

SOCIAL INCLUSION – BELGIUM: L’art de la résilience

SUMMARY

Multi-year programme for asylum seekers and migrants, since 2017 in Belgium, in collaboration with Fedasil, the Belgian Federal Agency for the reception of asylum seekers, as well as the Belgian Red Cross.



Where

Fedasil and Red Cross centres all across Belgium



When

Ongoing since 2017



Type of mission

Group art therapy interventions
Art-based capacity building & trainings



Participants

Asylum seekers and migrants
Children, unaccompanied minors and adults

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CONTEXT & OBJECTIVES

The forced migration situation for people arriving in Europe, often in dangerous and risky ways, is not a new phenomenon. The search for safety, in the face of persecution and conflict, or the search for economic security, has resulted in many people deciding to move to Europe.

Asylum seekers very often present severe psychological and psychosocial effects due to events and conditions in their place of origin and due to the migratory and adaptation process. There is a greater impact on children and unaccompanied minors who have to cope with a situation that is not appropriate to their stage of development and because they are in a determining evolutionary period for the development of their identity and personality.

Various studies as well as our own experience and this of our partners show that asylum seekers have a need to work on emotional regulation and coping strategies to adjust to a migratory process taking in mind all the losses they have to deal with and a need for the creation of a social support network.

IMPACT

THE RED PENCIL (EUROPE)

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When we rescue the child,
we save the adult

Our programme carried out in collaboration with Fedasil and the Red Cross has benefitted many asylum seekers since the very beginning, some of them coming from Ukraine, just as our programme in Spain does.

One of the Red Pencil art therapist, who gave group art therapy sessions, to young mostly Afghan men reports about her experience:

"After gathering some information about the group, I called this cycle "A place to be together". As it turned out, it was a very accurate name reflecting well the sense of trust and belonging in the group.

As an expressive arts therapist specialized in trauma-informed and culturally sensitive care, I frequently work with people of various nationalities and cultures. However, this was my first therapeutic experience with a group of young men. Prior to the project, I found it somewhat challenging to imagine how I could potentially connect with that group. To my own surprise, I had some initial difficulties with identifying themes and art directives that we could explore together. Still, my attitude was to stay curious, open, and receptive.

All doubts faded away as soon as I entered the group and naturally connected with the participants. Arts gradually helped us to develop a mutual trust, find alternative ways of expressing and communicating without words, and developing a great curiosity towards each other. I very quickly understood that flexibility and the ability to improvise were my greatest resources in the given setup. Step by step and session by session, our therapeutic relationship deepened. That felt extremely touching and rewarding. End to end, I would describe our "space to be together" as lively, open, inviting, accepting, playful, curious, non-judgemental, flexible, safe, and comforting.

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Reflecting back on this cycle, I would say that it was very special and had a great impact on my perception of young men. It touched me to hear the beneficiaries speaking openly about their broken hearts, as they dived into the creative process. I felt privileged to hold their sorrows, fears, little joys, and playful ideas. What I learned from them was to give myself (and others) permission to show strength and stay vulnerable at the same time. As much as some of the narratives we explored during the cycle were difficult and painful, there was also a lot of joy, spontaneity, and resilience emerging during our time together. All those moments stayed with me and found a place in my heart. They also opened up new opportunities for my therapeutic practice. In particular, I have started to work with a number of new male clients.

Summarizing, I would like to express my gratitude to The Red Pencil for trusting my therapeutic skills and giving me an opportunity to expand as an art therapist. At the same time, I would like to emphasize that art therapy has a tremendous potential to help people in movement to find more resilience, restoration, and peace. To express. To embrace their resources and feel worthy again. To be heard and seen. The secret of the arts, as I see it, lies in the ability to connect people of various nationalities and cultures on a level that is simply human and indigenous to all of us. When we make art, it becomes easier to connect with others, abandon stereotypes and colonizing attitudes, become more receptive,

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