

Karlsruhe, 3 June 2016

## **Eurhythmy with Firefighters Emergency Pedagogy Mission in Ecuador**

**The earth quakes in Ecuador –the country has been again and again shaken since April 16<sup>th</sup> 2016. The people are visible marked, the many aftershocks send them into fear and horror. The emergency pedagogy intervention team of the *Friends of Waldorf Education* helped especially children and adolescents to find new stability, orientation, and security. In cooperation with the municipal authorities, the German Honorary Consul, and multiple schools, seminars were given to train local aid workers and pedagogues so that they can continue to help affect persons after the team's departure.**

One of the most important tasks of an emergency pedagogy crisis intervention is, in addition to the direct acute care of children, to inform pedagogues and aid workers about the development, course, and possible effects of a psychotraumatisation and to show them emergency pedagogy methods for handling traumatic behaviour of children and adolescents.

All together around 500 teachers, pedagogues, and aid workers took part in seminars in Bahía de Caraquez, Guayaquil, San Vicente and Pedernales.

Special to this mission was the fact that for the first time the emergency pedagogy team consisted mostly of local colleagues. Eight of the twelve team members live and work in Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, and Chile. Here one can see how important and helpful a functioning network on the ground is. The mission ran so smooth and well due to the professionalism and reliability of the South-American colleagues.

In the first week, the team worked in Bahía de Caraquez. The majority of buildings there are destroyed, the vital tourism industry has utterly collapsed and in some parts the city resembles a ghost town. Already in first meetings with teachers it became clear, what people there were forced to experience. Directly in front of their eyes family members were buried, friends pulled from the rubble. Almost all here and also in Guayaquil show typical trauma symptoms like sleep disorders, stomach and head aches, up to dissociations and flashbacks. Many feel powerless and some even guilty when faced with the events. In lectures and workshops, emergency pedagogues showed them ways to deal with their experiences and thereby lessen post traumatic stress disorders. A deep understanding for posttraumatic reactions can show people new ways to access their inner lives. Psycho education and training in methods offer them the possibility to stabilize themselves so that they can then transfer this calm to affected persons.

Especially the firefighters showed at first scepticism but were after a short while also excited. In Guayaquil, for example, there was the impressive image of 30-40 firefighters doing eurhythmy, kneading with clay, and opening themselves up to the unusual methods with joy.

The further north one goes, the more devastating the affects of the earthquake. Pedernales, where the team worked in the second week, resembles a debris field. Because the buildings are not inhabitable, a provisional tent city was set up as a school. Here the emergency pedagogues began their work with a total of around 500 children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years old. They showed significant shock and trauma symptoms. Preschool aged children, who didn't stop crying and complaining about pain; adults who are either totally in shock or show excessive and compulsive occupations.

So-called secondary traumatisations could also be often observed. Like Stefania, whose mother reported sleep disorders and strange behaviour in her daughter. In meetings it is revealed that the child wasn't directly in earthquake region. Not the earthquake itself caused the traumatic shock but rather the panic fear of her mother and the subsequent media reports which she followed.

Trauma expresses itself as a shock-like torpor. As long as this shock-induced paralysis isn't resolved, the emotional wounds cannot heal. Especially movement games work against paralysing movement aversion. Painting and sculpting allow for the expression of that which cannot be verbally expressed. Stabilisation methods based on Waldorf pedagogy are especially effective in the acute shock phase of the trauma process.

**In order to finance their mission, the Friends of Waldorf Education are dependent on donations.**

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*The **Friends of Waldorf Education** are worldwide sponsors of a free education system. Since 1971 they have advocated for Waldorf education and the freedom of education systems. Since 1993 the office in Karlsruhe has organized and supervised international volunteer services worldwide and has to date made it possible for over 7,000 people to complete a social service in over 350 projects in more than 60 countries. Now around 600 young people annually take part in the programme. Since the summer of 2011 it has also been possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions in Germany through the association. Since 2006 the Friends of Waldorf Education have been active in the area of emergency pedagogy. Following the outbreak of a war or a natural disaster, they worked with psychologically traumatized children and adolescents in Lebanon (2006), China (2008 and 2013); Gaza (2009-2013), Indonesia (2009), Haiti (2010), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Japan (2011), and Kenya (2012-2013), the Philippines (2013-2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), Nepal (2015), Greece (2015), Slovenia (2015), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2016), Germany (2014-2016), and Ecuador (2016).*

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