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Training material for new volunteers of the Free Movement Network

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Abstract

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Free Movement is a network of migration activists that was founded in 2006 in Helsinki, Finland. This is a functional thesis that has been created to fill the need of training material for the new volunteers of Free Movement Network (FMN).

FMN volunteers do solidarity-based work with migrants and support them with various activities. One of their activities is weekly counseling sessions where they offer advice and guidance for free to migrants. The goal of the training material I created is to introduce the activities of the network, connect the new volunteers with the old ones and educate the new volunteers on some of the skills that are beneficial in working with migrants. The skills I focused on are trauma-informed practice, empathy and active listening.

The training material was made in collaboration with FMN. I used a variety of methods to understand the needs of the new volunteers. I conducted interviews, created and presented a prototype and had discussions with the members of the network. After the creation of the material, I organized an event on the premises of FMN and gave a presentation of the training material to the new volunteers.

Finally, I collected feedback from the participants to make adjustments to the material.

Vapaa Liikkuvuus on siirtolaisaktiivien verkosto, joka perustettiin Helsingissä vuonna 2006. Tämä on toiminnallinen lopputyö, joka on tehty täyttämään tarvetta koulutusmateriaalille Vapaa Liikkuvuus verkoston uusille vapaaehtoisille.

Vapaa liikkuvuus verkosto tekee solidaarisuuteen perustuvaa työtä siirtolaisten kanssa ja tukee heitä erilaisissa aktiviteeteissa. Yksi aktiviteeteista ovat viikottaiset neuvonta-tapaamiset, joissa tarjotaan ilmaista ohjausta ja neuvontaa siirtolaisille. Kirjoittamani koulutusmateriaalin tavoite on esitellä verkoston aktiviteetteja, luoda yhteyksiä uusien ja vanhojen vapaaehtoisten välille sekä kouluttaa uusia vapaaehtoisia joihinkin taitoihin, jotka ovat hyödyllisiä siirtolaisten kanssa työskennellessä. Taidot joihin keskityn perustuvat traumatietoisiin käytäntöihin, empatiaan ja aktiiviseen kuunteluun.

Tämä harjoitusmateriaali tehtiin yhteistyössä Vapaa Liikkuvuus verkoston kanssa. Käytin useita metodeja ymmärtääkseni uusien vapaaehtoisten tarpeita. Tein haastatteluja, loin ja esittelin prototyypin ja kävin keskusteluja verkoston jäsenten kanssa. Materiaalin valmistuttua organisoin tapahtuman VL-verkoston tiloissa ja minulla oli esitelmä koulutusmateriaalista uusille vapaaehtoisille. Lopuksi keräsin palautetta osallistujilta tehdäkseen hienosäätöjä materiaaliin.

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1 Introduction

This is a functional thesis that has as its final product the creation of training material for new volunteers in the “Free movement network”. I collaborated with the association “Oikeudet ilman rajoja ry” which is the official association behind “Free Movement Network” (FMN).

“Free movement network” is a network that supports migrants in Finland and is inspired by the principles of the “No borders” movement. All the functions of the network are voluntary. The material that I created will be used during the training for the new volunteers that are joining the activities of the network.

FMN needed training material that would offer an introduction to the activities and identity of the group and guide the new volunteers when working with migrants in a solidarity work context. The material is made in close collaboration with FMN. To find out about the specific needs I conducted interviews with the members of the network, created and presented a prototype and had discussions with the members of the network. After the creation of the material, I organized an event on the premises of FMN and gave a presentation of the training material to the new volunteers. Finally, I collected feedback from the participants to make adjustments to the material.

The training material is in the form of a Powerpoint that is accompanied by a document with detailed instructions and sources based on my theoretical research and my personal experience as a volunteer of the network.

2 Voluntary work in Finland and Free Movement Network

2.1 Voluntary work in Finland

In Finland there is a big amount of organizations compared to other countries and its population (Seppo 2013: 10). There are two possible explanations for that: one due to historical facts that shaped the identity of Finns in a way that they appreciate organization and rules and second the importance of the civil society activity in the formation of Finnish national identity and post-war wealth (Seppo 2013: 10). Finnish people believe that the membership in organizations gives access to social capital and helps with gaining good social skills (Seppo 2013: 19).

But what do we mean by social capital and why is it important? Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986 cited in Hanifi 2013: 33) defines social capital as the sum of those resources that originate in networks of acquaintances or memberships of groups. Voluntary work is part of social capital and helps in having access to the resources of the groups you have a membership. The characteristics of voluntary work are that it is unpaid and unforced activity for the good of other people or the community (Pessi & Oravasaari 2010 cited in Hanifi 2013: 35).

In the Finnish context, voluntary work reflects similar values as the welfare state, values as altruism, social and gender equality, solidarity and equal treatment for all (Grönlund 2012 cited in Seppo 2013: 11). One of the movements that also affected Finland was the Settlement movement. It was a movement that sought to rather empower people than help in a paternalistic way and it acted horizontally with the active participation of the community to solve problems of the neighborhoods (Roivainen n.d: 3). It was a movement that took the exclusivity of "helping" from the religious organizations and gave it in the form of solidarity to the community. Little by little social workers gained this terrain: professionalization took over the direct involvement with the community.

2.2 Free Movement Network

Free Movement Network (FMN) is a network that was established in 2006. According to their manifest which can be found on their website, it is a network that is politically and religiously independent and works towards the equality of all people. They demand universal freedom of movement and the realization of human and fundamental rights. They oppose deportation, detention, and criminalization of migrants. They believe that there should be no division and unequal distribution of rights between immigrants and citizens. (Free movement network.)

FMN is working in solidarity with the migrants and supports them in a variety of ways: by sharing information, facilitating legal assistance, providing material support, or protesting together with the migrant communities in the struggles they face because of the actual border regime and border policies. (Free movement network.)

FMN is aspiring towards anti-hierarchical practices and decision-making processes. Anti-racism and working against discrimination are part of their commitment. Also, FMN is open to collaborations with other groups and organizations that work towards the same goals as them.

The community of FMN is diverse. According to their website, people who are engaged in the organization come from a variety of backgrounds but they share the need to have a voice in the formulation of border policies. (Free movement network.)

Even though the volunteers of Free Movement Network are not social workers they practice solidarity work that resembles social work as they interact with vulnerable clients, they offer guidance and counseling services and the clients share with them confidential information regarding to their status, situation, life, etc.

I shall refer to the migrants that visit the counseling of the FMN as “clients” of the network for the ease of comprehension and to make a connection to the social work background. But for the sake of precision, I shall also make a note that the volunteers of FMN are not keen on using the term “clients” as they precisely want to emphasize their differentiation to the officials and institutions as they strive to establish a relationship of solidarity to the migrants, that resembles more to companionship in opposition to “helper-helpee” that give hierarchical and power dynamics connotations.

3 Profiles of migrants as “client group” of FMN and new volunteers

3.1 Migrants as a client group of the Free Movement network

FMN is working with migrants with a variety of different legal statuses. I shall give some examples. There can be asylum seekers at the beginning or the end of the asylum process. There can be undocumented, minors, or recognized refugees. There can be migrants with problems with work or student permits.

