voluntary.

Some important considerations:

- It would be preferable for the participants to have access to something to eat and some drinking water

before doing the workshop. We suggest, therefore, that a snack of sorts be offered before each course, in keeping with the context.

- The participants should be invited to take the course (of from one to several hours) on a weekly basis so as to develop reflexes as much psychological as physical.
- Because each has his or her own history and aptitudes, we urge an approach that will not re-victimize the participants but aim to give them back the power to direct their own lives. We would want the participants to learn in a friendly and dynamic atmosphere, and one respectful of their personal trajectory. It is thus imperative to choose aid workers who have empathy.
- To this point, some training should be offered also to those in the targeted communities responsible for peacekeeping, concerning the importance of not exercising their authority with any ill will, and concerning their own self-confidence and mindful communication, so that the participants can have confidence in them and not fall prey to them.

## **Who we are**

### Sarah Gaudreau-Desrochers

Sarah is passionate about martial arts and the study of human behaviour. She holds a B.A. in International Studies and Modern Languages from Laval University in Québec. She has specialized in social intervention using martial arts as a way to prevent violence. She launched a complete programme of self-defence in 2012 and continually refines it with the aid of specialists both of psychosocial intervention and of martial arts. She worked for nearly a year on socio-professional reintegration among men. She is now director of the auto-defence committee of the federation Traditional Martial Arts Canada (TMA – or AMT). She wants to reduce violence in the world by mindful teaching of awareness and the support of survivors of aggression.

Sarah has practised Kung Fu Wuchang for 18 years and taught it for 12 of them, before dedicating herself to Brazilian jiu jitsu and to kickboxing. She has been initiated into various other combat sports such as judo, sanshou, Kali, Kung Fu Shaolin and Thai boxing.

### Martin Blanchette

Martin has a certificate in social service work, a Bachelor of Science equivalent (certificates accumulated in addiction, mental health and criminology), as well as other training such as neuro-linguistic programming (nlp), facilitating forgiveness circles, and others. He has close to 20 years' experience in intervention in community or therapy projects, whether itinerance, addiction, violence or social reintegration.

Martin has acquired 8 years of experience in different martial arts. He has a teaching formation in yoga and regularly practises Tai Chi Chuan. After a personal journey of interior spiritual development, he has turned, in recent years, towards meditation and what one might call the 'abandonment' of self.

## **What we need for follow-up**

We are currently looking for:

- Social or aid workers or organizations interested in planting our project in their community and receiving the training for it.
- Donors, whether private or public, so that we can go out and give the training and the material to aid workers wherever the need is felt. We would like also to see the workers remunerated when they offer the course. It is paramount that the participants taking it not have to pay.