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# Prisoners as hospice volunteers in Poland

## Abstract

Creating programmes combining penitentiary area with hospice-palliative care and voluntary work in different countries is an interesting direction of implementing the ideals of hospice. The first part of this publication refers to the description of major initiatives for the reintegration of prisoners through hospice voluntary work. In 2009 Poland was awarded 'The Crystal Scales of Justice' thanks to a programme called 'WHAT' (hospice voluntary work as a tool of acceptance and tolerance for people leaving penal institutions). The project was aimed at social reintegration of prisoners through volunteering for a hospice located outside prison. The results of several years of satisfactory cooperation between the hospice and prison in Gdańsk were passed over to penitentiary counsellors and hospice teams in ten cities in Poland. The results of the initial research show that involving prisoners in a hospice team, where they face suffering and dying, improves their psychosocial functioning and the quality of team care. Thanks to the correctional programmes prisoners are currently working in 29 hospices and more than 70 nursing homes, helping patients in need of instant care. Moreover, the convicted from semi-open and open penal institutions are directed to volunteer for hospitals or children's homes. In February 2012 a survey among the sentenced was conducted. **The purpose of the study:** Its main objective was to characterize the meaning of life among prisoners doing voluntary work for a hospice, and convicts not involved in volunteering.

**Method:** In the study a short personal questionnaire together with the PIL (Purpose in Life) questionnaire by Crumbaugh and Maholic were used (Polish adaptation by Płużek) to examine the understanding of the meaning of life.

**Results:** Based on the results obtained it was found that most respondents have a high level of meaning of life. A qualitative analysis of the data suggests that experiences of hospice volunteering may affect the nature of understanding the meaning of life among the convicts.

**Conclusions:** Prisoners not involved in hospice volunteering are more focused on their current situation, leaving prison, having a family and money. They use conventional phrases to describe life and themselves. Prisoners who volunteer for hospices have further time perspectives, are realistic about their abilities, express more goals in life and use a wider variety of language to talk about life, suffering and themselves.

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**Keywords:** prisoners' hospice voluntary work, hospice-palliative care, the meaning of life, rehabilitation.

## Hospice volunteering programmes for prisoners

The subject of hospice-palliative care in prisons was introduced in the USA, where *National Prison Hospice Association* (NPHA) was created. The first

penitentiary hospice programme was established in *US Federal Medical Center* for the convicted in Springfield, Missouri in 1987. Professional systems of prison hospice care were created and used in the USA and other countries [1]. In 1998 *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation* initiated a programme called

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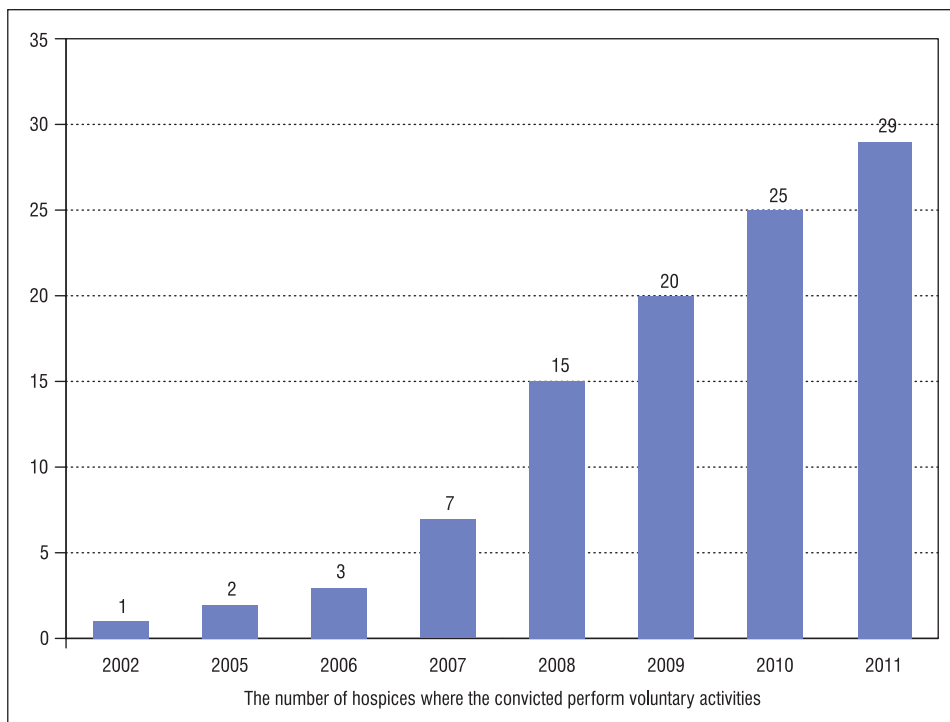
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**Figure 1.** The dynamics of the development of cooperation between penitentiary units and hospice-palliative care centres in Poland.

