



COALITION FOR WORK WITH PSYCHOTRAUMA AND PEACE KOALICIJA ZA RAD SA PSIHOTRAUMOM I MIR

MONTHLY REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2018.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

As will be seen, it has been a very busy month for us.

In the region, we are seeing the results of the depopulation and the lack of economic development. We also are seeing continuing ethnic tension, intensified by the commemoration this month of Vukovar coming into Serb hands, and by the actions of politicians. In this sense, the withdrawal of funding by the Norwegian government for an interethnic school is significant. The psychological state of the region continues to be quite poor. We do not expect improvement.

With regard to clients and groups and other therapeutic activities, we are continuing to supervise two therapists. We have a small number of clients. We are trying to keep the number of clients to a minimum because of the pressure of other work.

With regard to asylum seekers and refugees, the situation in the region continues to deteriorate in Serbia, Croatia, and particularly in Bosnia. The winter weather will make it worse. We do not have sufficient funding and personnel to do what we would like to do. There are issues with providing first aid to asylum seekers and those assisting them. Part of this is financial. Another part is their acceptance of it. Still another part is that the general attitude in the world is that "migrants" are a policing problem rather than a human one. We have been going to Belgrade, to Mikser House, weekly. We formed a local Serbian organization to comply with Ministry requests.

We also met with Aleksandar Dimitrijević of the International Psychoanalytic University of Berlin. We will continue this contact. Dimitrijević was escorting Vamik Volkan, whom Charles had met in 2003.

Further, we are working with Selma Porobić of the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic, who has worked in several places in the world with large refugee populations and is interested in expanding this work and with cooperating with us.

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Further, we have been working with Gwyneth Jones-Hamman to form a working group on migration and trauma. Gwyneth organized an online conference on this subject at the beginning of the month (<http://www.cwwpp.org/conference-trauma-and-mental-heal-in-conflict-and-migration.htm>), at which Charles gave a talk and where we provided technical support. She also is organizing a group on psychology and peace on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/psych4peace/?ref=bookmarks>).

We also have had contact with Johannes Cornelius van Nieuwkerk of Refival, who is working on models of refugee integration (<http://www.a1216.refival.org> and <http://www.informationphilosophy.com>).

Further, we gave a short talk for the Peace and Service Consultation of the Friends World Committee for Consultation European and Mideast Section.

An article by Charles just appeared in the Dutch Quaker magazine, De Vriendenkring, in Dutch. It gives a short summary of our work in the border town Tovarnik and shows how PET works.

At the end of the month, Charles gave a talk on the psychology of genocide for a class on the Holocaust at McGill University in Montréal electronically.

Further, we have started an education and supervision group with Capoeira al Shababi in Jordan and are hoping to expand that work.

We also are working on a proposal to work in Bukavu, Eastern Congo.

We listened to five National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM) webinars on trauma.

On the BBC, we heard about a group of Syrian refugees producing chocolate in Nova Scotia (<https://peacebychocolate.ca>). They are assisting refugees and peace groups. We have ordered some of these.

In short, it has been a busy month. We have huge amounts of work to do and have great worries about the future.

We continue.

THE REGION

Once recognized as a breadbasket region for all of the former Yugoslavia, two and half decades after the war and what is called the UN's most successful peace operation, Eastern Croatia, despite the perception of it as a fruitful field for numerous integration projects, is threatened with huge depopulation. Over the past few years, Croatia had lost twenty times more people due to depopulation than in the Homeland War.

As the lack of financial stability is cause of migration, it is clear that the younger population is moving from a region that is not capable of ensuring prosperity for everyone. This includes the issue of building human relations.

The lack of achieved progress in co-existence after reintegration is not just at the level of political rights. The construction of an intercultural school in Vukovar was meant to foster inclusiveness and reconciliation in a town that remains divided along Croat-Serb ethnic lines. But the project never took off and now the Norwegian Embassy is demanding its funding back. The intercultural school

was seen from the start as an unwanted child by both the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Croatia's ruling party, and the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS).

The mayor, Ivan Penava (HDZ), who had opposed the project both while in opposition and after becoming mayor, in 2016, when the school was founded, told the city assembly: "Back then [while in opposition] I thought the project was not good for Croatia and that a sovereign country with systematic policies should not allow foreign bodies into its legal framework, especially in education. I have not changed my mind. Unfortunately, our country apparently does not share my opinion as it started the project and brought it to its conclusion so that we could get the school in Vukovar, with or without us..."

