



Helping the Helpers: Toward Sustainable Communities- Training and Support for people engaged in integrating migrants

Abstract

A short-term pilot program launched in September 2016 in Cusercoli, Italy trained 12 volunteers serving people forced to migrate to Europe from the Middle East and Africa. Using the ProQOL survey measure, we found that their level of benefit from the training was potentially significant. The training supported higher levels of compassion satisfaction, and decreased compassion fatigue and burnout, based on pre and three month follow up questionnaire surveys. Following the generally favorable result of this training and feedback from this and other trainings, an expanded yearlong program including on-going internet based small group supervision is planned to launch in September 2018.

Introduction

Migration and Forced Migration, nothing new, but the problem grows:

Migration is as old as humanity and the current era is no exception. Globalization and inequality drive people to look for new opportunities for economic wellbeing and self-expression. War, political repression and oppressive social systems force large numbers of people to flee their homes in search of safety. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in 2016 (the most recent year for which statistics are available) approximately 65 million people were displaced from their homes within or across international borders. (UNHCR Global Trends, 2017) This is more people forced from their homes than at any previous time in history. The push and pull factors are many, but it is safe to say that if people could find opportunities for safe, prosperous lives, allowing room for a wider range of religious, political, social and personal expression, migration would be much reduced. The particular factors that push and pull forced migration are not new, but increased global communication, decreased difficulty in traveling long distances, and increasing inequality between economically prosperous areas and places stuck in poverty may drive the increase.

Who is Helping?

One of the results of this huge displacement is that people with complex social, economic, educational and cultural needs are surfacing in communities far from home and separated from the support systems that used to sustain them. Migrating people are frequently disoriented and sometimes disappointed or disillusioned by the challenges they face in new, not always hospitable communities. Even under the best of conditions, moving to live in a new society is not easy. Unfamiliar circumstances, customs, linguistic, cultural and social challenges make life more complex and difficult. Many of the conditions that migrants encounter along the way or in host communities are unpredictable, even overwhelming. Migrants, whether forced or voluntary need support systems and helpers to assist them to navigate their new circumstances.

While xenophobic, angry or defensive rhetoric often grabs headlines, there are also good-hearted people everywhere willing to help newcomers. Unfortunately, a good heart and willingness to help may not be enough to equip people well for the role of a helper. This is especially true when migrants arrive in a new community hurt, fearful or damaged by the dangers of their journey or by the upheaval in their old home.

In addition to good heartedness, helpers need to develop skills to support a smooth transition and healthy adaptation for migrants, especially those who have had serious traumatic experiences along the way. Unfortunately, without proper skills helpers can do additional harm to the migrants they try to assist. Eventually, helpers without training are likely to do migrants and themselves harm in the process of trying to help. Most people who try to support migrants are at risk for discouragement and burnout if they themselves are not well supported and trained.

What is our target group?

The target group of Helping the Helpers training and supervision support program is ultimately the population of people forced to move away from their homes because of war, oppression or desperate poverty. However, in order to be helpful to as many forced migrants as possible, we have developed training methods, materials and an approach to supervision for people to become more effective helpers, able to sustain their efforts over the long haul. We believe that building strong communities of support with skillful helpers and knowledgeable hosts is key to making migration a process that strengthens rather than harms social life.

Helping the Helpers programs have trained groups like lawyers and community leaders working with Syrians in Turkey, social service workers assisting migrants in Italy and the United Kingdom, and Kurdish women serving communities in Turkish cities where Kurds have relocated after leaving their homeland due to politically motivated violence.

We are currently prepared to train and offer support in English, Turkish and Italian.



How do we define effective support?

Recently our program began using the ProQOL measure, an online survey that can be self-administered and scored in many different languages. The focus of the survey is to assess the capacity of a helper and to monitor their level of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue when serving others.

The ProQOL is "a 30 item self report measure of the positive and negative aspects of caring." (Professional Quality of Life, 2018) It is composed of two scales: first, Compassion Satisfaction and second, Compassion Fatigue, which in turn, is composed of two subscales: Burnout and Secondary Trauma. It has been validated and used for over 15 years and "is the most widely used measure of the positive and negative aspects of helping in the world." (Professional Quality of Life, 2018)

We ask participants in our Helping the Helpers programs to complete ProQOL surveys in their native languages just before and three months after each residential training institute. (They also complete qualitative evaluations immediately after the training and in their three month follow up) With this tool we are able to help helpers stay aware of their levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout and secondary trauma. With that self-awareness, helpers and people committed to high quality services have a regular way to reflect and check in on their motivation and well-being.

Method

Our Helping the Helpers program uses a holistic, integrative model encompassing biological, psychological, and social factors. The model focuses on understanding interactions between environmental, social, psychological and biological factors that affect mental health and human reactions to traumatic experiences. Our approach grows out of a Quaker spiritual frame of reference that encourages balancing individual and communal factors in fostering wellbeing and wholeness.



Key elements of this program content include:

- Sustainable healing and solidarity with other care providers
- Trauma informed care
- Secondary trauma prevention and intervention
- A community and relationally oriented model of healing
- Mind Body integration interventions
- An environmentally aware framework for sustainable healing

Results

The 12 participants in our Helping the Helpers training completed ProQOL surveys before and 10 participants also completed a survey and evaluation 3 months after the conclusion of the 5 day training.

Based on their qualitative evaluations, the participants' level of satisfaction with the experience at the conclusion of the training was good. In addition, the range of compassion satisfaction scores before the training was 24-49, while three months later it was 34-49 (all responses were anonymous.) Taken together, participants' Compassion Satisfaction scores rose by an average of 10.29% points. Average burnout and secondary trauma scores dropped by 21.85% and 14.74% respectively. However, because this sample size is so small and not every participant completed the 3 month evaluation, these scores cannot be considered particularly significant. Future trainings that increase the number of participants providing evaluation data, that include helpers with more significant initial levels of burnout and secondary trauma, along with more on-going exposure to both service and supervision should be stronger indicators of the value of this training. Qualitative comments by training participants also indicated their desire to see more ongoing support and maintain "living contact" with course participants and trainers over time.

Discussion

Our experience with the pilot five day training in Italy Sept. 2016 was that the 12 participants found their time well spent. They enjoyed the program content and the information that they learned. They appreciated the restful, healthy atmosphere of the conference center and meals, and above all they commented that they enjoyed connecting with one another and finding out that they were not alone and others shared some of their feelings and experiences.

One clear limitation that several participants remarked upon was that the training did not go far enough in providing them with an on-going level of support that they said they needed to sustain their work over time. Some kind of regular supervision and group support from other service providers and trained professionals would be very helpful as helpers encounter new situations and complicated challenges in their volunteer lives.

Based on that feedback, and in accord with comments from other volunteers and professionals in the field, we are developing a more comprehensive follow up pilot that includes more residential training and on-going internet based supervision for another small cohort of volunteers from around Europe.

Conclusion

This initial pilot represents only a small first step toward the development of an effective method. Eventually, we hope pilots like this will point the way toward a more comprehensive, sustainable, and socially sophisticated trauma-informed model of care for forced migrant service providers. The next iteration of the pilot, filled out with an internet based small group supervision component, is scheduled to begin in Brussels in September 2018. This next pilot is funded through the Quaker Council for European Affairs and promises to be another significant step forward.

References

Professional Quality of Life. (2018). Retrieved from www.proqol.org

Simich L. and Andermann, L. (2016). eds. *Refuge and Resilience: Promoting resilience and mental health among resettled refugees and forced migrants*.
New York, Springer Verlag

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (19 June 2017). *Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2016*. Retrieved from: <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/>

