

Volunteer Prison Education Program

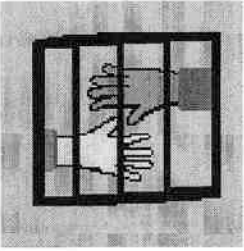
Joan Bloomgarden PhD, A.T.R.-BC



Joan Bloomgarden Ph.D, A.T.R.-BC (registered art therapist) is the co-founder of the Volunteer Prison Education Project (VPEP) and the project *What Will Happen to Me?* for children of incarcerated parents. While Dr. Bloomgarden earned her doctorate in psychology she practiced as an art therapist. By merging these two disciplines she focuses her interest and research on the study of creativity. Dr. Bloomgarden believes that social, cultural, and moral ills can and must be solved by the use of creative problem solving, innovative thinking, intuition, and hard work.

Dr. Bloomgarden is an assistant professor in the graduate school at Hofstra University. She is also a licensed elementary school teacher, a licensed art teacher, a practicing art therapist, and has contributed to the field with numerous published articles and presentations. Dr. Bloomgarden's latest article describing her use of "offerings" as an innovative art therapy intervention is published in *Art Therapy: The Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, Vol.14, No. 2, 1997. In September 1997, Dr. Bloomgarden presented "Creativity, the Inner Dialogue," in London at the 4th European Arts Therapies Conference (ECArTE).

[\[Back to Board\]](#) [\[Charles Bloomgarden\]](#)



Volunteer Prison Education Program

- [Intro](#)
- [Goals](#)
- [Short-term goals](#)
- [Objectives](#)
- [Course and faculty descriptions](#)
- [Future plans](#)
- [Plans for next phase of the project](#)
- [Final thoughts](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Founders of the project](#)

This innovative, volunteer program was launched in July 1997 at the Rose M. Singer Center, Rikers Island Prison under the supervision of Dr. Vincent Vaccaro and coordinated by Dr. Joan Bloomgarden. It seeks to provide quality educational experiences to inmates who would otherwise not have access to learning. The project seeks to demonstrate that a committed core of volunteer educators can work cooperatively within the prison system, at both the state and federal level, to motivate inmates to help themselves, their families and one another. This program is unique because it actively seeks the involvement of inmates and their families to create a learning community within the prison system.

Goals:

The goal of the Volunteer Prison Education Program is to develop a program that is helpful, credible, innovative and successful at all levels. It is our hope that this project will:

- Engage inmates and their families in useful educational activities that will promote positive behavioral change.

- Assist in prevention of crime by reducing recidivism.
- Be the first program created by perpetrator's families to work cooperatively with prosecutors.
- Include the prisoner's contribution, whenever possible, from inside the prison.
- Empower the families of inmates to become actively involved in crime prevention.

Short-term goals:

- To develop a volunteer pool from the skill bank of inmate's families.
- Foster relationships with local organizations to extend outreach capabilities.

Objectives:

- To design and implement an education project using volunteer participation with the intent to reduce crime by working with inmates. This project draws upon data from validated research findings that prove education in various forms promotes behavioral change.
- To initiate a relationship with the US Attorney and separately with the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the New York State Department of Corrections.
- To identify proactive methods that families of perpetrators can use to help their loved ones to encourage and enable the prisoners to help themselves.
- To initiate a pilot project so that other organization will be provided with a template that will serve as a foundation for satellite projects.
- To create partnerships with existing community organizations and seek their support. As an example, Leadership Huntington, headquartered in Long Island, is an issue-oriented leadership program designed to empower community members with knowledge and skill and ultimately transform the community. It is under the umbrella of a national organization.
- To perform action research to assess the progress and effectiveness of the program for inmates, families, and the prison system.

Course and Faculty Descriptions:

<http://www.whitmore.org/prison.html>

- **Child Development**
- **Understanding Your Anger**
- **Art Education in Prison: Toward Enhancing Self-Esteem**
- **Conflict Resolution: Practical Exploration**
- **Basic Understanding of Money Management**
- **Basic Eye Care**

Course: Child Development

This course is designed to give the prisoner the basic knowledge of how a child develops during the early stages of life. Reading material and visual aids will be provided.

Course: Understanding Your Anger

Information included: What is anger? When does it turn in to aggression? How do you manage anger? What is empathy? Reading material will be provided.

* Bilingual Instruction with Spanish as the First Language:

Course: Art Education in Prison: Toward Enhancing Self-Esteem

Experiential Activities using guided imagery and artwork are intended to promote self expression and socialization. Discussion following the art and imagery experience will include symbolism and storytelling.

Course: Conflict Resolution: Practical Exploration

This course will use every day examples of conflicts and explore the possibilities for solving problems. The course will be interactive.

Course: Basic Understanding of Money Management

This course will address money management and planning.

Course: Basic Eye Care

Keeping your eyes safe. Basic knowledge of the anatomy of the eye will be covered. Students will learn about selecting eyeglasses. This will be a question/answer group. One session.

- **We currently have professional faculty to teach the courses**