Further, the prosecution of war crimes still is an open wound on both sides in this divided town.

This year, on the occasion of the commemoration of 18. November 1991, the day that Vukovar came into Serb hands, we had an opportunity for the first time to see publicly the reported number of 66 cases of male sexual mistreatment in concentration camps. We suspect that numbers are much higher. We hear of increasing numbers of suicides. We also are seeing quite a large amount of family violence and sexual abuse. We have wondered whether this latter is due to a truly increasing amount of such abuse or whether it has been present for a longer period and only now is being reported. We suspect the latter.

Generally speaking, there has been very little change in the psychological state of people since our last report and, in general, in the period that we have been in the region. We are the only organization in the region offering assistance with psychological traumatization. The importance of mental health and wellbeing is still undervalued and stigmatized.

CLIENTS AND GROUPS

We continue to have a small number of individual clients and therapeutic and educational groups onsite and online. We also are giving supervision to two therapists, one in Croatia and one in another country. We provide all services without charge. Some clients voluntarily and without pressure give us small contributions.

WORK ON THE SITUATION WITH MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Introduction

The situation with regard to migrants in the region is deteriorating. We are discussing how to go further with it given our funding and our time constraints. However, work with migrants is one of our highest priorities.

The General Situation

The general situation with regard to migrants in the Western Balkans is dire and inhuman. Rather than regarding it as a series of issues of people fleeing from war and injury and poverty, the European Union and all of the governments in the region are regarding it as a legal matter. Thus, there is prosecution and, to our minds, persecution, of the migrants themselves and of those assisting them. We think that the governments rather than the migrants are the criminals.

We now are coming into winter. The temperatures have dropped and there is rain, and there already is snow in some of the mountain regions. Thus, people are suffering.

In general, non-governmental organizations are not permitted to enter the official camps, particularly to give psychological support.

Another major issue is that of the attitudes of the beneficiaries themselves. They regard the Western Balkans as a region of transit. Thus, while, in our experience, many could get asylum if proper histories were to be taken, and that that is not happening is an issue in itself. Most beneficiaries want to go on to Western Europe. Another point is that, as more or less everywhere, mental health is stigmatized among the asylum seekers. Thus, to some degree, we are trying to convince the people themselves that they need assistance. This also applies to the people working with them. Most are secondarily traumatized by the stories that they are hearing. They are not getting education or psychological supervision. Also, there is the issue of good-hearted people who want to assist but who know little and who stay for too short a period to be of real use.

Another issue in this regard is the shortage of language and cultural interpreters.

Our Ideas and Strategies

We want to do what we always want to do, that is, educate and psychologically supervise people from within the migrant communities and from the communities of people assisting them. PET seems to be ideal for this, as it is flexible and can be applied virtually everywhere.

Croatia and Bosnia

This month, there has been an increase in the number of migrants moving through Bosnia. The conditions there are horrible, and there is a large amount of violence against migrants by officials. The Bosnian-Croatian border in the Bihač-Velika Kladuša area was closed for several weeks. We would like to be spending time in that region, but do not have the financial and time resources. Further, we wonder what we could do there for a short period. We very much would like to have at least one staff person there.

In Croatia, more non-governmental organizations have been excluded from the centers. We have not yet been able to gain entry, and have little hope of doing so given current politics.

Belgrade

We have been traveling to Belgrade every Monday for about the past year and a half. The issues are the same as those described earlier in this section, with a few more. We have been going to the Miksalište Center – Mikser House. Despite numerous emails, we have not been allowed into the official centers. Miksalište is a kind of transit center – day center. People can get some assistance with existential issues. We would like to have the funds to have a person for eight hours per day five days per week and more. We also need interpreters.

At the advice of the Serbian Ministry of Social Welfare, we have formed a Serbian local organization.

Contact with Alexandar Dimitrijević and Vamik Volkan

Vamik Volkan gave a talk in Belgrade at the beginning of the month. We were supposed to have a meeting with him and Alexandar Dimitrijević, who escorted him and who is a professor at the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin. Unfortunately, Volkan became ill at the last moment. Charles had met Volkan at the Austen-Riggs/Eriksson Institute in 2003.

