Tales of a refugee
Narrative group intervention in the prevention of psychosocial problems among unaccompanied minors in Norway. A pilot project.

EUPHA Workshop 22.06.2016

Domnine Lecoq
Clinical Psychologist
Transcultural Center
Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Stavanger University Hospital
Transcultural Center in Stavanger, Norway

Our center is dedicated to provide traumatized asylum-seekers and refugees better access to a more adapted mental healthcare system
Who are we?

- We are five employees: two psychiatrists – whereas one is a specialist in child psychiatry –, a clinical psychologist, a clinical social worker and a secretary. We are hoping to expand our team.

- We were part of a two-year project financed by Health Region West, but we are now permanently implemented in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the Stavanger University Hospital.
What are we doing?

• Our task is to help provide and build a better mental health care to these patients by:
  – **Working clinically** with patients, all age groups
  – **Supervise** other instances that work with this population
  – Offer **training** to other professionnals
  – **Education, lecturing**
  – **Research**
How did the *Tales of a Refugee* project started?

A nurse working with the asylum center for young unaccompanied minors was worried for a group of Eritrean adolescents. They were showing psychiatric symptoms but were too suspicious to trust others to tell what they had experienced or their symptoms.

Jone Schanche Olsen, leader of the Transcultural Center, recalled that Kjell Ole Myrvoll and Anders Lundesgaard had a narrative group intervention in Sjøvegan Asylum Center in the Troms region in Norway.
To tell somebody else’s story

Together with the nurse, they decided to start a group who will tell the story of «one Eritrean person» who travels from Eritrea to Norway. The group decides everything (from the name and the age to the way) but the rule is that they all have to agree.

The idea is that the parallel processes of talking about another one’s story will help them to process their personal story without having to divulge their own to others.
Why is it this important?

• The group is telling a story that is close to their own but without having to feel the shame or the guilt.

• The youth’s own experience would be externalized og projected onto this character that does not exist.

• They do not need to fear that
  – their own stories get repeated or
  – the interpreter is a spy for their homeland.
Concept

• The frame:
  – 10 meetings with a nurse that knows them well together with a psychiatrist/psychologist from the Transcultural Center
  – The first meeting is used to explain the concept and to have some psychoeducation on the effect of trauma on the body and on the mind
  – Always the same interpreter. Not everything is interpreted, e.g. no interpretation when the boys are talking with each other while discussing but only when they have agreed
Until now:

We have had five groups:

- Group of Eritrean asylum seekers, perceived as successful
- Group of Eritrean refugees, catastrophic
- Group of Arab-speaking members, not functioning
- Group of Eritrean refugees, perceived as successful
- Ongoing: Group of Eritrean refugees, so far perceived as successful

29.06.2016
A pilot-project

• We are still trying to build the frame, but we know already that the boys get attached to «their story».
• A Master student in Intercultural Work (MIKA) in Stavanger intends to evaluate the impact of the narrative groups on the participants as her Master thesis
• We are very excited to see the results
Thank you for your attention

Please feel free to contact us if you wish to work in cooperation with us

domnine.lecoq@sus.no