In addition, sometimes there can be friends or spouses of migrants that worry about them and come to counseling on their behalf. There can be migrants who were forced to come to Finland (for example victims of human trafficking) or migrants that came specifically because they had some kind of bond with the country. Sometimes, there can be organizations of different ethnic groups with political demands who are searching for allies in their struggle.

The examples mentioned above make clear the diversity within the client group of migrants in terms of status and the impossible task of making a homogenous group of clients, even at the legal level. From a social perspective, it is also a challenging task trying to define the profile of the client group of FMN as we then inevitably have to take into consideration aspects like race, gender, age, religious beliefs, etc that also shape the identity of the client group. Even migrants with the same nationality cannot be seen in the same category. As

Vertovec mentions “A national perspective blurs the fact that there is a broad variety of ethnic, cultural and religious orientations amongst migrants having the same passport as well as significant differences in migration channels, migration motives, languages, social-economic positions and legal implications (Vertovec 2007 cited in P. Scholten et al: 4).

3.2 Profile of the new volunteers

According to information provided by the FMN, new volunteers that join the actions of the group are people who are interested in solidarity work and want to participate in the political debate around immigration. But what do we mean by the term solidarity work with migrants and refugees?

For this reason, I will refer to a greek term that in my opinion is quite close to the values of FMN and would give an image of the specific kind of solidarity that they focus on. This term is “allilegyos” and it is used to describe a person who stands in solidarity. In the context of migrants, solidarity represents a kind of relatedness that is lateral and anti-hierarchical and goes beyond hospitality and bureaucratic frameworks of assistance to immigrants and refugees (Dalakoglou & Aggelopoulos 2020).

In Finland, there have also been, as in other European countries, strong solidarity movements with the immigrant communities, especially since “the long summer of migration” in 2015. Some examples are the Right to Live demonstration (Näre 2018 cited in Merikoski 2020: 92) and the Home Accommodation Network (Merikoski 2020) where local activists and volunteers joined their powers to demand human rights and equal treatment for all. According to Kleres (Kleres 2018 cited in Merikoski 2020) emotions like anger and disbelief are known to mobilize people to act in solidarity with asylum seekers and this is one of the findings of Merikoski (2020: 102) in her research with volunteers of Home accommodation network in Finland. Another finding was the discontent of the people about the migration policies and discourse of

the times and the expression of resistance through actions such as home accommodation (Merikoski 2020: 96).

4 Theory and training material

The training material is going to be used in the “Newcomer’s events”, events that FMN organizes twice or three times per year so that new volunteers can join the activities of the network.

There is a wide range of activities that the new volunteers can participate but mostly they are joining the counseling team. The counseling team is offering guidance and information about the migrant’s rights, the asylum process, the specific needs of each client, their interactions with Migri (Finnish Immigration Office) or other officials, deportation risks, etc.

For this reason, we decided, in collaboration with FMN and through a process that is described in detail in the implementation part, that my training material is going to focus on counseling and more specifically on some counseling skills we viewed as more relevant to the needs of the network. We saw these skills as part of self-care for the new volunteers.

According to the older volunteers, self-care is crucial for the well-being and commitment of the new volunteers. One of the problems FMN has encountered in the past is the retention of volunteers. Many of the volunteers are initially interested and motivated but with time, a lack of self-care skills contributes to experiencing overwhelming feelings that can even lead to burnout and eventually dropping off the voluntary activity.

The counseling skills that I focus on for the creation of my material are trauma-informed practice, empathy and active listening skills. These skills will be the basis of my theoretical part. My goal is to examine them on a theoretical level so that I can understand in depth the concepts and in continuation make a compact package of information for the new volunteers that will be relevant to

the experience of counseling with migrants to support their interactions, boost their confidence in communication situations and help prevent emotional overload.

5 Trauma and Trauma-informed practice

The clients of Free Movement Network come from a variety of backgrounds as we mentioned but the vast majority have in common a traumatic background: most of them come from places devastated by war or corruption, they were forced to leave their home country, they had to travel and live in uncertainty to mention some of the potentially traumatic experiences that they may have been through. Many of the clients have been victims of torture, discrimination, and racism and they may carry a variety of different traumas. Recent research shows that Syrian refugee children exhibit a high level of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) as well as symptoms of depression and anxiety (Yayan et al. cited in Banoglu & Korkmazlar 2021: 2).

For this reason, it is very important for the volunteers that work with the specific group to be aware of how trauma can affect the individual in order to protect both the clients and the volunteers. I will focus in this part on trauma, vicarious or secondary trauma, re-traumatization and trauma-informed approach.

5.1 Trauma

According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), “trauma result from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (SAMHSA 2012:2 cited in SAMHSA 2014:7). As we can see from the definition above, trauma is not a traumatic event but the perception of it as traumatic. This is very important information for the people who work closely with potentially traumatized individuals as not all terrible events cause trauma while at the same

time, some more “mundane” events in the life of an individual can create trauma if the person has perceived the experience as a major threat that overwhelmed his coping capacities. Another information about the trauma that volunteers working with vulnerable populations have to be aware of, is that trauma has a biological effect on the brain and it alters and dysregulates the neurobiological circuits. This can contribute to developing post-traumatic stress disorder. (Delahanty 2008 cited in Mehta & Binder 2011: 654.) The impact of traumatic stress can be acute or long-lasting. Most of the individuals recover quickly from traumatic experiences but others can develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or complex trauma (Hopper et al. 2010: 81).

PTSD is a psychiatric condition that “ is characterized by persistent symptoms of intrusive re-experiencing, avoidance and hyperarousal following exposure to a traumatic event” (Mehta & Binder 2011: 654). PTSD can appear in up to 25% of people who experience severe psychological trauma (Liberzon & Ressler 2016 cited in Brewer-Smyth: 59). Depending on various factors such as the type, timing, duration, and intensity of the trauma a person can be susceptible to post-traumatic stress disorder (Mehta & Binder 2011: 654).

As far as complex trauma is concerned, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) describes it as “both exposure to multiple traumatic events-often of an invasive, interpersonal nature and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure”.

5.2 Secondary trauma and re-traumatization

“Secondary trauma”, “vicarious traumatization” or “compassion fatigue” are some of the terms that are used to describe the traumatic and psychological stress of an individual who is witnessing the trauma and pain of another individual (SAMHSA 2014: 216). It is a phenomenon that is fairly common in care professions (nurses etc) because of the nature and the conditions of their work and their close contact with people with a traumatic background (Sinclair

et al 2017: 10). According to Figley (Figley 2002 cited in Sinclair et al 2017) the symptoms of compassion fatigue are similar to those of PTSD.

In the context of the creation of the training material, I think it is very important to mention the existence of this phenomenon as there has been in the past incidents of volunteers experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatization and consequently discontinuing their volunteering activities in the network.

Compassion fatigue could affect both new and old volunteers and for this reason it must be taken into consideration in order to prevent, notice in advance the signs and have a plan of action in case of occurrence.