*GRACE (Guiding Responsive Action in Corrections at End-of-life)* promoting hospice care in penal institutions and prisons. Together with *Volunteers of America* they developed recommended elements of hospice care in prisons for the convicted. Its essential factor was help offered by prisoners volunteering for caring after their inmates at their demise [2]. These programmes concentrate on providing help within the penal system, in which the convicted volunteer for their dying inmates.

In Poland penitentiary counsellors created programmes focused on employing people deprived of their freedom as volunteers helping the most vulnerable members of the society. A programme called *BONA* has been used since 1998. Women serving imprisonment volunteer for a nursing home, where they take care of intellectually and physically disabled children [3]. Since 2002 the penal institution and hospice in Gdańsk have been cooperated in a project of hospice voluntary work for the convicted [4]. The process of rehabilitation through hospice voluntary work in Poland has been appreciated in this country and abroad [5]. In June 2009 Poland was awarded a prestigious prize ‘The Crystal Scales of Justice’ by The European Commission and The Council of Europe for a project called *Voluntary service of the convicted in Poland* implementing an innovative form of cooperation among prisons, hospices and social

welfare homes [6, 7]. A distinguishing feature of this awarded project was a nationwide programme called *WHAT (hospice voluntary work as a tool of acceptance and tolerance for people leaving penal institutions)*. The above-mentioned project was based on the six-year experience of cooperation between the prison in Gdańsk-Przeróbka (a semi-open penal institution) and the hospice in Gdańsk [4]. It was aimed at social reintegration of prisoners through voluntary activities in hospices. The hospice personnel and penitentiary counsellors were trained how to involve prisoners in hospice voluntary activities, and the convicts were acquainted with the aims of hospice-palliative care [8]. From 2002 to 2005 Hospice in Gdańsk was the only institution where prisoners were given yellow volunteer T-shirts. Since 2008 the project has resulted in other hospices in Poland starting cooperation with penal institutions (Fig. 1). Currently in Poland people serving a prison sentence are working in 29 hospice-palliative care centres, and more than 700 convicts have done voluntary work for hospice-palliative care centres [9]. They usually do the cleaning and maintenance work, and after the essential training nurse the patients and accompany them in hospices.

Such unusual presence of people deprived of their freedom in hospice-palliative care centres meets with favourable media coverage. In the short time of

implementation of *WHAT project* many publications appeared in local and national media. The voluntary service of prisoners is present in Polish and foreign press reports, radio and television programmes [10]. In December 2008 the German station ARD made a documentary in Gdańsk presenting voluntary activities performed by the convicted. In 2009 the French station ARTE made a similar reportage. An important element of increasing social awareness of rehabilitation was an educational film entitled *Pokonać uprzedzenia* (To overcome prejudices) [11], used as an educational tool at universities.

### The positive effects of hospice voluntary activities of prisoners

The programme of voluntary activities performed by convicts through education and practical actions has been accepted by hospice-palliative care teams. It was very important to break the isolation and monotony of life of hospice patients, especially for the lonely ones. The programme provides prisoners with rehabilitation opportunities and supports limiting the isolation of people suffering from social exclusion. It also creates opportunities for its participants to increase their self-acceptance and self-confidence as well as acceptance by others. Teamwork has a positive influence on the improvement and formation of interpersonal relations and openness, and provides the convicted with abilities to coexist in the society thanks to their relationships with people, who are free [12]. It is also of significant importance to show them how to help others, how to form the sense of responsibility for another man, and how to improve sensitivity to his needs. The participants of this project develop their knowledge of hospice-palliative care. It is also important to overcome negative prejudices and stereotypes against people deprived of their freedom in the community of hospice workers and volunteers [13].

