



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

## Pragmatic Engagement of the Spirit

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### **Introduction**

The Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace (CWWPP) was formed informally in 1994 by a group of physicians, social workers, and others in response to the wars involving the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The primary registration of the CWWPP is in The Netherlands as a “stichting”, the most common form of registration for non-governmental voluntary organizations. We are registered in Croatia as a foreign non-governmental organization. The organization also is registered as a non-profit organization in the USA and has 501(c)(3) status. The organization has consultative status with the UN (ECOSOC). Further, the CWWPP is engaged with the Croatian Ministry of Justice in a program of probation and rehabilitation.

During the more than 21 years, the CWWPP has been working in Eastern Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We have worked with refugees, torture survivors, and war-traumatized groups. We believe it is time to apply our experience and passion towards helping a larger number of migrants and their helpers.

Charles Tauber comes from a refugee family and grew up in a neighborhood in New York consisting of asylum seekers and refugees and, before coming to the CWWPP, worked in movements for social change, this since 1966. From 1988 until 1995, Dr. Tauber worked with a number of groups doing examination and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in The Netherlands, including the Medical Examination Group run jointly by Amnesty International and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (the successor of this group is the IMMO, still working in The Netherlands). Further, during this period, he trained a variety of workers with asylum seekers and refugees including doctors, nurses, social workers, workers in collective centers, and lay volunteers. During this period, he wrote a training manual in Dutch for lay volunteers on work with asylum seekers and refugees. Charles Tauber is a Friend, currently a member of Northeast Netherlands Monthly Meeting of Dutch Yearly Meeting.

Sandra Marić is a sociologist brought up in a diverse ethnic background in Zagreb, where she also studied. She has worked as a teacher of social studies, including psychology, sociology,

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philosophy, and ethics, in the gymnasium in Vukovar and further has worked extensively in a variety of institutions for children and young people. She has been working with the CWWPP for more than 10 years. She considers herself to be a friend of Friends.

### **Forced Migration Overview**

Forced migration is a key aspect of our times. Large numbers of people are seeking relief from war, torture, and poverty. Accordingly, they are leaving their homes and seeking asylum in safer places. While a great deal of attention is being given to their immediate, humanitarian needs for food and shelter, virtually no attention is being given to their psychological needs, both in the short-term and, with regard to integration into receiving societies and recovery from their psychological traumas, in the longer term.

In 2015, approximately one million refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants reached the European Union, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. From January 2016 onwards, nearly 60 per cent of arrivals have been children and women. People have fled from conflicts, regional instability, and human rights violations, which include structural violence against women and children as a weapon of war.

Most of the refugees coming to Europe have witnessed and experienced violence, before and/or during their forced displacement. Thus, this was not only violence at the hands of their families or communities, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages or crimes of 'honor', but also forms of violence by strangers, e.g. smugglers, even detention facility personnel, border guards, asylum officials and reception center staff become present risks.

Forced migrations require multiple adaptations in a short time. In times of conflict, everyone is affected by violence; however, women and children in particular are more vulnerable to neglect and abuse, and are more at risk, especially of gender-based violence, due to the lack of social protection and lack of safe access to services. There is widespread recognition that gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence and exploitation, and child marriage, increases during conflict. Men and boys also experience sexual violence, especially in the context of detention and torture.

Some of the main issues affecting migrants identified by assessments include insecurity, overcrowding, inadequate access to basic services, rising rent and food prices, and competition for the limited work opportunities. Children have disruptions and barriers to adequate education, particularly when contending with language barriers or new curricula.<sup>1</sup>

Organizations that operate in the refugee camp Moria on Lesbos, Greece, have been warning for months of bad conditions and overpopulation of the camp. During the winter, even more difficult conditions are expected.

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<sup>1</sup> The preparatory classes in the Croatian language for refugee children exist only in a several primary and secondary schools in Zagreb, although all schools are required by law to have them. This is the task of the Ministry of Science and Education in collaboration with the Agency for Education. In addition to this problem, many children who attend classes because of the impossibility of having a Croatian Identification Number (OIB), they are unable to be formally enrolled in school or a vote. It is important to emphasize that the OIB is the responsibility of the Finance Ministry, which is not responding to existing needs.