Re-traumatization refers to a condition in which a person with pre-existing trauma is triggered by a new stressor and reacts more quickly or in a more intense way (Pazderka et al. 2021: 2). People with prior trauma can get more easily re-traumatized and those with multiple traumas can suffer of traumatic stress of more severe and chronic nature (SAMHSA 2014: 19). Services that don't take into account trauma and its impact on the clients can unintentionally re-traumatize clients by evoking traumatic memories (Brown 2013: 387).

During the counseling sessions, migrants and refugees have to re-tell their stories which are often traumatic and this puts them at risk of re-traumatization. Volunteers that participate in the counseling have to be trauma-informed to protect both themselves and the clients.

5.3 Trauma-informed approach

A trauma-informed approach takes into consideration the impact that trauma has on the life of a traumatized individual (SAMHSA 2014: 20). SAMHSA collected three key elements of a trauma-informed approach: “(1) realizing the prevalence of trauma; (2) recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including workforce; and (3) responding by putting this knowledge into practice” (SAMHSA 2012: 4 cited in SAMHSA 2014: 20).

In addition, Hopper et al. (2010: 81-82) gathered the basic principles of Trauma-informed care. These are the following:

- Trauma awareness: the organizations should be aware of the trauma and how it may affect an individual's life, the symptoms that may have and the way that trauma has altered their behavior as a response to trauma. Trauma awareness is relevant to the providers of the service as well, as many times they have also suffered trauma or vicarious trauma and they can be triggered by the clients behavior.
- Safety: Often a traumatized individual has felt a breach of their boundaries and feels unsafe. For this reason, the establishment of safety on the part of the service providers, both psychological and physical, is very important. The service providers should be aware of the possible triggers of the clients so that they can understand them and avoid re-traumatization. It is advised to work in collaboration with the clients and take into account diversity on many levels such as cultural differences, ethnicity, gender, etc. In addition, privacy and confidentiality are of great importance. In Talentia's ethical guidelines it is mentioned "The confidentiality of the client relationship and the client's right to good treatment and privacy have to be taken into account in social welfare services" (Talentia: 41).
- Control: Traumatized individuals often have felt a loss of control in their lives. Therefore in the trauma-informed care framework, it is crucial to create predictability and get the clients involved in the planification of the services so that they can feel in control of their lives.
- Stengths-based approach: Trauma-informed practice is strengths-based. It means focusing on the capabilities and strengths of the clients and not on their shortcomings. It promotes resilience by helping the clients in acquiring life skills and building a view to the future.

6 Active listening and empathy

6.1 Active listening

Listening is one of the most important communication skills that volunteers use in their work with the migrants as they have to gather information to be able to offer them guidance and advice. The information gathered is sensitive as it is mainly related to decisions from the migration office and contains personal and sensitive data. At the same time, migrants and refugees are socially vulnerable client groups and there can be many challenges related to communication in many levels and layers. Active and empathetic listening can be great tools for encounters with the clients of the network.

Active listening is a specific technique where the listener is focused and responds in an empathetic way so that the client feels understood (Levitt 2001 cited in Weger et al. 2014: 15). According to Weger et al. there are three elements of active listening. The first one is engaging truly with the person through non-verbal communication. Second is paraphrasing the person's message to bring it to the surface, and third asking questions that facilitate exploration of the experiences of the person (Weger et al. 2014: 15).

Behaviours as non-verbal communication (the way we make eye-contact with the person, how we pose our body, in an open or closed manner, our facial expressions) as well as verbal behaviors (using paraphrasing, naming emotions, summarizing) affect the way a client sense the empathy of the professional (Croft et al. 2022: 3).

In the following illustration we can see the six skills that apply to active listening: paying attention, suspending judgment, reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, and sharing (Center for creative leadership 2019). I used a similar diagram for the training material to help volunteers visualize the complexity of listening in a counseling context.

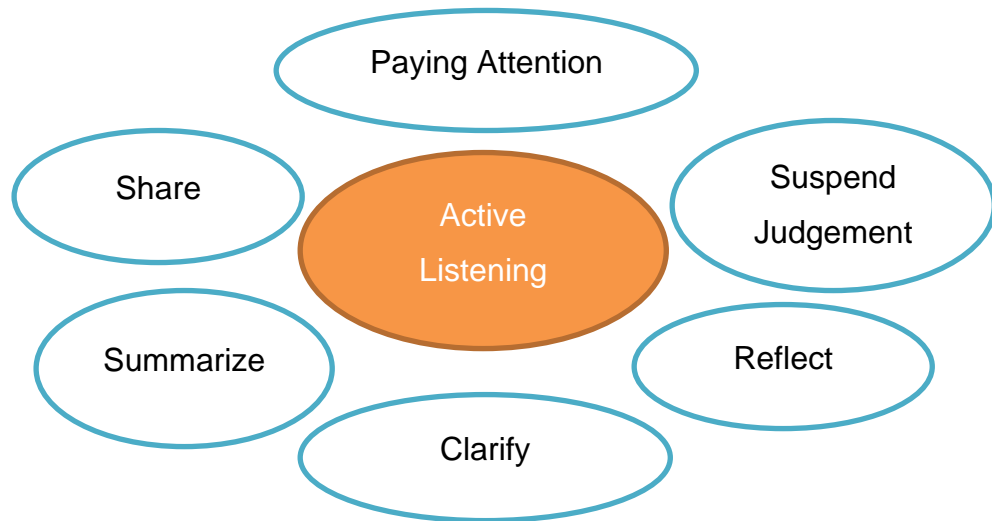


Figure 1. Six skills of active listening

Active empathetic listening is a similar concept in that puts the focus more on the empathetic response of the listener. Drollinger et al. (2006 cited in Kourmoussi et al. 2018: 2) pictures empathetic listening as a process that consists of three stages on the part of the listener: a) being sensitive to the clues that the client gives so that he/she gathers all the direct and indirect information provided from the client b) analyzing, putting together and memorizing the information to let emerge the narrative of the client c) using verbal and non-verbal communication to respond to the client to show his/her interest towards the client.

Empathy is considered one of the key professional skills for effective social work. Empathic social workers are more efficient in their work and clients that are treated with empathy have a better recovery. (Gerdes & Segal 2011: 141). I will focus on the next chapter on empathy, its importance in a social work context and its protective effects on both the clients and the social workers.

6.2 Empathy

Oxford dictionary defines empathy as “ the ability to imagine and understand the thoughts, perspective and emotions of another person” (Oxford Reference).

Research has identified two types of empathy: cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy is the capacity of identifying on a cognitive level the emotional state of the other person and affective empathy is being capable of feeling and connecting with the other on an emotional level based on the understanding of the other person’s situation. (Sinclair et al.2016: 438.)

The path to understanding empathy in a more profound way has opened with neuroscience and the use of fMRI to scan the brain. Neuroscientists discovered that similar neural circuits are stimulated when humans experience emotions and when they perceive others expressing emotions (Decety & Lamm 2006: 1149). Gerdes and Segal (2011) proceeds from this to suggest that the knowledge of the brain mechanism of mirroring and simulation should be a guideline for social work professionals. They suggest exercises like role-playing where the student of social work takes the perspective of another person in a made-up scenario (Gerdes et al. 2011 cited in Eriksson & Englander 2017: 609).