The results of the survey conducted by the internet users — the readers of [www.trojmiasto.pl](http://www.trojmiasto.pl), in 2008 clearly demonstrate the social changes in perception of hospice volunteering. This internet portal published an article entitled *A prisoner is not as bad as he sounds*. The participants of this survey (the total of 892 votes) had to answer a question if prisoners should have a possibility to work in places like hospices. 61% of respondents said *yes*, explaining that helping people in need teaches respect for a man. Another 32% said *yes*, especially for prisoners serving short sentences. Only 7% of respondents said *no*: 4% claimed that a sentence is a form of punishment and should be served in isolation; 3% were of the opinion that it is never

known if the prisoners are not going to commit another crime [14]. According to the initial survey conducted in 2009 it can be stated that involving prisoners in hospice-palliative teamwork, where they face suffering and death, meet other workers, volunteers and patients' families, improves their psychosocial functioning [15].

### The characteristics of the meaning of life among prisoners

The time of imprisonment is a specific period in prisoners' lives, which brings a lot of changes. During that time they adapt to new social roles, evaluate their lives, value things, give meaning to past events and often set new goals. Serving a sentence is a difficult situation and as such may be the time of searching the meaning of life and changing perspectives on life priorities. In psychology the meaning of life is one of the basic existential needs connected with the personal and subjective experience of life [16]. V. E. Frankl a neuropsychologist from Vienna and the creator of logotherapy defines the meaning of life as a subjective condition of satisfaction associated with intentional actions directed at values. At the same time a man is not the creator of meaning but discovers it in reality. According to Frankl the meaning of life is not obtained by a man once and forever but has to be discovered throughout the whole life along with new emerging life events [17]. Exploring the meaning of life requires personal involvement and effort to give the events specific meaning. It is a necessary condition for the proper functioning of personality, the motivator of all actions and mental well-being [18]. Discovering the meaning of life and meeting the objectives may be the source of happiness [19]. The meaning of life is closely connected with its meaninglessness. According to Frankl the meaninglessness of life is a situation when the understanding of the meaning of life decreases as a result of barriers in achieving selected values. Personality factors and external situations, such as death of the beloved ones, losing a job or isolation, may cause internal crises and the feeling of senselessness. A manifestation of the meaninglessness of life may be running away from home, drug addiction, alcoholism or crime. If the selected values do not belong to the primary ones, a man will live a superficial life, believe in pseudo-meanings of life, which will collapse while confronted with oncoming difficulties. Being faithful to one's own values sets in order all human activities, provides a man with a feeling of safety and protects him against getting lost in life [20].

## The study of the meaning of life among the prisoners of the penal institution in Gdańsk

### The purpose of the study

Focusing on the core of the meaning of life the aim of this study is to:

- characterize the meaning of life among prisoners doing voluntary work for a hospice, and those not involved in volunteering.
- conduct qualitative characteristics of the meaning of life among the prisoners involved in the study.

Due to the preliminary nature of this research and a small group of subjects, the description of the study will be a qualitative analysis of the results obtained.

### The subjects of the study

In the study participated 7 men, the convicts of the penal institution in Gdańsk-Przeróbka, not involved in hospice volunteering (1<sup>st</sup> group OB), and other 7 men, the convicts of the same penal institution, volunteering for the Hospice named after Rev E. Dutkiewicz in Gdańsk (2<sup>nd</sup> group OB). The average age in the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB was 31.6, and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB 34.7. The subjects completed basic, technical or secondary education. The average length of a sentence for the first group was 22.6 months, and for the second group 39.6 months. The average time left to be served was 13.7 months for the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB, and 18.9 months for the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB. The majority of subjects were imprisoned for the first time. The prisoners from the second group performed hospice voluntary activities for a period of time between 1 and 10 months. The average voluntary time for this group was 3.9 months. Participating in this study was voluntary and anonymous. The subjects completed a short personal questionnaire and a PLT questionnaire.

### Method

The study used the PIL (*Purpose in Life*) questionnaire by J. C. Crumbaugh and L. T. Maholic adapted by Z. Płużek. This test is based on the assumptions of the theory by V. E. Frankl. Its full version consists of three parts: A, B and C. Part A consists of 20 questions regarding the need for the meaning of life. A subject responds to these questions on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7 implies the maximum intensity of a tested feature and 1 implies the minimum one. The result is obtained by summing up the responses to all questions in part A. The higher the general result is the higher is the satisfaction from the aspiration of finding the meaning of life. The lower it is, the stronger the existential frustration is. The number of points available ranges from 20 to 140 [21]. Apart from the

quantitative analysis in part A, an extended analysis can be conducted. Popielski and Płużek suggest using categories identified by them: 1. The objectives of life, 2. The meaning of life, 3. The affirmation of life, 4. Self-evaluation, 5. The evaluation of their own lives, 6. Responsibility and freedom, 7. The attitude to death and suicide [22, 23]. Part B consists of 14 unfinished sentences, which should be completed with the first thought which comes to the subject's mind after having read each of them. In this analysis the categories including the most frequent answers are isolated. In the final part of the test (C) the respondents are instructed to write a few sentences regarding their own aspirations, ambitions and objectives of life. Parts B and C PLT undergo only the qualitative analysis of the data obtained.

