

# Dear Friend...

*We all have opinions, ideas and feelings that we would like to share but sometimes it is difficult to talk about them. Writing a letter can be a better way to say what you think.*



## Issues addressed

- Those related to the theme of the session

## Aims

- To encourage participants to express their views and feelings
- To promote empathy and understanding about differing points of view about a particular issue
- To encourage participation by members of the group who find it hard to speak in front of others
- To start discussion about solidarity, equality and mutual respect.

## Time

This activity should be done over one or two days and fitted into a wider programme.

Part A: 30 minutes

Part B: 15 minutes

Part C: 30 minutes

Part D: 45 minutes

**Group size:** 5 to 30

## Preparation

- Pens and paper
- Access to a photocopier

## Instructions

**Part A:** Identify two or three participants and ask them to write a personal letter to another member of the group about a particular issue e.g. about being a member of a minority, racism, Europe, injustice etc. The letters should end with an invitation to reply for example, "What do you think about it?", "Can you help me with this?", "What is your opinion?"

**Part B:** At the beginning of the next session, ask the writers to read their letters to the whole group.

**Part C:** Ask the people to whom the letters were addressed write their replies.

**Part D:** At the end of the session or the next time the group meets ask the recipients to read out their replies.

## Debriefing and evaluation

Start the discussion by asking the participants who wrote the letters to say what they learned from the activity and then ask the rest of the group to say what

they learned from listening to them. Continue the discussion with the whole group about the issues that were raised in the letters.

## Tips for the facilitator

This activity provides an excellent opportunity for people to think clearly about what they feel or want to say about an issue. It provides an opportunity for participants who have difficulties expressing themselves verbally to contribute to the group discussion. In this way the activity helps generate very positive group feelings and promotes personal understanding. It may also be useful when dealing with conflicts in the group.

This exercise works with any type of group but it functions particularly well with international groups.

The theme for the letters should be related to the purpose of the session. For example, if the issue is 'violence' then the starting point could be a recent event such as conflicts between different youth groups, a violent attack on somebody, a police raid on a Roma (Gypsy or traveller) camp, etc.

**Part A:** Your choice of the first writers should be made so as to take into account the diversity of the group e.g. one person from the majority and another from the minority; different kinds of minorities; a female and male, etc.

It is important that those writing the letters know who each other are so that they do not write to one another but target other members of the group.

While participants should be told to make the letters as personal as possible, it must be left to them to decide to what extent they do so. 'Personal' in this context means that the participants should somehow be able to identify with the issues, or that these are particularly pertinent to them.

One difficulty with this activity may be that some participants may feel that they 'cannot write'. They may need to be encouraged. It is very useful to hand out photocopies of the letters written in part A to each member of the group.

## Suggestions for follow up

Write letters about something that concerns you. Send them to the appropriate authorities, politicians or local papers. Make sure your views are known and help make changes.

Writing letters isn't easy. It can be very hard to say exactly what you mean, you have to choose your words carefully. If you are interested you could try 'White future' (page 181) which is an activity to explore the origins of words and how, by association, their meaning changes.