



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

MONTHLY REPORT JULY 2019

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These months are very busy, externally and internally.

In Vukovar, we experienced the 13th Danube Film Festival. Unfortunately, it has changed from its original idea of bringing people together in a war-torn city to an event for the local political and other elites. Notable in this is a banner that hung all winter on a former warehouse and concentration camp at the entrance to the downtown of Vukovar, “I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians”, which is a quotation from the words of Ion Antonescu, the 1940s Romanian marshal who steered Romania into an alliance with Nazi Germany.

During the month, a decision from the Croatian Supreme Court about Cyrillic script in Vukovar substantially increased tension in the city, and Mayor Ivan Penava got substantial support and empathy from President Kitarević, proposing that there first had to be justice for Croatian war victims. We should note that the last time that this dispute arose there was a considerable amount of violence, with a number of serious injuries.

Also, during the month, Kitarević’s confirmation to a Swiss journalist of the practice of very violent Croatian police pushbacks of migrants at Croatia’s borders created large amounts of tension. The Public Attorney also confirmed that she has evidence that the police had a directive to ignore all international laws and simply push back migrants.

We also have heard, informally, that Croatia has fulfilled all requirements to become member of Schengen regime.

The heat and the weather in the region in general have been the cause of distress of a large number of people.

Unfortunately, we also must report the insanity of the US appropriation for so-called “defense” – in our view it is anything but that – of 1.48 trillion (!) USD. Think of what those funds could do for human beings, especially if weapons manufacture and use were to be banned!

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As we repeat each month, we remain the only organization in the region giving psychological assistance without charge.

We had seven clients this month, with most having the usual issues of having been abused as children, with the additional complications of the war.

We continued the group in South Africa, this time speaking about mourning and difficult situations at work. We started a group online with workers in Snehalaya, an Indian group working with the children of sex workers. Further, we continued the supervision of Ivan Maslow and Alphonse Kanda.

The migrant situation is becoming more and more concerning to us. The violent pushbacks by the Croatian police have been condemned by many human rights organizations. The situations in Serbia and Bosnia and elsewhere are inhuman and deplorable. We continue to work with No Name Kitchen in Šid, Serbia. Further, we continue to work online with Advocates Abroad in Greece. We also continued the seminars with students from the University of Belgrade. We have written a brochure for untrained short-term workers with migrants, of which there are many.

We have gotten translations of the manual of the course on the Caregiver-Client Relationship and Self-Care in Farsi and French and have agreed with a former volunteer for him to improve the videos.

We have been taking several relevant online courses. Also, Charles Tauber is learning Arabic online.

Further, we have been visited by a Swedish journalist.

We are continuing our contact with Search for Common Ground in Nigeria and with Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Ebola now has broken out.

Further, we have spoken with the Dr. Ani Kalayjian of the group Meaningful World and with Dr. Rain Warren, who has done work on listening in Rwanda.

The primary internal issue that we are facing is funding. We are extremely frustrated that we cannot do what we feel that we need to with regard to work in the region. The reason, again, is the lack of personnel, this due mostly to the lack of adequate funding.

In conclusion, we see the need for even more work and are frustrated by the lack of funds to provide personnel to do it.

STATE OF THE REGION

As the summer came to its peak, a colorful crowd attended the 13th Vukovar Film Festival. So, 13 years ago, a man (may we say refugee?), with a group of local people from Vukovar organized a film festival with the intention of and as an opportunity for bringing people together in a divided war-torn city. From that time, the festival has grown, but, somehow, the initial idea about integration has completely disappeared. The Festival survives only as a selection of the best movies from the Danube region for the local political elite and other “red-carpet” visitors. The huge banner for one of the films hung almost all winter over the ruin of a warehouse at the entrance to the downtown of Vukovar that, during WWII, was a concentration camp. What symbolism in the name of the movie hanging at the entrance to Vukovar! “I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians”, which is a quotation from the words of Ion Antonescu, the 1940s Romanian marshal who steered Romania into an alliance with Nazi Germany.

During the month, a decision from the Croatian Supreme Court about Cyrillic script in Vukovar substantially increased tension in the city, and Mayor Ivan Penava got substantial support and empathy from President Kitarević, proposing that there first had to be justice for Croatian war victims. We should note that the last time this dispute arose there was a considerable amount of violence, with a number of serious injuries.