Based on findings in social cognitive neuroscience, Decety and Moriguchi (2007: 4) in Gerdes and Segal (2009) suggest that there are four components of empathy that are necessary to experience it to its full extent:

1. Affective sharing or the experience of similar emotions between the self and another
2. Self-awareness which distinguishes the difference between the self and the other despite the temporary identification between the self and the other.
3. Mental flexibility which is the capacity to imagine in a cognitive sense the situation of the other person “from the inside”

4. Emotion regulation which is the process of regulating the emotions emerging.

Once social workers have come to “feel in the other person’s shoes”, one crucial step in communication with the client is self-other awareness. The social worker should have a powerful sense of self to avoid enmeshment with the client, that is to be conscious of the boundaries between him/herself and the client. Too much emotional sharing without the capacity to disengage emotionally from the experience of the client can create problematic situations such as projecting own thoughts/feelings onto the client, losing objectivity, and identifying too much with the client (Gerdes & Segal 2011: 145-146) and even cause burnout (Eisenberg 2000). Observing in a mindful way the reality is key according to Gerdes and Segal (2011) to avoid these challenges.

Mental flexibility is the capacity of being able to move in and out of the other person’s perspective in a flexible way (Decety & Lamm 2006). In a social work context, this would mean that the social worker would be able to approach emotionally the client but also to be able to take distance from the client’s experience later. Gerdes and Segal (2011: 146) point out that trying to oblige oneself to take distance from the emotions of another person is much harder than watching one’s own emotions. By doing so, a social worker can be empathetic to the clients and avoid getting overwhelmed by their experiences. Meditation and exercise of mindfulness are some of the most effective ways to practice emotional regulation (Vago & Silbersweig 2012).

To convey the importance of empathy and help the volunteers to practice it, I included in my training material a role-playing exercise. With this exercise, apart from training them to perspective taking I also wanted to point out that empathy is a skill that can be taught and trained.

7 Implementation of the thesis

7.1 Preliminary process for the creation of the training material

I have been volunteering for the Free Movement Network for a long time and it is an organization I deeply respect because of its engagement in the cause they are serving. The volunteers participating in the activities have a vision for a better society for everybody and a will to change things and themselves in the process. When I was searching for the theme of my thesis I talked to one of the volunteers in the group and asked if there is some kind of material that they would need for the network. He told me that they would need training material for the newcomers that join the group. I then came up with the idea of making material with the knowledge I have gained through my studies in social work.

The next step was adding this proposal to the agenda of the next monthly meeting. Due to corona, there has been a bit of neglect on the monthly meetings and there was very little participation in the meeting so I decided to make a shared document in the drive and share it through the mailing list so that people could comment on my ideas about the creation of the training material. In this document, I described my idea and I included a list of subjects that could be interesting. A couple of members of the group commented but the participation level was not as big as I would have liked to get the information needed and to be participative and inclusive. The subjects suggested were:

- Solidarity as a concept

- Ethical considerations

- Power dynamics

- Social services available in Helsinki for migrants/paperless right now

- Self-care (suggested by the group)

The next step was to make a doodle invitation for the group to set a date for a meeting to discuss the subjects. Only two participants responded to the doodle so I had to reconsider how to advance as it was difficult to get people to respond to my questions. Under “normal” circumstances the group would meet every week so this would have been easy but because of the Covid pandemic the counseling part was taking place online so the group didn’t gather together.

The next thing I did was that I reconsidered the feedback I got from our teachers and then decided to follow Sylvia’s advice and conduct interviews. So I sent messages to three of the members of the Free Movement Network and arranged an interview with each of them.

7.2 Interviews

The interviews took place through what's up phone call. Every interview lasted 30 minutes. The volunteers that participated have a lot of experience as they have been members for a long time. The first thing they wanted to know was what are social services more concretely. The questions I posed to them were the following:

-What set of skills would the newcomers need in their work with the migrants?

-What kind of information you have found interesting or important when joining the group?

-Do you have some idea about how the form of the training should be? How about the duration?

-Some tips or advice that I should be taking into consideration?

7.3 Results

The results I got from the interviews gave me an insight into what is useful for the training. All the participants agreed that ethical guidelines for social welfare professionals were very important. Also, all the participants concluded that the creation of a PowerPoint would be a good form around which the training could be organized. Related to that, one participant mentioned that the PowerPoint should be “informal, chill and safe”. Also that it should be interactive, for example, in that there should be space for thinking and discussion because its principal function will be to encourage and inspire the participants to join the group and at the same time provide the basic information needed. Lastly, the theme of self-care was also present in all the interviews.

Some other comments were related to social work principles such as social justice, antiracism, and non-discrimination. Also, confidentiality and privacy were important issues as well as how to manage confidential information. Some other subjects were empathy and how to “encounter”, how to meet authentically and communicate in an effective and empathic way. Specifically, how to meet people with a traumatic background was on focus as most of the clients that visit have had traumatic experiences. Finally, another theme was active listening.

7.4 Creation of the first version of the training material

On 13.12.2021 I had the opportunity to try the first version of my training material during the event “Newcomer’s afternoon”. I wanted to try out a version of my material to see how it would match the needs of the newcomers. In this version of the material I included an introduction to the activities and principles of FMN as well as the themes of empathy and active listening.

I made a few observations by myself as well as asked the opinion of the network members and the new volunteers. One important observation was that the new volunteers were a very heterogenic group: some of the volunteers were

university students with majors related to the activities of the network (sociology or social services) and some were with a migrant background that had already been clients of the network in the past and they would like to share their knowledge and contribute to the network with their expertise as “specialists through experience” (kokemus asiantutkijat, peer counselors). In the group of new volunteers, there was also a psychologist and an experienced social worker who was doing her PhD on migration affairs.

I realized then that this would definitely be a great challenge for the creation of my material as I would have to either include something of all levels in my material so that it would be interesting to all the new volunteers or focus on one specific group of new volunteers and make a material that serves mainly their needs.

I shared my thoughts with the group and in their opinion, both options would be beneficial. After reflection and discussions with the group I decided that it could be possible to make a material that could engage both old and new volunteers, experienced and non-experienced, if I would pick up carefully the right themes and the training would be sufficiently interactive.

I decided that the training material would begin with a presentation of the network and its action, views, values and activities. Then I would proceed with the following themes: trauma-informed practice, active listening and empathy. My goal was to create a material that would be interesting, inclusive, taking into consideration the diversity of the users, and informative.

To make clear how connected listening skills, empathy and trauma informed-practice are with the activities of the network I would like to mention a real-life example from my experience. The place where we offer the counseling does not have windows and it has happened to us that a client that had been previously in jail was not feeling comfortable there. He shared his concern and by listening to him, being empathetic and trauma-informed we didn't dismiss his fear but instead, we offered another private space for him to talk. This relaxed

him and we could advance with the counseling session without problems, avoiding re-traumatization and gaining trust.

