



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

MONTHLY REPORT 2019 03

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Again, this has been a busy month for us. We spent a fair amount of time writing the annual report for 2018 and had clients and groups and worked on the migrant situation. The migrant situation continued to deteriorate badly. Further, the situation in the region remained more or less constant.

As to the situation in the region, politics continued as usual. We have heard that, again, the commemorations of the World War II concentration camp at Jasenovac will be separate between various groups. Further, the psychological situation in the region continued to be poor, this even being shown by a number of incidents highlighted in the media. We continued to be the only organization in the region giving “talk therapy” without charge.

With regard to our work internally, we finished and posted the Annual Report for 2018. It is available on our website at <https://www.cwwpp.org/annual-report-2018.html>.

With regard to external affairs, the number of clients remained the same as last month. The issues seen also remained the same – psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, trans-generational transmission of trauma, and low self-esteem. We continued with the supervision of one person in Croatia and one in South Africa. The issues again were similar to those of last month. The person in Croatia is working particularly with one family on trans-generational transmission. Our colleague in South Africa is working on a thesis in medical anthropology, with clients, and with students, and is trying to find a way for us to work together to train “barefoot therapists”/“peer supporters” there.

The migrant situation continues to deteriorate. The approach by governments is one of policing rather than of humanity. Amnesty International has brought out a report detailing abuse by the Croatian police. The non-governmental organizations with which we are working in the Kladaša/Bihač region of Bosnia are having difficulties in maintaining the services which they wish to because of that situation, and it will take a large effort to support them. We slowly have started working with an organization working with migrants in the border region of Šid, Serbia where the situation is very bad.

We have arranged to give seminars to students in the Departments of Psychology and Political Science at the University of Belgrade who wish to work with refugees. Further, we will give a seminar at the beginning of May for psychology students at the University of Osijek and will give two seminars for students from the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic at the end of May.

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We also have heard from a doctoral student in Berlin who wishes to work with migrants and those assisting them.

Outside of the Western Balkans, we are working on setting up projects in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa and are looking at work in other places.

With regard to publicity, we have had another article in the Dutch Quaker magazine, "De Vriendenkring". A chapter of ours on peacebuilding and trauma will be published by the International Leadership Association. Also, a visual presentation and article for the InPACT conference in Zagreb has been accepted.

SITUATION IN THE REGION

This year, again, there will be two separate commemorations at Jasenovac, the site of the largest WWII concentration camp in Croatia. This will be the fourth year in a row that separate commemorations will be organized, as the state did not take the necessary measures to stop or at least reduce the negation and revisionism of the Holocaust and genocide committed during WW II.

The Alliance of Antifascists of Croatia, the Serb National Council (SNV), the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Communities, and the Kali Sara Croatian Roma Alliance will organize a separate commemoration for the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp on April 12.

Following recent political scandals involving Regional Development and EU Funds, Minister Gabrijela Žalac of the opposition Živi Zid (Living Wall) party will enter into parliamentary procedure a bill of amendments to the Conflict of Interest Act under which every office holder would have to declare the assets of his/her immediate family, aside from her/his own.

The Croatian non-governmental organizations the Centre for Peace Studies (CMS) and Are You Syrious (AYS) issued a joint statement drawing attention to three aspects of Croatian police behavior: dehumanization, torture, and humiliation of refugees; rhetorical legalization of violence; and discrediting of organizations.

During the month, migrants illegally entered Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia on a daily basis. Croatia has so far been criticized by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Human Rights Watch, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights and, most recently, by Amnesty International over violent pushbacks of refugees and migrants to Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also recalled criticisms made at a plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg late last year.

The best illustrations in these turbulent times in which we live tend to be the "black chronicles" plastered across newspapers in the Croatian media. The Croatian public was totally shocked by an infamous domestic abuse case of a man beating up his eighteen-year-old girlfriend in Zadar, by a father who threw his four children off the balcony of the family home, and a by teenager of just fourteen years of age who killed his mother with a knife. We live in a society that is socio-economically deteriorating, in which generally dissatisfied people live.