### Results

#### The results obtained in part A PLT

Among the prisoners not involved in hospice volunteering (1<sup>st</sup> group OB) an average result in part A PLT is 111, whereas among the prisoners performing hospice voluntary activities it is 118.1. The highest result obtained in the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB is 138, and the lowest one is 89. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB the highest result is 140, and the lowest one is 103.

These results indicate the difference referring to the understanding of the meaning of life in the researched groups. Slightly more than 70% of prisoners — volunteers indicated high and very high intensification of the meaning of life, which indicates a significant difference in comparison with the prisoners not involved in volunteering, who achieved the result of about 43%.

#### The qualitative analysis of part A PLT

In the first category — *The objectives of life* (questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 20) both groups express clear aims and aspirations. There are also no significant differences in the fourth category — *Self-evaluation* (questions 1, 13) as all prisoners describe themselves as enthusiastic towards life. However, while analysing their responsibility, the subjects from the first group indicate more moderate intensity of this feature than the subjects from the second group. The sixth category — *Responsibility and freedom* (questions 14, 18) shows further similarities of responses. The majority of subjects claim that every man entertains the freedom of choice throughout his whole life. They also express experiencing the feeling of directing and controlling their own lives.

The differences between the two groups can be only noticed while analysing some of the responses. The most significant difference can be seen in the

**Table 1. The results obtained in part A PLT in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB. Percentage distribution**

Bands of results obtained	Intensification of the meaning of life	The percentage of people in the survey (%)	
		1 <sup>st</sup> group OB	2 <sup>nd</sup> group OB
131–140	Very high	14,3	14,3
111–130	High	28,6	57,1
90–110	Average	42,8	28,6
80–89	Decreased	14,3	0
60–79	Low	0	0
20–59	Very low	0	0

second category — *The meaning of life* (questions 11, 12, 17), especially in the 11<sup>th</sup> question referring to finding the explanation for the meaning of their own lives. The prisoners — volunteers marked more positive answers than the prisoners not involved in volunteering. Two people from the first group gave the intensity of this feature 4 points and the other two less than 4. It should be emphasised that the 11<sup>th</sup> question was given the lowest number of points among all the questions in the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB. In the fifth category — *The evaluation of their own lives* (questions 9, 10), the prisoners — volunteers gave more moderate answers, describing their lives as average, in comparison with the responses provided by the prisoners from the first group. In the seventh category — *The attitude to death and suicide* (questions 15, 16) more differences can be noticed. Two of the prisoners — volunteers assessed positively their preparation in case of death and expressed the lack of fear of dying. Three others gave these features 4 points, and the other two admitted that they were unprepared for and terrified of death. The 15<sup>th</sup> question was given the lowest number of points among all twenty questions for this group. On the other hand, the majority of prisoners not involved in hospice volunteering described themselves as prepared for death. Only two of them expressed a negative attitude towards their own preparation for dying.

### The results obtained in part B PLT

Individual responses provided by the subjects from both groups have been divided into thematic categories. A thematic analysis and a percentage analysis are included in table 2.

The majority of subjects (over 70%) from both groups describe their lives in a very positive and interesting way (statement 1). They define their lives as cheerful, beautiful, interesting or surprising. The differences in the attitude towards life between both groups can be noticed only in statement 12. It is worth mentioning that five out of seven prisoners — volun-

ters define their lives as a superior value, the gift from God or the meaning of existence. On the other hand, in the first group only two people describe their lives in that way using stereotypical phrases. More than a half of respondents from the first group hope to be able to cope with everything or almost everything in life (statement 2). The situation is similar in the second group, among the prisoners — volunteers, although they emphasise solving problems and everyday difficulties.