7.5 Creation of the final version of the training material

Preparation of the workshop

On 3.12.2022 I organized an event for the presentation of the training material. The event was combined with the “Pikku Joulu”, which is the “Small Christmas” event of the network. I posted the invitation on our Facebook page where I invited people that would be interested to join the activities of the network to participate in the training and celebrate with us “Pikku Joulu”.

On the day of the event I made sure that there would be food and drinks as well as all the necessary equipment (projector, chairs, etc). I made sure there is a cozy and welcoming atmosphere.

Execution of the workshop

Four new volunteers came to join the training as well as eight members of the network. The training presentation started at 5pm and lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. I was feeling confident but at the same time, I felt scared because of the high expectations I had for myself: as a member of the group I wanted to deliver training material of a good quality that would benefit the new volunteers and that would be attractive enough to inspire them.

The contents of the powerpoint were thought and selected according to the needs of the network and the needs of the new volunteers. I prepared instructions for the training material that are included in the appendix (Appendix 2). In the beginning, I started with a general presentation of the network, its activities, values and its political action. Then I presented with the help of an old volunteer the framework on which the network bases its action, solidarity. Afterwards, I moved to one of the basic activities of the network, counseling which is the activity in which most of the new volunteers engage. Counseling is

an “entry point” for the new volunteers as they get to work with the migrants with assistance from older members of the group and from there they can decide their further engagement with the group. For the counseling part, I focused on three skills: active listening, empathy and trauma-informed practice. I used my theoretical knowledge about these topics for my presentation and through short videos and exercises I managed to create an interaction between the old and the new members of the network. I finished the PowerPoint presentation with an opening for discussion and questions.

After the end of the training, I gathered feedback from the participants to improve it before I hand in the final version.

7.6 Feedback

One of the most important parts of my project was the collection of feedback. Because of my deep engagement in the creation of quality material this part of my project was one of the most important as the feedback could guide me on how to improve it before its delivery. I have written notes and instructions for most of the slides of the Powerpoint to make sure that if somebody else has to deliver the training in the future, there will be enough information as well as the sources of the material.

In the following chapters of the feedback I will refer to the challenges I had in collecting the feedback, how I tried to overcome them as well as the positive feedback and the areas of improvement. In the end, I will present the changes I did to the material before I delivered it to the network.

Challenges in collecting feedback

My goal in collecting the feedback was to get as accurate and honest feedback as possible so that I can make the right changes to the material, where needed. Because of my engagement in the network I had in mind that the old participants might be partial and they would feel compelled to give me good feedback. Loyalty and a need to conserve the unity of the group were some of

the biases that I had to face concerning the old volunteers. On the part of the new volunteers, it was a will to belong and agreeableness. I could see the trap of getting the feedback I desired because of the reasons I mentioned so I had to be very delicate in how to get the trust of the participants so that they would provide honest and specific feedback.

To overcome these biases I made sure that I had a one-to-one conversation with each participant where I explained that my goal is to provide a useful tool for the training of the new volunteers so giving accurate and honest feedback is of crucial importance. I underlined that positive feedback is also welcomed because I need to see what works too but mainly I am interested in what didn't work as it is crucial to get close to the areas of improvement of my material.

Overall Feedback

The overall feedback I got from the participants was that the training was very good and useful. The participants agreed that it was great to have material that they can use each time in the newcomer's events with notes and sources so that it is easy for another person to do the training next time.

They noted that it contained themes that they don't normally go through together with the group (for example the trauma-informed approach) but which are very important and highly relevant to the work that they do with the migrants, both for the old volunteers and the new ones.

The material was well structured in their opinion and it was diverse too, "it had different components" as they commented. Also, somebody mentioned that "this material focuses on the interaction, the encounter between the volunteers and the client" and she found that very useful. In somebody's opinion, "it was good to talk about trauma so that the new volunteers don't take it personally if a client shows signs of fear or rejection towards them and also mentioning the secondary trauma is very important too so that they know that this exists".

They liked the fact that the training material explained the action of the network as an “entity”, meaning that it included all the activities, principles and political action and all the possibilities of action that somebody can find within the group.

Regarding the exercises, they all liked the video with the Ukrainian mother and Gabor Mate’s video. One of the participants mentioned that she is a visual person so the videos helped her to assimilate the information and kept her interested. They all agreed that the exercises were a good way to bring the participants together and create interaction between the old and the new members of the group.

Concerning the closing of the training, a participant mentioned that “It felt nice that you shared why you joined the network, it made it personal”. Another participant added that it was nice that at the end of the presentation, the newcomers had the opportunity to present themselves and talk about why they are interested in the group, what they would like to achieve, in what kind of activities they are mainly interested etc.

Areas of improvement

As I mentioned before the areas of improvement were very important for the formation of the material. First of all, I wanted that the participants felt heard and respected so that they would open up about the aspects of the material that would need some improvement. I managed to get specific feedback on which I could reflect for the finalization of the training material.

Most of the participants agreed that there should be only one video per “theme” because two videos were a bit too much. I asked which of the videos was more interesting and all of them agreed on the same video.

Concerning the exercises, I got the feedback that it would be better to specify in advance that they would be in pairs because some Finnish people are very shy and it would be better to mention it in the beginning. I got feedback that one of

the active listening exercises would need more detailed instructions and also make it clear what is its purpose.

One of the members mentioned that he would like that there would be more real-life examples from different situations so that “the new volunteers would get the real picture of it”. He mentioned that we could share anonymously some examples from sensitive cases, deportations, etc.

The closing video was a scene from the movie “In the other side of hope” by Aki Kaurismäki. One of the participants suggested that we could ask, “Why hope?” to open a discussion on a positive note. I added this question in the instructions of the specific slide of the presentation.

Unfortunately, we had a very short time for discussion as some of the new volunteers had to leave early but in the instructions an extra time is added for discussion and questions. One of the old volunteers mentioned “that she would have liked to go through a discussion for the trauma theme with the rest of the team as her reaction to difficult situations is to shut down and she would like to discuss this with the rest to get to know how others are reacting to a difficult situations”. She added that in her opinion “there is need for sharing experiences between the members”.

8 Conclusions

Free Movement Network is a grassroots movement of people that see migration as a natural phenomenon and stand in solidarity with migrants and their struggles. In my view, they offer very high-quality social work that you can rarely find in the private or public sector. There are a few reasons for that. One of the most important is the composition of the group as it is a mix of highly skilled academics in the social sciences field (sociology, political science, social work, psychology, etc) as well as grassroots volunteers and migrants who have been through the migration process. This is a very successful combination in my opinion as it offers a balance of theory and practice. The “glue” that connects

them is common political and ideological stance regarding borders and migration.

Preparing material for a network where I have been actively involved has had its good sides and its challenges. On the positive side, I had an understanding of the real needs of the group and I felt a deep satisfaction that I provided material that is useful and relevant to their specific needs. It was a pleasure contributing to a bigger cause together with people that stand for their values. For me, activism has what I would call the “magic” of giving meaning to your existence and at the same time making you feel humble but not insignificant.