Ms. Kitarević, as the current President and as a popular and populist presidential candidate, with a career in NATO, in her speech on the death of a young soldier, the first victim of the Croatian Afghanistan Peace Operation, promised that she would call G-d by phone to recommend his place in heaven. What can we say?

Recently, Kitarević’s confirmation to a Swiss journalist of the practice of very violent Croatian police pushbacks of migrants at Croatia’s borders created large amounts of tension. The Public Attorney also confirmed that she has evidence that the police had a directive to ignore all international laws and simply push back migrants. The situation got so bad that the BBC morning news show “Newsday” was reporting on it.

We also have heard, informally, that Croatia has fulfilled all requirements to become member of Schengen regime.

The heat and the weather in the region in general have been the cause of distress of a large number of people.

As we repeat each month, we remain the only organization in the region giving psychological assistance without charge.

Unfortunately, we also must report the insanity of the US appropriation for so-called “defense” – in our view it is anything but that – of 1.48 trillion (!) USD. Think of what those funds could do for human beings, especially if weapons manufacture and use were to be banned!

Furthermore, as we have reported before, the UNHCR has reported that, in 2018, there were 70.8 million refugees and displaced people. Most of these are being treated badly and with disrespect, and certainly their needs are not being met. This is a shame for the world!

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Introduction

We had seven clients this month, with most having the usual issues of having been abused as children, with the additional complications of the war. We continued the group in South Africa, this time speaking about mourning and difficult situations at work. We started a group online with workers in Snehalaya, an Indian group working with the children of sex workers. Further, we continued the supervision of Ivan Maslow and Alphonse Kanda.

The migrant situation is becoming more and more concerning to us. The violent pushbacks by the Croatian police have been condemned by many human rights organizations. The situations in Serbia and Bosnia and elsewhere are inhuman and deplorable. We continue to work with No Name Kitchen in Šid, Serbia. Further, we continue to work with Advocates Abroad in Greece. We also continued the seminars with students from the University of Belgrade. We have written a brochure for untrained short-term workers with migrants, of which there are many.

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We are continuing our contact with Nigeria and with Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Ebola now has broken out.

Clients

We had seven clients this month. The issues were the same as usual. All clients, who now are adults, were abused as children psychologically, physically, and/or sexually. Several are suffering from war traumas on top of that.

Groups

We had only one meeting with the South Africa group this month because of their other obligations. We spoke about death and mourning and difficult situations at work. A good deal of this is cultural.

We began to work online with a group in India called Snehalaya. The people there are working with children of sex workers. The children range up to about 18, and a few are older. The group also works with "graduates" over 18. There are about 250 children. Many of the mothers and some of the children have HIV. While some of the workers there are social workers and teachers, they urgently need training and support. Also, the workers are secondarily traumatized and need psychological supervision. We are holding the group weekly.

Supervision

We continued the supervision of Ivan Maslow and Meba Alphonse Kanda.

Ivan is working with two men who were sexually abused as children. Further, he continues to work with a man from a family with serious issues of trans-generational transmission of trauma.

Alphonse is very busy with students and his thesis and is doing well. He expects to finish his thesis by the end of the year.

The Migrant Situation

Introduction

The migrant situation is continuing to worsen. Many people are dying at sea. There is little if any psychological assistance for migrants anywhere. Migrants, and those assisting them, are considered to be criminals rather than people seeking to get away from war and to create new lives for themselves.

Finally, the brutal pushbacks by the Croatian police, which are supported by President Kitarović, are beginning to be highlighted internationally.

We find current policies completely inhuman everywhere around the world, and certainly in the regions in which we are working. We feel powerless and helpless. We are giving the small amount of assistance that we can.

Relationship with No Name Kitchen

We are continuing our relationship with them. One issue that they have is that their volunteers come for very short periods. This is problematic for the organization and for the volunteers. We are attempting to assist them through training and supervision.

Work with the Šid Group

We continue to work with the Šid group people working with No Name Kitchen. We now are doing it online to save travel time and fuel costs. The volunteers stay for only a few weeks, or two months at most. One of the reasons that we wrote the brochure for short-term volunteers – see below – is because of people such as them. Like all volunteers, they want to assist. However, like all volunteers, they need training and psychological supervision and become secondarily traumatized.

Work with Advocates Abroad

We continue to have meetings with Advocates Abroad in Greece weekly. Again, there is the problem of people being there for very short periods. There is an urgent need in Greece for psychological workers who will stay there for long periods. There are many migrants harming themselves and attempting suicide. Advocates Abroad is one of the few organizations recruiting psychological workers. They also stay for very short periods. They also suffer from secondary traumatization.