When asked to complete the statement: More than anything else in life I would like to.... (statement 3), the majority of prisoners not involved in hospice volunteering indicate leaving prison and having money. On the contrary, the prisoners — volunteers indicate the importance of universal values such as: having children, health, happiness, long life, and do not mention imprisonment. It is similar to the responses given in statement 6 (statement 6), where the respondents had to identify the worst aspects of their life. The members of the first group mainly indicated prison, whereas the prisoners — volunteers referred to their own negative emotional states. According to them the worst thing is experiencing inability, helplessness, monotony and loneliness. The prisoners from the first group concentrate on leaving prison, whereas the prisoners — volunteers focus on their dreams and understanding of the causes of the difficulties experienced.

The responses to statements number 5 and 7, which refer to defining one's ambitions and main objectives, also seem interesting. The biggest ambition and the main aim for prisoners not involved in volunteering is having a family and supporting it financially, whereas the prisoners — volunteers point at education, individual development, achieving happiness, peace of mind and affluence. It is significant that in this group 3 people out of 7 did not refer to the statement about their ambitions. It can be said that the respondents in both groups talk about the same objectives but they do it in a totally different way.

**Table 2. The responses obtained in part B PLT in the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB. Thematic categories and the percentage distribution of responses**

no	Statements	1st group OB		2nd group OB	
		Categories of response	%	Categories of response	%
1	My life is	A very positive assessment of life: cheerful, wonderful, beautiful, fun	71,4	A very positive assessment of life: super, impressive, surprising, interesting	71,4
		Life is interesting	14,3	Life is valuable, an experience	28,6
		No answer	14,3		
2	I hope I can	Coping with everything or almost everything	57,1	Coping with problems, difficulties	71,4
		Ability to live according to one's liking	14,3		
		No specific ability mentioned	14,3	Self-development	28,6
		Cooking	14,3		
3	More than anything else in life I would like to	Life in freedom	57,1	Many things	28,6
				The desire to turn back the clock in order not to be imprisoned	14,3
		Money	28,6	Health	14,3
		Health and happiness	14,3	Happiness	14,3
4	In my life I have already achieved	Almost everything	57,1	Longer life	14,3
				Having children	14,3
		Specific achievements: in sport, retirement	42,9	Basic life goals	71,4
				A lot	14,3
5	My greatest ambition is	Family	85,7	Not much	14,3
		Achievement of a selected goal	14,3	Education, self-development	42,9
6	The most hopeless thing is			No answer	42,9
		Prison	71,4	Family	14,3
		Repeating the same mistakes	14,3	Facing negative states: inability, helplessness, monotony, loneliness	57,1
7	The only aim of my life is	Poverty	14,3	Prison	42,9
		Family	57,1	Achieving stability: happiness, peace of mind, affluence	42,9
		Leaving prison	28,6	Achieving a specific aim	42,9
8	I feel sad	Fulfilling dreams	14,3	Cessation of drinking alcohol	14,3
		Negative behaviour of others: wrong doing, jealousy, harming others	42,9	Difficult emotions faced by the family: visits, misunderstandings, tears	42,9
		Facing difficult states connected with sadness and misfortune	28,6	Pain	28,6
9	Death is	Thinking about family	28,6	Misunderstanding	14,3
		Death as an inevitable, natural phenomenon	57,1	Many things	14,3
		No answer, indifferent feelings	28,6	Death as the end of life on earth, natural phenomenon, the end of existence	85,7
10	Seeking solace in alcohol and drugs is	Negative phenomenon: hell	14,3	Death as a negative phenomenon is sad	14,3
		Very negative assesment of human behaviour	100,0	Very negative assessment of human behaviour	100,0

→

Table 2. Cont.

11	Illness and suffering might be	Negative expressions describing illness and suffering: nightmares, painful, hard, fatal, burden on the family	100,0	Negative expressions describing illness and suffering: incurable state, torment, the cause of a nervous breakdown, a sign of weakness, burden on the family	57,1
				Indicating a less severe course of illness and suffering : might be easier, milder	28,6
12	Life is for me	Positive expressions describing life: cheerful, wonderful, adventure, favourable	57,1	Life as a superior value: the most important, gift from God, the meaning of existence	71,4
		Life as a superial value: everything I have; the most important	28,6	Positive expressions: beautiful, happiness	28,6
		No answer	14,3		
13	Suicidal thoughts	No suicidal thoughts	85,7	No suicidal thoughts	71,4
		Eliciting negative emotions: horror	14,3	Negative assessment of suicide	28,6
14	Help offered by others	Phenomenon: needed, important, valuable	71, 4	Invaluable phenomenon, priceless, rare, expected	57,1
		Manifestation of natural human inclinations	14,3	Help as an important source of self-support	28,6
		Help as the source of positive emotions: very kind	14,3	Help as the source of positive emotions: nice, inspiring	14,3

As far as their achievements are concerned (statement 4), the members of the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB seem to be extremely satisfied with them, claiming that they have already achieved everything or almost everything in their lives (57%). On the contrary, the members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB give less spectacular responses, indicating the achievement of basic life goals (71%).