Very often, the reasons for these types of unacceptable behavior are sought in the consumption of alcohol, narcotics, broken interpersonal relationships, or in some psychopathological elements. Seldom are the possibilities for normal functioning and fitting in with the rest of society seen.

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 continue to be the only organization in the region offering assistance on psychological traumatization. The importance of mental health and wellbeing is still undervalued and stigmatized.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Introduction and Summary

The number of clients remained the same as last month, at nine. The issues that they faced also remained the same, namely psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, trans-generational transmission, and low self-image, all aggravated by war experiences.

We continued supervision with one person in Croatia and another in South Africa. Our Croatian colleague continues to focus on a family suffering from trans-generational transmission of trauma. He, and we, believe that he is making progress. Our colleague in South Africa is working on his thesis in medical anthropology and with students and clients. He is trying to find a local group that will work with us on training “barefoot therapists”.

The migrant situation continues to deteriorate. The approach by governments is one of policing rather than of humanity. Amnesty International has brought out a report detailing abuse by the Croatian police. The non-governmental organizations with which we are working in the Kladaša/Bihač region of Bosnia are having difficulties maintaining their work, and we are doing our best to support them. We will start working with an organization in Šid, Serbia at the beginning of April.

We have arranged to give seminars to students in the Departments of Psychology and Political Science at the University of Belgrade who wish to work with refugees. Further, we will give a seminar at the beginning of May for psychology students at the University of Osijek and will give two seminars for students from the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic at the end of May. We also have heard from a doctoral student in Berlin who wishes to work with migrants and those assisting them.

Outside of the Western Balkans, we are working on setting up projects in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa.

With regard to publicity, we have had another article in the Dutch Quaker magazine, “De Vriendenkring”. A chapter of ours on peacebuilding and trauma will be published by the International Leadership Association. Also, a visual presentation and article for the InPACT conference in Zagreb has been accepted.

Clients

We had nine clients this month, with no new ones. The issues thus remain the same – sexual and psychological abuse by parents of people who now are adults. This causes problems of self-image and dysfunction on a wide variety of fronts. This, in turn, is aggravated by their war experiences. As always, we remain the only group giving psychological assistance without charge. Most of our work with clients is online.

Groups

The group in Split continues. The primary focus of it in March was trans-generational transmission of psychological trauma. Further, the group is interested in setting up an interdisciplinary team for emergency intervention.

Supervision

The supervision with a colleague in Croatia continues. The focus of the supervision is one family. This is going well. This couple also are giving seminars in a commune for addicts and are dealing with a number of other clients.

The supervision with our colleague in South Africa also continues. He is under pressures from many sides. He client load is high and difficult. These clients include people in poverty, those who have somatic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, and migrants. He has a large number of students. Also, the financial pressures on him are high. Further, he is progressing on his masters thesis in medical anthropology. Additionally, he is in contact with a church group that may produce an online educational group for us that may create barefoot therapists in the townships.

The Migrant Situation

Introduction

The migrant situation in the region continues to worsen. Among others, Amnesty International has published a report citing police violence in pushing back migrants to Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In all of the countries in the region, and in the European Union as a whole, there is the in our view reprehensible attitude that migrants are a problem for the police and not a problem of humanity. The stories that we are hearing about what people have experienced are very bad indeed. Also, there is an attitude of repression of volunteers and non-governmental organizations. As we have reported in the past, virtually no one is giving psychological assistance to migrants or to those who are assisting them. These volunteers are suffering badly from burnout. We are doing what we can.