Work with Students from the University of Belgrade

The students are enthusiastic. What we are hoping is that, even with a small number, we will get a few useful people out of it. The group will have a hiatus for the month of August.

Another issue there is that UNHCR has not responded to our request for places, despite this being a joint project with the University. To say the least, we are upset with that.

The Brochure for Short-Term Volunteers with Migrants

We have written a brochure for short-term volunteers working with migrants and put it on our website and on Facebook. The link is <https://www.cwwpp.org/miscellaneous-educational-documents.html>. The brochure includes links to other sites.

Finding the Group Working in Tuzla on Facebook

We found on Facebook that there is a group working with migrants in Tuzla. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/144469886266984/>.

Further Comments

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the situation is getting worse and worse. There are strong reports of brutality at the Croatian borders that have even made the mainstream media such as the BBC World News. There is virtually no psychological assistance for migrants anywhere, nor are there funds around to gear up programs such as ours. We feel helpless and powerless. This has become a human tragedy!

Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET)

We heard from a former volunteer that he will improve the videos from the first course for us.

Thanks to Gwyneth Jones, we now have Farsi and French translations of Course 1, the Caregiver-Client Relationship and Self-Care. We are attempting to find other translators for other languages.

Courses Taken

Charles Tauber worked on a number of courses during the month.

He is following a free online course in Arabic from Duolingo, <https://www.duolingo.com/course/ar/en/Learn-Arabic>

Further, he finished a course on Community Health Workers. <https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/strengthening-community-health-worker-programs>

He completed a very elementary course on teaching traumatized children.

https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/teaching-students-trauma/5/todo/53340?utm_campaign=teaching-students-trauma-5&utm_content=GoToWeek_1&utm_medium=futurelearn_organic_email&utm_source=CRM_email&utm_term=CP_1_WTW_w1

He started a course on Religion, Conflict, and Peace <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:HarvardX+HDS2825x+1T2019/courseware/4021b6906f5a499096e8f783dbd92c5c/750dcebd3e2647f6be3881a53ca8b342/>

We take these courses more or less as a break from all of our other work.

Miscellaneous

We were visited by a Swedish journalist, Lisa Skeppstedt, who interviewed Charles Tauber. Ms. Skeppstedt was here for a five-day tennis camp for children, attempting to mix ethnicities. We will publish the article when it comes out.

We continued to have contact with a group working in northwest Nigeria. We are convinced of the need there both among the direct beneficiaries and those assisting them.

At the end of the month, we heard from our contacts in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo that they want to start a training group in French and English. We also heard that Ebola is very close by, in Goma. They are worried. We wish that we could do more.

We spoke to Dr. Ani Kalayjian of the organization Meaningful World <http://meaningfulworld.com>. We hope to cooperate with them in the future. Dr. Kalayjian is Syrian, of Armenian ethnicity. She would like to do work there, as would we.

Further, we spoke to Dr. Rain (Lorraine) Warren, a psychologist who did her PhD on listening in Rwanda. We contacted her through the Global Psychosocial Network, where she gave a talk. We agreed that we would like to work together, were it possible to find funds.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Introduction

The primary issue that we are facing is funding. While we have sufficient funds for the moment, we do not have funds assured for 2020 and beyond. We are extremely frustrated that we cannot do what we feel that we need to with regard to work in the region. The reason, again, is the lack of personnel, this due mostly to the lack of adequate funding.

Funds and Fundraising

Our funding situation is worrying. We are spending as little as we can, despite the needs that we see. At current funding levels, we think that we can survive into the first quarter of 2020.

One of the problems is that people and groups are not sensitive to this region, to mental health in general, to migrants, and to bottom-up long-term solutions.

Again, we appeal for any leads that readers may have.

PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

In terms of the region, we worry about possible violence to be caused by the requirements by the Croatian Constitutional Court for signs on public buildings in Cyrillic. We fear that this will be fanned by the politicians.

We see our groups and clients continuing, possibly with an increase in their number. This will put strains on our capacity.

We see the migrant situation also as worsening. We see that leading to our frustration with our inability to do much about it without substantially increasing personnel.

We will continue to work on PET to the extent that time allows us to do so.

CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

We continue to work hard on the substantial problems of the region and beyond. We see an increasing need for our work. We need funding urgently to be able to continue it.