Almost every third child refugee who was followed disappeared since the refugee camp The Jungle in Calais was demolished in October. The organization Refugee Youth Service reports that it cannot be determined where a third of the 179 children of migrants who were followed since the French camp where almost 10,000 people who have fled wars in the Middle East and in Africa lived, was destroyed are.

These people also are at risk for a wide range of mental health issues, having experienced very high levels of trauma: 79 percent had experienced a death in the family; 60 percent had seen someone be shot or physically hurt; and 30 percent had themselves been physically hurt. Almost half displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—ten times the prevalence among children around the world.<sup>2</sup> Note: we prefer not to speak of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but rather of post-traumatic stress *reactions* (plural), first, to take these natural reactions out of the pathological sphere and, second, to indicate that the reactions go beyond the strict prescriptions found in the standard psychological references. Our standpoint is endorsed by many mental health professionals.

Children exposed to trauma can have difficulty regulating their emotions as well as difficulty knowing and describing their feelings. Symptom formation and psychopathology including long-term effects on personality development can result in high numbers of emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety and phobic disorders and co-morbid conditions like alcohol and drug abuse and antisocial behavior. More intermediate-term consequences of childhood trauma are likely to reside in higher rates of risk for the development of conduct disorders, higher rates of teenage pregnancy, dropping out of school, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. Also, childhood trauma may increase the risk of psychotic experiences.

These factors all contribute to the increased rates of gender-based violence and the urgent need for tailored responses. Gender-based violence crimes have devastating immediate and long-term effects on the lives of survivors, their families, and the communities in which they live, changing the development and future of the receptive society.

In addition, we are concerned about the mental health reactions of the volunteers and staff caring for asylum seekers and refugees, including those working with them as carers as well as those involved with them in more peripheral ways. Our experience (also see below) is that such people are very easily secondarily psychologically traumatized, that is, they take on the traumas of the people with whom they are working by listening to them and identifying and empathizing with them. Unfortunately, we see virtually no other groups working with these issues.

### **Our experience: More than 21 years In the Company of War-Affected People in Eastern Slavonia**

Accompaniment as a concept, with a root in the word *compañero*, which means a companion or friend, is used when speaking about accompanying those who are poor, refugees, displaced persons, prisoners, and so on. Accompaniment derives from the human rights and social

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<sup>2</sup> Selcuk, R. Sirin Lauren Rogers-Sirin. 2015. The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children. Washington D.C. Migration Institute

development fields (Mahoney and Eguren, 1997). It comes, in part from liberation theology<sup>3</sup>, the precursor to liberation psychology (Martín Baró, 1994). Psychosocial accompaniment has its roots in psychosocial and community wellbeing. At the very least, accompaniment of this sort requires commitment, time, openness and willingness to learn, negotiation of and joint reflection on relationships as they change over time, independence from agency allegiances and responsibilities, patience, a sense of humor, the ability to listen and hear in non-judgmental ways, a flexible approach to and understanding of more familiar interpersonal boundaries, including, amongst others, those of 'friend', 'helper', 'client', 'expert', 'facilitator', and continual reconsideration of ethical judgments.<sup>4</sup>

Staff and volunteers providing assistance to refugees and migrants are frequently exposed to the narratives of personal tragedy and fear. How they perform their roles has remarkable impacts on people's psychosocial well-being and their ability to recover. They often work under physically demanding and unpleasant conditions. In view of psychosocial support, engaging with communities is important. Nobody is a greater expert on any given community than members of the community itself. Unfortunately, helpers frequently experience moral suffering over the choices they have to make, and such circumstances may have adverse consequences such as over-involvement with beneficiaries, anxiety and depressive feelings, callousness, apathy, self-destructive behavior (such as alcohol or other substance abuse), and interpersonal conflicts.

According to recent research in Germany, 70% of people believe that dealing with the wave of refugees is one of the greatest challenges facing the country. 71% are convinced that terrorist groups pose a serious threat. "The feeling of being personally at risk has increased enormously. Nearly half the citizens of Germany are seriously worried by the refugee situation in the country." according to Wirtschafts Woche.<sup>5</sup> People fear illness and death less than human destruction and humiliation. Issues lie with having a sense of security, control of own lives, self image and identity and mental health as being assaulted. Unfortunately, there is insufficient capacity.

