

Animals, people and environment at the county jail

Acting locally, thinking globally

By Marc Bekoff
For the Camera

A s part of the Jane Goodall Institute's (www.jane-goodall.org) Roots & Shoots program, for which I'm the roving ambassador, I've been working at the Boulder County Jail over the past eight years teaching animal behavior, conservation biology, and animal and environmental ethics. The discussions we have are extremely interesting and wide-ranging and it thrills me at how outspoken and informed these men are about important issues. I never leave without having learned something

that I incorporate into my daily life and my talks at professional meetings around the world.

The program in which I now teach is called "transitions" and it's anticipated that the skills that the men learn will be used when they are released. Sgt. Susan Yankovich, who oversees the Program Support Services for the Boulder County Sheriff's Office, has worked closely with me to be sure that this will happen. Lisa Lopez has also been wonderful to work with. When each segment of the course is over or when someone is released, they receive a diploma to show that they have taken part in the course and been successfully graduated from it. Roots & Shoots is about building appreciation and respect for animals, people and the environment. It

originally focused on youngsters but now there are thousands of groups for all age groups in more than 90 countries worldwide. And now, youngsters, seniors, inmates, and people confined in refugee camps are part of Roots & Shoots. A major aspect of this program stresses that all individuals matter, that the voice of each and every individual needs to be heard and that each of us can make a positive difference to make the world a more compassionate place for all beings. Individuals in the program are empowered to work for change.

Crossing the divide into a habitat in which I've never lived really has been an education for me. In my groups we talk about animal behavior and spend considerable time discussing ethics — how

humans should interact with animals and how we should interact with the environment. Discussions of animal behavior, animal protection, sustainability, and climate change rival those of my university classes and debates about animal thinking, emotions, pain, and ethics are informed and moving.

It never fails to impress me that many of the men with whom I work are also incredibly hopeful individuals. And they're helping to nurture hope among youngsters by writing letters and poems telling kids about the mistakes they made, stressing that jail just isn't the place to be if they really want to make a difference, if they want to be able to work for a better world.

ple ways, a Kool-Aid smile to light up your face.

We can all learn from one another and we need to build bridges that carry messages of hope, peace, respect, compassion and love. Perhaps more now than ever everyone should be encouraged to spread the word, for there are many reasons for hope.

So, if you're looking for something to go out and build new bridges, cross frustrating and challenging divides right here in our community. Act locally, think globally. Help those who are less fortunate get a fresh start. It isn't always easy, but it's a win-win situation for everyone. We all can make a difference and sharing messages of peace and hope with youngsters and keeping their dreams alive — for that matter sharing these messages with everyone and keeping everyone's dreams alive — certainly is a good road to travel.

Marc Bekoff (<http://literati.net/>) *Bekoff* taught biology at the University of Colorado at Boulder for more than 30 years. He is the author of many books and travels widely spreading messages of hope.

Many of the men with whom I work enjoy sharing messages of hope. Many have families and want them to develop and sustain hope in what often is presented as a bleak and hopeless world.

And they do indeed have much wisdom to share. Their messages often bring me to tears — sincere outcries to try to make this a better world for all beings — messages that stress the importance of "being a kid" and the overriding importance of having a positive self image and of boundless hope and love. Some of the drawings that accompany their prose are outstanding works of art, including a beautiful pencil drawing of Fifi, one of Jane Goodall's favorite chimpanzees, drawn by Jeff.

Some of the messages that I've gotten include:

- Kids out there — you don't want to be like us — it's up to you to change the world and make it a better place.
- Obtaining an education will help unlock the doors to gaining opportunities.



Pencil drawing of Fifi, by Jeff.

- If I could do my life over, these are the things I would do: Love myself, go to school to learn how to live, be a good friend, love and respect my family... you can feel in your heart what is right. Have faith and hope for the future. Be happy.

- Time passes very fast, so please don't waste it. You are all very special.
- Be a kid, have fun, play ball in the afternoon sun... climb trees and care about the birds and the bees... have simple days and sim-

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