Three men from the first group indicate that they feel sad when they witness negative behaviour towards others, such as jealousy or hurting (statement 8). Besides, they find it difficult to deal with the thoughts of family (2 people), sorrow or misfortune. On the other hand, three people from the second group indicate a family as the source of sadness during their visits in prison (noticing their sadness and tears) or while dealing with conflicts and misunderstanding.

Most prisoners describe death (statement 9) as a natural phenomena. Four people from the first group use laconic terms defining death as a natural, inevitable process. Two others treat death indifferently, and another one defines it as hell. On the contrary, six men from the group of prisoners — volunteers describe death as the end of existence, the end of one's life on earth, and one of them uses a negative phrase 'death is sad'. Suffering and illness (statement 11) seem to be unambiguously negative. All prisoners from the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB describe illness and suffering as something terrible, painful, fatal or severe and a burden on their beloved ones. On the other hand,

the prisoners — volunteers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB define illness as an incurable phenomena, torment, the cause of a nervous breakdown, a sign of weakness or a difficult situation for the family.

Seeking solace in alcohol and drugs (statement 10) is negative according to all respondents. The prisoners describe such way of coping with difficulties as a nonsensical action. None of the respondents pointed at suicidal thoughts as their own way of dealing with difficulties (statement 13).

As far as help offered by others is concerned (statement 14), all respondents reacted positively. The subjects not involved in voluntary work describe helping as an important, precious, needed and kind activity. The members of the other group refer to it as priceless, invaluable, rare, expected, kind, inspiring and supportive for themselves.

### The results obtained in part C PLT

Isolating main thematic categories concerning the aspirations, ambitions and life goals made it possible to conduct a qualitative analysis of the third part of the scale. The subjects responded to a few thematic categories.

For both subjected groups a family and work play an important role in the context of aspirations. In all descriptions provided by the prisoners from the first group phrases like: 'to start a family' or 'a family' appear. Most prisoners from the second group also

**Table 3. The responses obtained in part C PLT in the 1<sup>st</sup> group OB and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> group OB. Thematic categories and percentage distribution**

Response categories	The percentage of people in the survey (%)	
	1 <sup>st</sup> group OB	2 <sup>nd</sup> group OB
Family: starting, maintaining good relations	100	71,4
Work	71,4	42,9
Leaving prison	57,1	0
Proper upbringing of children	28,6	0
Education	0	42,9
Psycho-spiritual development and satisfaction	0	28,6
Reverence and respect of colleagues	0	28,6
Happy life	0	28,6
Life in accordance with the law	0	14,3
Cessation of alcohol	0	14,3

consider a family to be important. However, their expressions used to describe it are more sophisticated and refer to relationships, e.g. ‘not to argue with family members’, ‘to start a loving family’, ‘to have a wonderful family’, ‘to live a quiet and prosperous family life’.

Work as a significant objective occurs in the statements of five people not involved in voluntary activities. What makes the statements in the second group different from those uttered by the members of the first group is a smaller number of indications and more complex phrases referring to work: ‘perfectionism at work’, ‘to ensure adequate financial support for a family’, to find a well paid job in a building site’.

In the first group leaving prison is a distinguished category. On the contrary, this category does not occur in the second group. Similarly, proper upbringing of children does not occur in the statements uttered by the members of this group, whereas in the first group this life goal is stated by two people.

Other categories presented in the table were not indicated by the members of the first group. It might be due to the fact that prisoners — volunteers provided more extended statements, indicated more aspirations and objectives than the prisoners from the other group.

Among the volunteers, apart from family and work, education seems to be another domineering category. Three people indicated their need to finish school and acquire better education. It is also inte-

resting that the category connected with spiritual development and morality was indicated by two people. One of them emphasised his willingness to maintain further mental and spiritual development. Another one in his questionnaire mentioned redressing the wrongs, financial support and help for the families of his victims. Apart from that, two people regarded as important the respect and reverence of their colleagues. The category — *Happy life* was also indicated by two people. ‘To live a long and happy life, which requires a lot of hard work’ — is a significant statement uttered by one of the subjects describing his aspirations.