The Report and Talk for the Friends World Committee for Consultation European and Mideast Section (EMES) Peace and Service Consultation

As has become usual, we gave a report on our activities at the EMES Consultation. The emphasis in our talk was on migrant work.

Contact with Johannes Cornelis van Nieuwkerk (Hans) and Refival

Recently, we have had several contacts with Hans and his organization. He has a number of excellent ideas about refugee integration. We recommend that you have a look at his websites <http://www.informationphilosophy.com> <http://www.a1216.refival.org> and <http://www.informationphilosophy.com> .

PET

Toward the end of the month, we heard that the first course was being translated into Croatian.

WORK ON OR IN OTHER LOCATIONS

Introduction

A number of people continue to ask us to extend our work, particularly on the PET courses. We continually put forward our blended PET model, that is, primarily online work with regular visits.

South Africa

We continue to work on the possibilities of training rural health workers in South Africa.

Jordan

This month, we started a weekly education/supervision group with Capoeira al-Shababi. This consists of four people. The issues they face are enormous. They have a quite a number of different types of refugees from the Middle East and Africa with whom they are working. The number of people in the camps and the region in which they are working is huge. We like the combination of body and psyche that martial arts entails.

We have written a proposal for a larger project.

Congo

Currently, we are working with a member of the Evangelical Friends Church in Bukavu, South Kivu, to write a proposal. At the end of the month, this was nearly complete. We also most likely will work with the Peace and Conflict Resolution Foundation, with whom we have been in contact for several years. We also are working to obtain the support for this work from Denis Mukwege, the recent Nobel Prize winner, and his institution, Panzi Hospital, as well as from other groups in Bukavu.

OTHER WORKThe Online Conference on Trauma and Migration

We were a partner in the Online Conference on Trauma and Migration, which took place at the beginning of the month. Gwyneth Jones was the organizer of it. Charles did the technical work of putting it up on our website and gave a talk. The link is <http://www.cwwpp.org/conference-trauma-and-mental-heal-in-conflict-and-migration.html>. Gwyneth and Charles want to form a working group on the basis of this. Also, a Facebook group on Psychology for Peacebuilding has formed on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/psych4peace/?ref=bookmarks>.

The Talk for the Holocaust Course for McGill University

Toward the end of the month, Charles gave a talk on the psychology of genocide for a course on the Holocaust at McGill University using Zoom. We offered a longer seminar for interested.

The Article for the Dutch Quaker Magazine “De Vriendenkring”

At their request, Charles wrote a two-page article for “De Vriendenkring”. It talks about our involvement with the village of Tovarnik on the Serbian-Croatian border before and during the migrant “crisis” of 2015.

Miscellaneous

We have watched a recent Bosnian movie directed by Alen Drljević called Muškarci ne plaču (Men Don't Cry). It shows a weekend of psychodrama work with former soldiers. It depicts situations that we have seen and we highly recommend it, if you can find decent subtitles for it.

In a search for a birthday gift for himself, Charles heard on the BBC about PeacebyChocolate. This is a group of Syrian refugees manufacturing chocolate in Canada. They are employing refugees and are promoting reconciliation and reportedly produce an extremely good product. We have written to them with regard to cooperation but have not yet received an answer. Their websites are <https://peacebychocolate.ca> and <https://peacebychocolate.ca/pages/natakallam>. We will report more next month when we have tasted it.

At the beginning of the month, the Global Psychosocial Network (GPN) had a meeting in which there was a talk by Nadika Paranamana, a woman who had lived through the wars in Sri Lanka and who now is developing tools for reconciliation. We agreed to talk further at a later date.

The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM) periodically has a series of webinars on trauma and related areas. As usual, we listened to these. They include some of the top names in the field.

A problem that we have been having this month is a flood of “friend” requests on Facebook. It is difficult to sort through them to see which are people genuinely interested in what we are doing and which are more or less spam. We can see a few that are reasonable. Still, it is an annoyance.

INTERNAL MATTERS

Funding is of great concern. We think that we now have sufficient funds until the end of 2019. This month, we received a grant from the Swiss Trauma Therapy Foundation.

CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

This has been a busy month. We also see huge amounts of work that will continue and expand. We continue to do our best.