We believe that capacity can be increased through the training and supervision of migrants themselves and of the work of activists and professionals who work with migrants as a form of support and prevention of professional stress and burnout. Using modern technology, this can be done in online as well as onsite form.

### **Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET) ©CWWPP 2016**

The CWWPP has developed a program for training and supervision of volunteers and all those working with traumatized people. The program began in The Netherlands in the late 1980s when Charles Tauber was working with asylum seekers and refugees. During this process, many volunteers, most of whom were uneducated in psychology or medicine and who were not

<sup>3</sup> The liberation theology approach to accompaniment is usually attributed to Archbishop Romero (1917-1980) After witnessing numerous violations of human rights, he began to speak out on behalf of the poor and the victims of repression (la voz de los sin voz), literally laying down his life for those amongst whom he lived.

<sup>4</sup> Irene Edge, C. Kagan, A. Stewart.; *Living Poverty in the UK: Community psychology as accompaniment*, pg. 26. <http://www.compsy.org.uk/LivingPoverty5b.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [Bert Losse](http://www.wiwo.de/politik/deutschland/allensbach-umfrage-die-deutschen-sorgen-sich-um-ihre-sicherheit/12737298.html): Die Deutschen sorgen sich um ihre Sicherheit <http://www.wiwo.de/politik/deutschland/allensbach-umfrage-die-deutschen-sorgen-sich-um-ihre-sicherheit/12737298.html>  
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receiving training or psychological supervision, requested assistance. In this way, “Pragmatic Empowerment Training (PET)” was developed.

The methodology is that of person-centered education, using the narratives of the participants, as one of the best ways to attend to unheard voices, to increase their knowledge, skills and insights, including a large amount of discussion and practice. The general philosophy is that of “you have the elements with you; we will assist you to bring it out and we will be there to support you”.

The course and the gatherings can be onsite as well online. Our experience has been that the course takes about 120 hours, which usually is divided into sessions of two hours once or twice a week. The curriculum includes basic work with people, interpersonal and group communication, basic psychology and counseling, non-violent conflict transformation, civil society, and human rights. The curriculum can be adapted to the needs of the group. Groups range from 5-16 persons, the latter being an absolute maximum. We will send you a more complete outline of a possible curriculum upon request.

We see our work as long-term, both for the migrants and refugees themselves, for those working with them, and for the social environment in the receiving region. Thus, it must be continuous for long periods. Accompaniment requires time and commitment.<sup>6</sup> We all have witnessed many times how serving and working for poor is pleasant from warm academic chairs and rooms, but working with the poor requires us to live with them and to share the pain and grief with them.

The work is very human. While there are laws and rules surrounding it, we feel that the accent needs to be on the people receiving it. We see most groups concentrating on judicial aspects. In this context, people need to take responsibility for themselves. Many have done that already, through their flight and through their actions during the flight. Yet, we emphasize that the decisions and the initiatives must be *theirs*, not ours. In this sense, we see ourselves as *facilitators* of the processes of adaptation to the new situation.

Further, again we emphasize that we see the traumas that people have gone through and their reactions to them as *reactions* and not as pathological *disorders*. Thus, if we think about people in their situations, most of us, given similar circumstances and similar knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes, would react similarly and can understand and feel the reactions.

Again, we return to our role as facilitators. We thus open safe spaces – physical, emotional, and in terms of time – where the reactions can take place. We assist people in learning about human reactions and the background to them. We assist them in learning new methods of reacting, taking into account their personal circumstances, for themselves.

This methodology allows for three types of processes to occur, that is,

- direct learning of content, skills, and attitudes;  
The training helps people to help others at important moments in their lives – during significant life events that require change and adaptation, in the midst of needing to make important life decisions, or after exposure to crisis situations. Through the listening

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Griffin, Jennie Weiss Block: *In the Company of the Poor: Conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez* by Paul Farmer, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2013, pg. 198.

and helping skills which we help people to develop, as well as their own generic skills and helping abilities, they can assist people in need to navigate times of great distress and regain their ability to cope and recover. The basic aim of the course is to develop competencies by increasing their knowledge and skills, and to change their attitudes toward themselves and the people whom they are assisting. This includes the capacity to deal with the consequences of psychological traumatization, which we see as central to the problems of creating conditions for peace, reconciliation, and social reconstruction.<sup>7</sup>