### The summary of the research results

Both groups, the prisoners not involved in hospice -palliative care voluntary activities and the prisoners — volunteers, obtained high average results concerning the meaning of life.

The members of the first group mainly describe themselves as responsible, directing their own lives, having the freedom of choice and specified life goals. They describe their lives as beautiful and interesting using a set of stereotypical phrases. They hope to be able to cope with everything or almost everything in life. In view of these data, it seems interesting that they find it difficult to discover the meaning of their own lives. Their biggest dream is leaving prison and having money. At the same time they describe imprisonment as the worst experience in their lives. Asked about their most important life goal, they mainly indicate starting a family or supporting it financially. Evaluating their achievements, they state that they have already achieved everything or almost everything. Most subjects indicate that they feel sad when they witness negative behaviour towards others. They consider death to be a natural phenomenon and they perceive illness and suffering in an unambiguously negative way. The majority of them claim that they are not afraid of dying and are prepared for it. They negate suicidal thoughts and consider addiction to be a nonsensical way of solving problems.

The respondents not involved in voluntary activities concentrate on specific aspirations, which do not vary very much. They present limited life goals, which might reduce their opportunities of achieving the sense of fulfilment and life satisfaction. One might have an impression that most respondents consider leaving prison, starting a family and finding a job to be the most important objectives, although these goals are treated superficially. Short, enigmatic responses provided by the subjects may indicate the lack of realistic goals and plans of achieving them. Putting oneself



in a favourable position, positive evaluation of their lives and achievements may be a result of low self-consciousness and adapting self-defence mechanisms to protect them from absorbing difficult information in order to allow them to function normally. However, the above-mentioned research do not provide unambiguous basics for a complete analysis of the reasons of functioning of these people.

The subjects performing hospice-palliative care voluntary work describe their lives as meaningful, interesting, inspiring or surprising. The majority of them defines life as a gift from God, the meaning of existence or a superior value. They hope to deal satisfactorily with difficulties in life. Asked about their greatest aspiration in life, they indicate children, health, happiness and a long life. Among other aspirations, ambitions and plans family seems to be very important, especially the relationships between its members. The feelings of hopelessness, monotony, sadness and loneliness are considered to be the worst aspects of their lives. Among the most important life goals the prisoners state education, psycho-spiritual development, achieving happiness and the peace of mind, finding a job, redressing the wrongs and being respected by colleagues. Summarizing their lives, the majority of subjects indicate the fulfilment of basic needs. The prisoners feel sad meeting their families and seeing their sorrow and sadness, and when they face misunderstanding. They describe death as the end of one's existence on earth but admit experiencing fears connected with death and the lack of preparation for it. While referring to suffering an illness, they tend to use various expressions describing the negative results of their actions: terminal illness, illness as the source of a nervous breakdown, a burden on the family. They negate suicide, drugs and alcohol and describe helping others as an invaluable, rare and priceless phenomenon.

## Conclusions

The prisoners performing hospice-palliative care voluntary activities indicate a diverse range of life goals such as: family, work, development, health and happiness, and describe them using various adjectives. They concentrate on the future, as they seldom refer to leaving prison, and in this aspect they differ from the prisoners not involved in hospice volunteering. In their responses the prisoners — volunteers often refer to the area of feelings and relationships. They can admit to their weakness, difficulties and dreams connected with the presence of another person. It can be said that the majority of them do their best to look realistically at their lives, which increases their chances

to cope effectively with their future problems. These elements are less noticeable in the group of prisoners not involved in volunteering. On the basis of this initial research it is difficult to assess to what extent the fact of being involved in hospice voluntary work influences the above-mentioned forms of functioning of the prisoners. Many years of experience in hospice-palliative care volunteering programmes for prisoners together with the opinions of penitentiary counsellors and hospice teams, where the prisoners volunteer, make it possible to claim that the presence of illness and dying, staying with personnel, the sick and their families in an open surrounding, and everyday hospice reality may be the factors influencing the changes in the value hierarchy and life goals of the convicted. The phenomenon of voluntary work may prove to be important in the context of understanding the meaning of life and in the process of positive changes in the way of functioning of the prisoners after having finished serving the sentence. The problem referred to in this research requires further, more detailed analysis.

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