

Refugee Children in the Camp of Šentilj: Emergency pedagogy stabilises

Report from Mission Leader: Bernd Ruf

In seemingly endless lines, a trek of suffering drags on from the provisionally set-up temporary train platforms into the Slovenian refugee camp Šentilj: The young, the old, very pregnant women, injured people, sick people, fathers with exhausted children on their shoulders and young men carrying their friends whose legs have been amputated. In long rows whole families hold hands or hold onto each others' shoulders in order to not lose anyone in the crowds. 7,000 to 10,000 refugees pass through here daily on their way to the border crossing at Spielfeld to Austria, accompanied by heavily armed police units.

Arisha is seven years old. She stands fearfully and panicked, separated from her family, in the middle of the refugee chaos, alone in no man's land between Slovenia and Austria. After a long time I am able to make out her father behind a chain of Austrian soldiers, with the screaming girl holding my hand. This attempt, to bring the girl to her father, almost gets me beaten by a totally overwhelmed soldier, who suspects that the family reunification will bring a destabilisation of the public order. Only with the collaboration of the responsible section leader, am I able to bring Arisha to her father. When I then look back as I walk away, I see how Arisha's father clasps his hands and bows forward deeply. A deep thankfulness lights up in the eyes of Arisha. It is for such eternal moments of humanity, for which the emergency pedagogy of the Friends of Waldorf Education are active worldwide.

Among the refugees, there are many unaccompanied children, of which several are heavily traumatised. The flight traumata occur here in cumulative, traumatising stress reactions which often first develop in the third sequence of events during the flight. The concept of sequential traumatisation *"takes into account the lasting and child specific stressors, with which children and teenagers are subjected to in the context of war and displacement"*.¹ Sequential traumatisations *"are triggered by repeated experiences which takes place over a longer time period (...)"*.²

Hans Keilson showed in a 25 year follow up study of Jewish war orphan children in Holland, that *"the extremely stressful situation (results) (...) from the continuous effect of massive, mutually reinforcing traumatic situations, which also go on after the war, so after the conclusion of the persecution itself"*.³ The arrival in Europe does not therefore mean an end to the traumatisation, but rather the most painful phase of the processing process just now begins.

An emergency pedagogy intervention team of the Friends of Waldorf Education supported children and adolescents with the processing of the traumatic experiences in the refugee camp in Šentilj, Slovenia⁴ during a mission in November.

In the provisionally heated mass accommodation facilities, the very confined space dominates. People camp out in blankets draped on field beds set up side by side. About 1,000 people are in each big tent. Everywhere in the camp there are measuring stations, with whose help the health authorities are trying to recognise the outbreak of a feared epidemic early. About two thirds of all refugees are either sick or injured. Infections, fever, respiratory diseases, diarrhoea, and skin disease are widespread. Many injuries, gunshot wounds, or broken bones are insufficiently cared for. In the emergency sick bay of the Slovenian Red Cross, there is intense activity. *"We are performing war medicine here"*, describes a doctor, almost ashamed of the standards of medical care.

The food given out under police protection is scarce. Sometimes for the last people waiting in line there is only a spoonful of soup and a piece of bread leftover. *"We are administering an insufficiency here"*, comments one of the many volunteer helpers. Without them the care for the flood of refugees would have already long broken down. Also the pedagogical emergency team from Germany helps out in the care shifts in the camp of Šentilj.

Again and again ethnic conflicts are set off and pent up aggression, especially between Afghan and Syrian refugees, causes the most trivial occurrences to become severe riots and mass brawls, which are then broken up with massive police presences. In the middle of all the tumult a mother passes me her infant over the barrier out of despair and worry, that he could be crushed to death. In the end there are many injured and frightened people.

Emotionally stabilising and supporting children in such situations is the main concern of the emergency pedagogical aid workers. The pedagogues and therapist offer psychosocial aid daily:

The children stand in a big starting circle. A communal opening song rings out, followed by rhythmic clapping and stomping exercises. Then the circle begins to move, in order to execute an inward and outward rolling spiral. After that, eurhythmic exercises follow. From the big circle it goes subsequently into different workshops. In form drawing lemniscates (figure-eights) are being practiced; in painting, water colours are being used; in drawing, experiences are being expressed pictorially. One group is doing eurhythmy. Another group is being told a story; another is singing. In the experiential pedagogy group work, trust in oneself and other is being strengthened, the concentration abilities are being practiced, and social competences are being re-built up in play. A closing circle with rhythmic exercises and a closing song end the work. The children are said good-bye to and dismissed.

An employee of the Slovenian civil protection, who attentively observed the emergency pedagogy work with the children, is astounded at how quickly a clearly perceptible uncramping occurs in the participating children and how the peaceful-calmed down atmosphere also affects relaxingly on the adults: *"The work with the children has a de-escalating effect. We could calm down the camp with emergency pedagogy and save police power!"*

In order to also help the aid workers and pedagogues, who work on site with the children, a continuing education course on emergency pedagogy took place in Ljubljana for about 50 pedagogues.

Here the refugee situation in Šentilj could be discussed in depth and possibilities for help could also be discussed.

Furthermore a one and a half day seminar with an introduction to psychotraumatology and emergency pedagogy was organised in Budapest by the Association of Hungarian Waldorf Schools. About 80 teachers took part in the professional development event.⁵

Bernd Ruf

Please also support the emergency pedagogical aid for traumatised refugees:

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Keyword "Emergency Pedagogy"

1. Detemple, K. (2013): Zwischen Autonomiebestreben und Hilfebedarf. Unbegleitete minderjährige Flüchtlinge in der Jugendhilfe. Baltmannsweiler. 33
2. Siebert, E. (2010): Schwere Last auf kleinen Schultern. Aufgaben und Grenzen Sozialer Arbeit mit minderjährigen traumatisierten Flüchtlingen aus Kriegsgebieten. Marburg. 63
3. Keilson, H. (2005): Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. Untersuchung zum Schicksal jüdischer Kriegswaisen. Unveränderter Neudruck der Ausgabe von 1979. Stuttgart. 426
4. The crisis intervention team in Šentilj, Slovenia was made up of: Bernd Ruf (mission leader, special education teacher), Christopher Huditz (coordination, school social worker), Leila Schürle (Waldorf teacher), Michele Roidt (pedagogue for young children), Martin Roidt (special education teacher), Mechthild Pellmann (art therapist), Dimitri Vinogradov (eurhythmist), Marga Zitzmann (psychologist), Elisa Loewe (medical student), Dr. Maria Bovelet (doctor), Zoe Besand (pedagogue for young children).
5. Our heartfelt thanks to our cooperation partners Branka Strmole (Waldorfska sola Ljubljana) and Zoltan Szabo (Magyar Waldorf Szövetseg)

*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. Since the summer of 2011 it has been possible to complete a 12-month civil service in anthroposophic institutions 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), Kurdistan-Iraq (2013-2015), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014), Nepal (2015), Greece (2015) and Slovenia (2015).*



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