- supervision, this in the psychological sense;  
Several studies suggest that level of burnout among professionals such as social workers, physicians, and other humanitarian workers is high in relation with other comparable occupations<sup>8</sup>. Volunteers are often victims of needs in emergencies, selected on the basis of their availability rather on their skills, training, etc. Their firsthand experience on the frontline and their needs are demanding. Supervision is important not only as a form of continuing education. Psychological supervision is a way to prevent stress and burnout of helpers. As many of them are providing assistance to migrants, it is important for them to connect with each other and cooperate. They have to be aware of early signs of stress. Supportive organizational culture and regular periodic supervision is important. Good practice in supporting staff well-being is a key management function. Supervision is not a luxury in any sense, particularly when working with non-professionals, but also when working with professionals it is essential.

Supervision should not only include discussion of the work but also discussion of the life of the worker and the influence of transference and counter-transference on his or her work;

Supervision is defined as one-on-one work; intervention is defined as work within a group. The frequency of supervision depends on the severity of their problems and the experience of the volunteers but should, in general, occur at least weekly and, with difficult work, more often.

We should note that such supervision also *must* be given to asylum seekers and refugees working with one another, and those working as translators, lawyers, and in other tasks. They have multiple burdens – their own traumatization as well as the traumatization of those whom they are assisting.

- therapy.  
First, the educational groups, because of the methodology involved, include a form of group therapy without the associated stigma.

Further, our general methodologies include the use of self-help groups<sup>8</sup> and lay counselors, including the training of “barefoot counselors” and “barefoot peacebuilders” in order to increase capacity within the community. Recognizing the extent of this need,

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<sup>7</sup> see more: <http://www.cwwpp.org/pragmatic-empowerment-training-pet.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cwwpp.org/peer-counseling-and-self-help-groups.html>

the work of CWWPP was begun in 1995, initially to provide direct mental health interventional services to communities (including displaced asylum-seekers) recovering from war. However, like the biblical parable of the man in the boat at sea in a storm “oh G-d, your sea is so great, and my boat so small,” it soon became obvious that there never could be enough mental health professionals. Rather, what was needed was a group of properly trained local residents who, even while themselves recovering, could learn the fundamental “tools of the trade” and provide practical supportive peer counseling services to their peers. The concept of a “barefoot therapist” has certain advantages. Clients do not feel as isolated as they ordinarily would. Clients do not feel that their problems are unique and not understood. Clients can share experiences with one another, which may lead to mutual assistance. These groups frequently do not carry the stigma of group therapy and/or of going to a psychiatrist or psychologist. Self-help groups share the standard advantages of group therapy. If non-professional leaders are used, there is a greater coverage of the affected population and thus greater penetration into the community and greater access for clients. The costs per client are lower, especially as many leaders are volunteers.

These groups are not for every client. Some clients still will require (a combination of) individual treatment and/or more specialized treatment. Thus, group leaders must know their limits and know when to refer the client to someone at a higher level. Self-help groups are an efficient and inexpensive way of dealing with large numbers of clients. They also have a number of other advantages, including much less stigmatization than usual therapy. It is essential, however, that there be good training and supervision.

We thus strongly believe that people can assist one another and form groups to do so.

### **Conclusion**

*“The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction.*

*True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.”<sup>9</sup>*

In this quotation lies the answer to the question of how Quakers can respond and what Quakers have to do. We feel that work with migrants is essential from a number of standpoints. Primary for us is working with our fellow human beings. However, we also see dangers in *not* doing it. The frustration of bottling up the trauma is well known. This easily can explode in violence. This not only applies to the current “first generation” migrants and refugees. Their children, and future generations, also are affected by it. Furthermore, we see problems with the creation of integrated societies if this work is not done.

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* pg. 88.

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

We look forward to opportunity to build strong capacity for supporting people providing humanitarian help. We expect that, helpers can obtain knowledge and skills and supervision of the work that will ensure the continuous education and support in the work, which ultimately contributes to the wellbeing of helpers.

We are willing to form online groups without charge and to ask only our expenses for travel and accommodation for onsite groups.

We thus appeal to Friends – and friends of Friends – to work with us on these vital issues.

