

Brigid's Hope: Women Transitioning from Prison

by Judy Wilbratte

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Brigid's Hope in Houston, Texas is a year-long transitional living center. The women there are over 30 years old; have been in prison for drugs, prostitution, and/or addiction; and were victims of physical or mental abuse. In addition, most have serious health issues (such as Hepatitis C) and are struggling to make something of themselves, but they are determined to not return to their previous lives.

Brigid's Hope program offers therapy, 12-step recovery meetings, subsidized housing, effective living skills, and other developmental programs. It also provides a more positive peer group. To enter this program, women are required to be drug and alcohol free for six months in a halfway house. Most do not have a car in a city with poor mass transit, many are waitresses, and others work and prepare for their GEDs or college courses. One is a "straight A" student.

The program began with individual typing interviews, and I found in them an awareness I do not often see. When interviewing a Six, we discussed her need for certainty. She replied that she had been working on that issue for years. I interviewed an Eight who was only participating in the typing session because it was a requirement of the program. After I covered what the motivation and worldview was for her type, she let me into her vulnerable world and wanted more. I had similar experiences again and again with the women. They felt accepted by me, knowing that I knew the best and the worst about their type, and it was okay. I believe we all crave being known and accepted for who we really are.

I then taught three two-hour Enneagram classes. In the first class, we used the Typing Cards, Enneagram Workbook, and Communication tool. In the second class, we covered the Conflict and Feedback tools, with the feedback demonstration having a particularly big impact. In the third class, I showed the "Nine Point of View" DVD (Palmer-Daniels) that demonstrates the speaking style and body language of each type, and then covered the Transformation Cards.

During one of the conflict exercises, the Twos were asked to identify their biggest "pinch" and all wrote the same thing – being unappreciated. The rest of the group "got it" that this was as important to the Twos as their own pinches were to them. This made the students aware that how you approach others can minimize conflict in your life.

I did not know how receptive the students would be to the material, but I discovered that these women were strong, determined, and full of hope while fighting against unbelievable odds. They not only "got it," but they were also my best and most engaging students. One of the women enjoyed the material so much that she wanted to learn how to teach the Enneagram. For me, it has been a privilege to participate in a small part of their journey.

I hope my experience will encourage others to help those who do not have the means to learn this wonderful, insightful personality system. The students will love it as much as you do, and they will benefit from the programs for a lifetime.