



Psychosocial support for children on the move: art as a way of expression

WEBINAR SUMMARY

30 May 2017

I. Experts:

Faustine Douillard started working with refugees in Jordan before going to Calais, France, where she worked with minors and unaccompanied children trying to cross the border to England. Her work involved identification, prevention and response to human trafficking victims. Since August 2016, she has been in Greece, as part of a Terre des hommes project which includes psychosocial support to children on the move.

Ira Dika is a graduate student of Fine Arts Film Department of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki. She has made two documentaries and received awards on several festivals. Her work focuses mainly on marginalized characters and socially vulnerable groups of people.

Stavroula Anthiropoulou is a teacher and a comic artist. By combining experience in education and art, her courses are at the same time playful and instructive.

II. Content:

In this webinar speakers presented two very successful psychosocial support activities, which were implemented with the active engagement of the children on the move.

Both activities were implemented in Greece, in the midst of an emergency refugee crisis. At that time 47 558 refugees were staying in Greece, out of which 37% were children, and among them 8% were unaccompanied minors. The activities started in Eidomeni, and continued in the refugee reception sites where the refugees were transferred after its closure.

Refugee children took part in the outside camp excursions and expressed interest to be further engaged, so the coordinators suggested them to make their own comic book and documentaries about their activities. They also felt misunderstood by the European society and wanted to raise their voice, and share their experience.

The project has been based on five basic concepts:

1. Putting in place structured activity, setting rules for all the participants to follow
2. Basing activities on participatory and community engagement approach
3. Providing space for expression, to enable children's voice, emotions and feelings to be heard
4. Creating group cohesion, with group logos, shared objectives and steps to achieve them
5. Applying experimental learning strategy, combining theory and practice, and enabling children to learn while doing



Producing a comic book

Twenty-six refugee children and teenagers, age 8 to 17, worked together to produce comic books, particularly addressing their life before leaving the country, the need to leave the country and their current life in refugee camp. Children were free to choose to address all three topics or only some of them, to avoid re-traumatisation – they could share as much as they wanted and felt ready to share.

There were three workshops, around two hours each. First workshop was an introduction about the comic books, how to create a character and the story background, how to show feelings. Second workshop included more details on how the comic book square looks like, defining the story and making a storyboard. In the third workshop children applied this knowledge in practice, and produced their stories. Workshops were held in Arabic, with the help of translators.

The first category, life before leaving the country, was filled with colourful pictures as children depicted normal lives and happy events they remembered. They usually draw their family at home, going to the shopping mall, playing with friends. In the second category pictures were less colourful and most showed the dramatic experience of their journey to Europe. Some children chose not to draw or write anything in this topic. The third category showed their life in camp and their outside camp activities, with drawings depicting activities outside the camp being more diverse and colourful.

The aim of this workshop was to teach children to express themselves, with or without words. These autobiographical comic books are individual work of the children and provided them an opportunity to open themselves to the world and tell their story.

Past-Present-Future moments documentary

This project lasted 10 months, including in total 67 children, age 9 to 20, from the three camps. Training had several steps. First was the introduction to the history of the cinema. They learned how to use camera and other equipment, and started to create their documentaries. They were asked to look back at their lives, to collect and document memories including for example pictures, traditional songs, or fairy tales.

Next step was the actual filming. Children were divided in groups and each child had specific responsibilities assigned to him/her. They recorded the material, transferred it and organized themselves. Time spent in training in this part was around 50–60 hours in the period of 4–5 weeks. Five lessons were delivered on how to make the film and what each stage of film making includes.

Children quickly recognized the cinema as a universal language to communicate to their peers, and with the world. They learned not only how to produce a film, but also how to express themselves without feeling embraced, how to collaborate and take responsibilities, to work with each other and with the others in their community, with adults, families, and authorities at the camp. All of those activities has as a goal improved psychosocial well-being of the children, and their self-esteem, cohesion and work in safe environment.