On the challenging part, there are undoubtedly more expectations when you have to deliver for a group you are personally involved. This can create anxiety and stress as there is always inside us pressure to be liked and appreciated by our peers. For me, the biggest challenge was the creation of material that is of real use and not just another boring document or Powerpoint in their shared files.

Writing this thesis has been a long journey for many reasons and I had to fight with procrastination and high expectations. The presentation of the training material was a fulfilling and bonding experience with the members of the network. I hope that with the creation of this material, I will contribute in attracting new volunteers and in supporting their engagement and satisfaction.

The next steps to be followed would be the creation of new material related to the activities of the network. There would be a need for material explaining the asylum process, how to file official complaints and training on emergency situations. Departing from this thesis, what I would personally like to explore more is the neurobiology of trauma and empathy. I think that social workers should expand their knowledge in areas such as neurobiology as it helps us have a better understanding of the behavior of our clients and ourselves.

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Appendix 1

Training Material for the new volunteers



Contents

- Information about Free Movement Network, Coffee without borders and Counselling
- Solidarity work
- Counselling
- Counselling skills:
 - Active listening (Exercise 1)
 - Empathy (Exercise 2)
- Trauma
- Trauma-informed practice
- Closure
- Discussion and questions

- All pictures are taken from <https://unsplash.com/>



Free Movement Network

ACTION!

- Production and sharing of information related to migrant's rights and freedom of movement
- Cooperation with various Finnish human rights organizations working on with refugees and migrants
- Involved with resistance against deportations, campaigns for residence rights of asylum seekers, supporting migrants to organizing demonstrations

WEEKLY EVENTS

- *Coffee without Borders*
- *Counselling every Wednesday offering advice to migrants and their supporters*



Coffee without borders

- Socializing all together, coffee / tea
- Activities such as parties, events etc
- In "passive mode" right now but very successful in the past!



Solidarity work

- Working TOGETHER WITH the migrants and not for them
- Horizontal and inclusive decision making.



Counselling

Advice and support to migrants related to:

- Immigration office decisions
- Deportation issues
- Family reunification issues
- All different kinds of permits
- Directing to institutions/organizations that could be of help according to the specific needs
- Practical issues, depending on our resources
- Official complaints
- ETC



Counselling

- Solidarity-based
- Confidential
- Inclusive
- Non-judgmental
- Independent from authorities
- Trauma-informed
- Non-discriminative

Always:

Work in pairs

We ask advice from lawyers if we are not sure about something



Key words

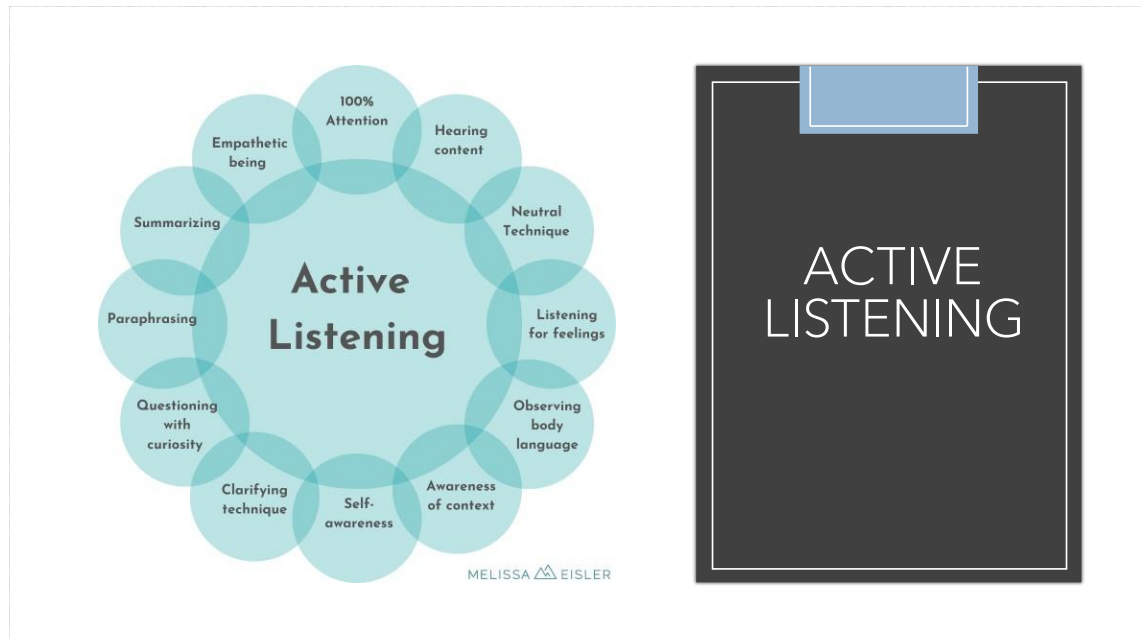
- Privacy
- Confidentiality
- Right to self-determination



Counselling skills

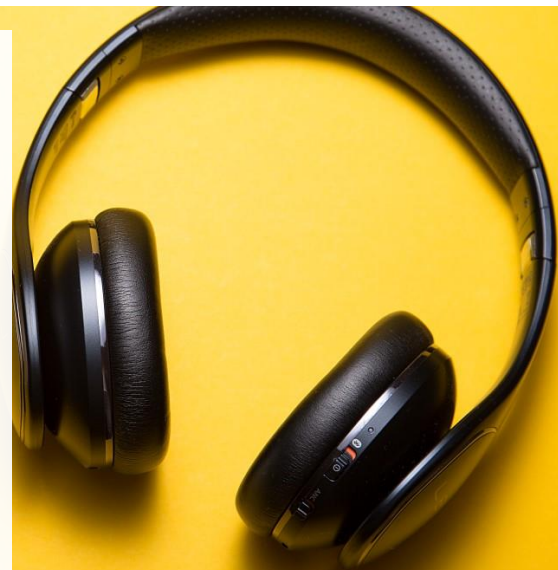
- Active listening
- Trauma-informed approach
- Empathy
- Strength-focused
- Culturally sensitive approach





Exercise 1, Active listening

- We will do this exercise in pairs. In order to practice active listening, we must find a pair with whom we can talk.
- One of you will share a small story from something annoying that happened to you for 4 minutes.
- The one who listens cannot say anything: no comments, no questions, no verbal back channel signals (aha, hmm, hum, etc).
- Then we change turns, and the other is talking.
- Then we discuss with our pair the following questions:



Discussion

- How did it feel just listening?
- Was it easy to concentrate and follow on what the other person was talking?
- Did you notice your selftalk?
- Was it easy to silence the selftalk in order to keep up with the other person?
- Did you notice any triggers from the story you were saying, or you were listening?
- If yes, how did your body react to that?



Active listening and emotions

- During discussions, people say things that will **emotional responses** in us. **We can't stop these emotions from appearing** But how we respond to them determines our effectiveness at listening and ultimately our ability to influence the direction of the dialogue and to decide the outcome as it relates to us .
- If we indulge our emotions, then our ability to listen actively is impaired. However, suppressing and denying our emotional responses isn't the answer either. Instead, we retain our effectiveness, influence **and** **definition** by increasing our emotional intelligence.
- Emotional intelligence is **being aware of our own emotions and those of the speaker**. Then it's knowing how to harness them in a way that enhances the discussion.