Bosnia

The SOS Team Kladuša needs support. It is being held together by a very dedicated volunteer who is giving up important parts of his own life to try to keep the group together. The leader of the group is highly committed. He is recovering well from an incident of burnout, which is something that all of us working in the field have suffered from at one time or another. Furthermore, there have been legal challenges to the right of the volunteers to be there. The SOS Team is working closely with the No Name Kitchen (NNK), with which we have begun to cooperate.

We are holding a support group online every Sunday evening. This seems to be assisting a little. Also, several individuals from the group have reached out to us.

We see the situation there as extremely serious. We wish that we had time and personnel and funds to be in Kladuša and Bihač full-time. We do not. We are doing what we can online.

Šid

We have agreed with No Name Kitchen (NNK) that we will work with their ten volunteers and with the 80-120 migrants whom they are serving daily at very least weekly starting in April. The border region around Šid has had a fair amount of violence. On 1 April Charles Tauber went there and was shocked by what he saw. The “squat” where many young men are living is an open destroyed factory. NNK has set up a generator. People are, in fact, living in the open. The police regularly come and take away the tents. We will assist the volunteers and the migrants to the greatest extent that we can, given our limited resources. We will continue to report on what happens there.

Please also see the section on the University of Belgrade below.

Universities

We will start the training of students from the Departments of Political Science and Psychology of the University of Belgrade quite soon, that is, probably in April or May. Jointly with these departments, we will approach various organizations working with migrants in the Belgrade region, including the ministries and the Commissariat for Refugees and the UNHCR, with the aim of getting the students placed to work with the migrants and the volunteers and staffs of these organizations. We feel that we must try to do what we can, as the situation seems desperate in the region.

We will give a seminar for students from the Department of Psychology of Osijek on Tuesday 7 May.

With regard to the University of Olomouc in the Czech Republic, we have arranged to give online seminars on 22 and 29 May on the PET program.

We have heard from a doctoral student in Berlin that he wants to set up educational and supervision groups with volunteers with migrants and with migrants themselves. We are waiting for him to come back to us on this.

The Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo Project

Amos Malenga of the Evangelical Quaker Church in Bukavu is working hard on the local side of things. The Reverend Samuel Muderhwa and the Peace and Reconciliation Project in Bukavu also want to participate. We will be seeking funding for this project. Bukavu has a variety of issues, including the general situation of political and civil unrest in the Congo, refugees from Rwanda, and, currently, an epidemic of Ebola not far away.

The South Africa Project

As mentioned above, a colleague is working on setting up a project to train members of a church group in the townships around Johannesburg to be barefoot therapists. There will be more work on that in April.

Publicity

Charles Tauber wrote an article for the Dutch magazine “de Vriendenkring” on his motivation for the work that we are doing.

Further, we provided the last pieces of the bureaucracy for the article in the book on leadership and peacebuilding to be published by the International Leadership Association.

Also, an abstract for a visual presentation/five-page article for the InPACT Conference in Zagreb has been accepted. The paper will be published in the proceedings of the conference.

Miscellaneous

GPN

The meeting this month again dealt with various aspects of trust.

Patriotism and Nationalism as Mental Illnesses

Charles Tauber, at least, sees patriotism and nationalism and their ephemera such as flags, national anthems, etc. as mental disease processes. He feels that this is an attachment disorder and reflects the need for father figures and also is caused by brainwashing and by desires for control by governments and individuals, who use it for their own nefarious purposes. Unfortunately, it is a disease process that is a severe epidemic. Like all disease processes, it must be tackled by non-violent but effective means. The first steps are awareness and recognition of it. Unfortunately, there are too many people who deny that it is a danger, and many see such things as virtues.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

Introduction

The largest internal challenges for us are funding and personnel. We see the very large needs and are meeting them to the greatest extent that we can given current resources. However, we urgently need to be able to maintain current work and expand it. That requires more people and funds.

Fundraising and Finances

We ask for your assistance in finding potential funding sources.

Reporting

We completed the writing and the posting of the annual report for 2018.

CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

This has been a busy month for us, and we expect the coming period to be even more so.