Source: <https://www.goodlisteningkills.org/active-listening-games-exercises-activities/>



Empathy

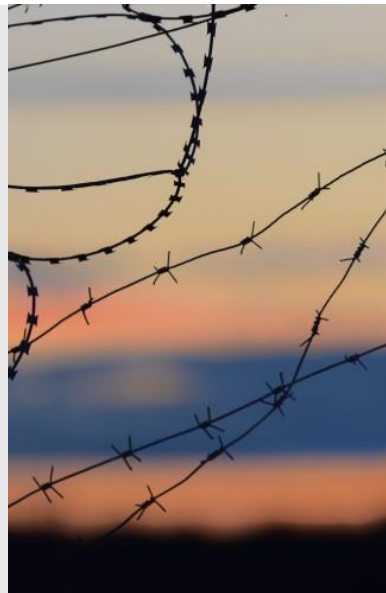
Brené Brown on Empathy

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>



Exercise 2, Empathy

- We will watch the video of a woman escaping Ukraine with her children. Then we will make pairs, and we will talk to each other about how we think that this woman should be feeling. You can make a list of emotions that come to your mind. How you would feel if you would be her?
- Tip!
- Try to think about her emotions from different perspectives, as a woman, having a family, etc
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-dzcVJwA>



Trauma

- *Gabor Mate: The ROOT CAUSE Of Trauma & Why You FEEL LOST In Life* | Dr. Gabor Maté & Jay Shetty
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TQJmkXC2E&t=1129s>
- Minute 3:156:16


Trauma-informed approach

- Recognize the great influence that a trauma can have in a person's life, their development and coping.
- Recognize that trauma can affect how a person perceives and approaches service providers, such as the immigration office, officials, included us.
- Emphasize on choice and empowerment
- Strengths-based
- Prevent secondary trauma or vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue for those who work with traumatized people.

Trauma-informed approach

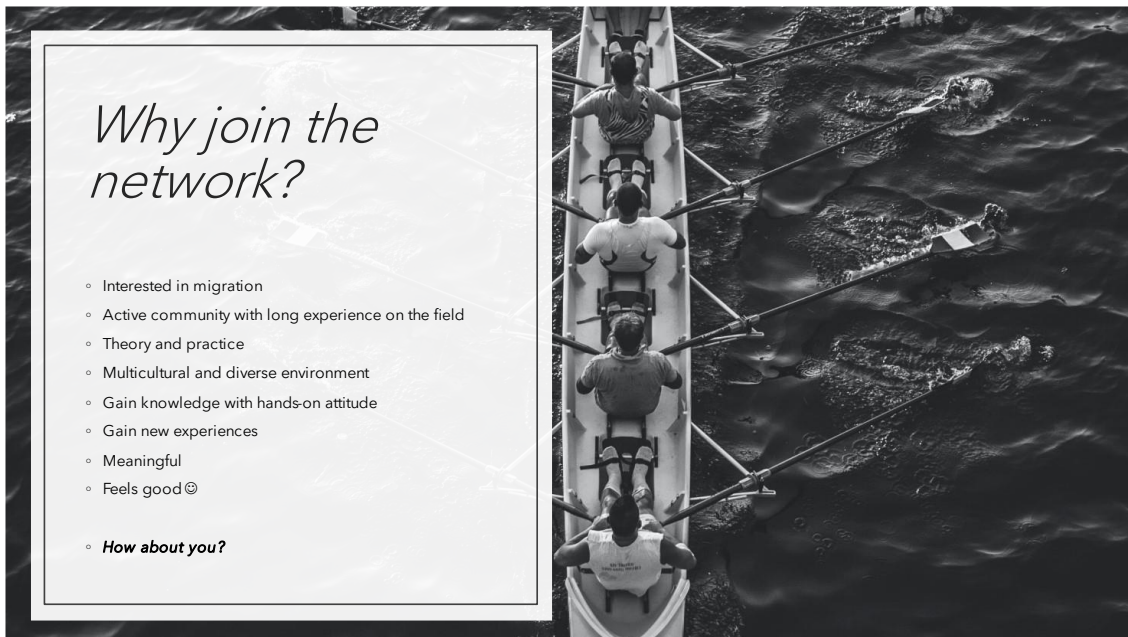
- Provide an atmosphere of safety
- 1) Physical and emotional safety: an atmosphere of safety, respect and acceptance
- 2) Trustworthy relationships: respectful, non judgmental relationships with clear boundaries.
- 3) Avoid re-traumatization
- 4) Acceptance and respect for diversity

Source: TIP 57: *TraumaInformed Care in Behavioral Health Services*(SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)



The other side of hope, *By Aki Kaurismäki*

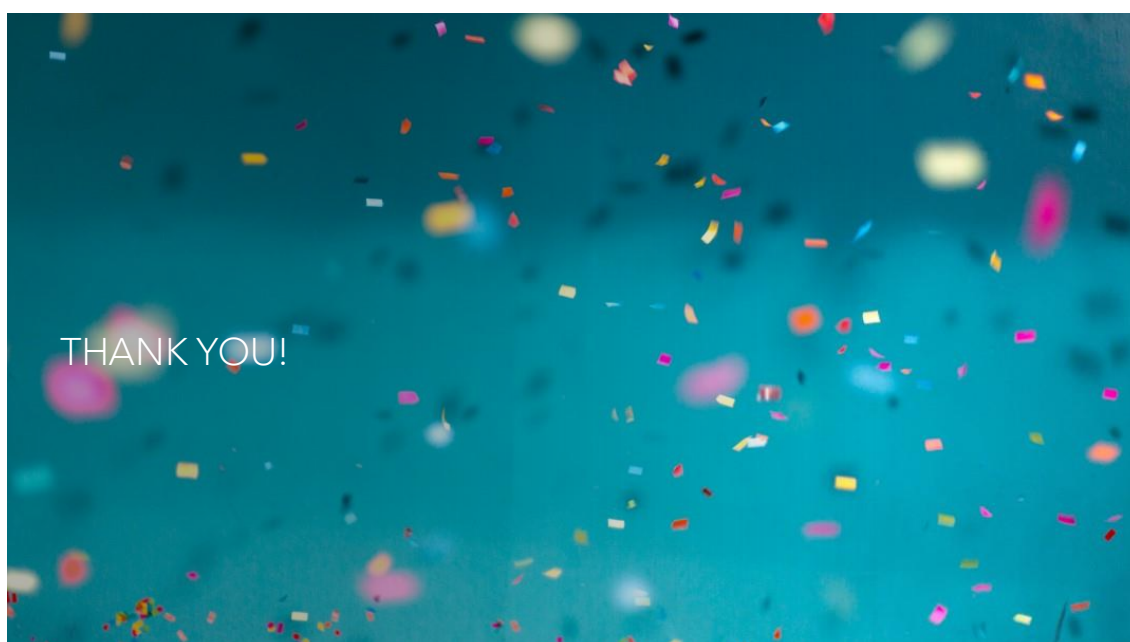
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHVsYsXSUJQ>



Why join the network?

- Interested in migration
- Active community with long experience on the field
- Theory and practice
- Multicultural and diverse environment
- Gain knowledge with hands-on attitude
- Gain new experiences
- Meaningful
- Feels good ☺

◦ **How about you?**



Appendix 2

Instructions for the training material

Slide 1

Free Movement Network

Slide 2

Contents

Slide 3

Free movement network, presentation

- Network of migration activists functioning since 2006.
- Multidisciplinary team: Among us, there are students, healthcare professionals, researchers, construction workers, culture workers and artists, from Finnish and migrant backgrounds. We are politically and religiously independent, and our work happens through different working groups. The network is supported by the association Vapaa Liikkuvuus (Free Movement).
- We support general freedom of movement, and the realization of fundamental rights regardless of people's status and background. Read more from our manifesto Free Movement For All.

Source:

Free Movement Network

<https://vapaaliikkuvuus.net/free-movement/>

Slide 4

Action and weekly events

- Through our work in Helsinki and Tampere, we support the struggle of migrants for their rights. We cooperate with various Finnish human rights organizations working with refugees and migrants. We produce and share information on controls of movement, their consequences and struggles against them in Finland and abroad. In Helsinki and Tampere, we give advice to migrants and their supporters on matters concerning residence permits and the realization of fundamental rights. We regularly organize an open cafe, Coffee Without Borders, where people interested in migrants' rights and freedom of movement may meet. Over the years, we have also been involved with resistance against deportations, campaigns for the residence rights of asylum seekers, and defending EU migrants' right to housing in Helsinki.

Source:

Free Movement Network

<https://vapaaliikkuvuus.net/free-movement/>

Slide 5

Coffee without borders

Slide 6

Solidarity work: its meaning and its practice in our group. We can ask somebody else from the group to explain that part. Through that, we

create a sense of being a team and it breaks the monotony of one person only talking.

Slide 7

Support and advice the network provides during counseling.

Slide 8

Principles of the counseling

Privacy: Be aware of the space where you are talking and the volume of your voice you are talking. Be attentive to the person's voice if he/she whispers, it is a sign that he/she feels uncomfortable with the level of privacy. Adjust to his/her volume and tone of voice. Try to be sure that their privacy is protected!

Confidentiality: All the information is confidential.

Ask always permission for sharing information with anybody else, whoever this might be. Also if you share with somebody in our group you have to explain who this person is and why you want to share this information. For example, I would like to share your documents with Kaarlo because he is part of the group and is experienced so he can help us with your case. You shall not share with other people outside of the group stories, documents, etc. If for some reason you have to, make sure that you change all the possible identifiers so that there will be no hazard of breach of confidentiality.

Self-determination: It is a basic right of everybody to take decisions that concern them. What we can do is inform them

the best we can about the different alternatives and the implications that they may have.

Be careful with cybersecurity, with whom you share emails, chats, etc.

Sources: SAMHSA

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4816.pdf>

Talentia ethical guidelines guide

<https://talentia.lukusali.fi/#/reader/5821b56c-da82-11ec-a1c5-00155d64030a>

Slide 9

Keywords

Slide 10

Counseling skills we will be practicing during the training

Slide 11

More listening, less talking

Slide 12

Active listening, flower

Source: Melissa Eisler, *12 Levels to enhance your listening skills*

<https://melissaeisler.com/active-listening-12-levels-to-enhance-your-listening-skills/>

Slide 13

Source: *Good listening skills*

<https://www.goodlisteningkills.org/active-listening-games-exercises-activities/>

<https://www.goodlisteningkills.org/active-listening-games-exercises-activities/>

Slide 14

Discussion on a listening exercise

Slide 15

Active listening and emotions

Source:

<https://www.goodlisteningkills.org/active-listening-games-exercises-activities/>

Slide 16

Empathy video

Slide 17

Empathy exercise

Slide 18

Gabor Mate: The ROOT CAUSE Of Trauma & Why You FEEL LOST In Life | Dr. Gabor Maté & Jay Shetty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTQJmkXC2EI&t=1129s>

Minute 3:15-6:16

Slide 19-20

Be sensitive to the reactions of the person!

1) Physical safety:

Make the person feel comfortable and safe. Because of the configuration of our counseling rooms, there might be people that feel uncomfortable. For example, if they have been in jail or detention center it might trigger a recollection of trauma sitting at the end of a corridor where there is no exit. Talk to the person and you can find together a place where he/she feels more comfortable.

Emotional safety:

Remember privacy and confidentiality!

Respect, non-judgmental.

Boundaries! We say “no” to things we know we can’t do.

2) Trust-building:

We don’t give false promises. When we promise something, we do it or we ask sb else from the group to continue with the case if for some reason we can’t.

If we don't know, we ask somebody else from the group. If we aren't sure about something we either consult with somebody else, for example, a trusted lawyer or we guide the person to where he/she can find this information. If we are not still sure where to guide him/her, we say that unfortunately, I can't help you with that. We either give valid advice or we don't give at all.

3) Avoid re-traumatization:

Retraumatization is when a person gets traumatized again due to being exposed in some way to the trauma that he/she already has. Trauma is like a mental scar and it can come up on the surface. We are sensitive to private information that is related to traumatic events. We don't ask too many questions, only the necessities that are important for understanding his/her case and only related to the issue that he/she came for. We can also say to the person that he/she doesn't have to share the things he doesn't feel like sharing. We are the "gatekeepers" and even if a person wants to share too much we also have the responsibility to know what is the minimum enough information we need in order to provide help. Give time to the person to reflect and decide what he/she wants to share and what not.

4) Secondary trauma/vicarious trauma/compassion fatigue

Secondary trauma: Literature often uses the terms "secondary trauma," compassion fatigue," and "vicarious traumatization" interchangeably. Although compassion fatigue and secondary trauma refer to similar physical, psychological, and cognitive changes and symptoms that behavioral health workers may encounter when they work specifically with clients who have histories of trauma, vicarious trauma usually refers more explicitly to specific cognitive changes, such as in worldview and sense of self (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Secondary

trauma describes trauma-related stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event. Secondary trauma can occur among social and health service providers and among all professionals who provide services to those who have experienced trauma (e.g., healthcare providers, peer counselors, volunteers, priests, etc).

Sources:

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4816.pdf>

TIP 57: Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services
SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Shelter from the storm: trauma-informed care in Homeless services, Hopper, Bassuk, Olivet 2010

Newell, J. M., & MacNeil, G. A. (2010). Professional burnout, vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue: A review of theoretical terms, risk factors, and preventive methods for clinicians and researchers. *Best Practices in Mental Health: An International Journal*, 6(2), 57–68.

Slide 21

Do they know Kaurismäki? We can ask the participants “Why hope?”

Slide 22

I talk about myself, and why I joined the network. Then I make an open question for discussion. I ask the new volunteers why they got initially interested in the activities of the Free Movement Network, what they expect, what they would like to achieve, in what kind of activities they are most interested in, etc. Give time for discussion and answer questions.

Slide 23

Thank you!

