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Challenges and impossibilities of 'standing alongside' in an intolerable context. Learning from refugees and volunteers in the Calais camp. Charlotte Burck & Gillian Hughes. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 2017. (in press)

Abstract

This article describes the experience of setting up a psychosocial and therapeutic support project in the French Calais refugee camp, by a group of family therapists and clinical psychologists from the United Kingdom. This came about in response to reports of a humanitarian crisis unfolding on our doorstep, with the British government's lack of support for the growing numbers of refugees gathering along the UK border with France. The project involved working alongside other agencies in the camp to provide psychosocial and resilience-based therapeutic support to unaccompanied young people, women, children and their families and also to many volunteers in the camp. The process of setting up the work is described, as well as the challenges and dilemmas of offering an intervention in extremely unsafe and insanitary conditions, where for most the experience of trauma was ongoing. The project was informed by systemic–narrative practice and community/liberation psychology, which incorporate the political and social context. A narrative framework offered a way of drawing on people's strengths and resources, rooted in their cultural and social histories and helping them connect with preferred identities, which we found to be essential in the context of ongoing crisis.

Keywords

Refugees, unaccompanied young people, children and families, refugee camp, systemic and narrative practice, community/liberation psychology, psychosocial interventions, resilience

Working in the Calais refugee camp has been extraordinary, shocking, humbling, and at the same time life affirming. We (the authors and our team) entered into a microcosm of the lived experiences of refugees in the unwelcoming context in which they were located, facing acute needs, heightened tensions, complex contradictions, and the polarised issues with which our world is being confronted on an unprecedented scale. This was a place where people who had fled their countries needed to survive ongoing police surveillance and brutality and constant reminders of not being wanted. How was it possible to maintain a sense of identity, coherence and hope in such a context?

In this paper, we attempt to articulate some of the experiences of setting up a team and offering psychosocial and therapeutic support in the 'official unofficial' camp, on a former landfill site close to Calais Ville in which up to 10,000 refugees tried to live with dignity in disgusting conditions, having fled terrifying and intolerable contexts and made perilous journeys seeking safety. We attempted to offer support in ways that involved witnessing and acknowledging injustices, and helped people to re-connect with positive versions of their identity and their cultural histories, through both collective and individual conversations.

As the numbers of people seeking refuge and safety from war zones and persecution has increased exponentially in the last few years, we in the UK are faced with a disastrous humanitarian crisis on our doorstep, which our government has done its best to ignore while denying any responsibility. For example, in February 2017, the UK government confirmed

they would stop receiving unaccompanied young people through the Dubs amendment¹ after admitting only 350 children, and cancelled the fast-track Dublin scheme which aimed to help those with family already in the UK. This stance of harsh inhumanity has been supported by powerful societal discourses. Our newspapers have been full of stories about the ‘dangers’ of immigration, dominated by racist discourses which at best position refugees as an unwanted burden on the state and at worst, as untrustworthy - out to take what they can. Research commissioned by UNHCR looking at press coverage of the migrant crisis by a number of EU countries concluded that the UK was the most negative of all (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). Brexit was a stark illustration of how a culture of fear has been created around the migration crisis in Europe and reinforced the UK government’s position of keeping people out. Although the issue of immigration in this debate refers to EU nationals not refugees, the media (and UKIP) have fuelled the hostility to refugees to garner support for Brexit.

This has led to numbers of British citizens feeling compelled to take a stand and act in its place, volunteering and offering different services to the residents of the Calais camp, and it is what brought us (the authors) together. We were distressed and ashamed of the stance the UK government was taking and did not want to be complicit in it. We wanted to find a way to make use of our professional experience, Gillian's of managing the Child and Family Refugee Service at the Tavistock Centre, London, and Charlotte's of working with families who had witnessed and experienced violence.

We are both systemic family therapists (Gillian also a clinical psychologist), drawn to narrative and community/liberation psychology approaches because of their emphasis on: working with people’s values, as well as the strengths and resources rooted within their communities and social histories; an understanding of distress arising within social and political contexts; the explicit challenging of dominant negative stories of people’s behaviour and motives; supporting people to create their own definitions of self and identity; and the priority given to connecting people and supporting social action (White, 2005; Denborough, 2008; Afuape and Hughes, 2016). We wanted to avoid interventions which focused directly on addressing trauma as the people in the camp were not yet in a safe place and the risk of creating more harm than good was therefore very high. We were also mindful of the criticisms of many interventions developed in Western contexts which are not culturally congruent and rely on deficit models, involving an expert led process of assessment and diagnosis (Braken, Giller and Summerfield, 1999). Given the context of persecution and abuse of power from which many had fled, coupled with the ongoing oppressive environment of the camp and more broadly within Europe, we felt it was particularly important to draw on approaches which explicitly took a stance in opposition to this.

Mapping the context

¹ Lord Dubs, himself a refugee who fled Nazi Germany via the kindertransport, designed the Dubs amendment which aimed to facilitate the entry to the UK of some of the estimated 90,000 unaccompanied children attempting to seek refuge in Europe.

To decide what, if anything, we could usefully offer in the Calais refugee camp, we began by mapping the system by identifying organisations already working there before we made our first visit. The process of 'scouting' (Bunning et al, 1990), following from one lead to another, was crucial to see whether there could be a role for us, and where we might best find 'entry' points. Initially, we made a relationship with colleagues from Art Refuge UK, an experienced art therapy team, who had been working in the camp at least six months and provided us with many contacts.

As the Calais camp was never recognised as an official refugee camp, we discovered that there was minimal input from the French state. Médecins du Monde (MdM) and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) both had very small teams there, but the camp was almost entirely maintained by various small groups of volunteers from the UK, France and all over Europe, doing their best to provide what their governments were not - food, clothing, shelter, legal advice, education, and health care. We learned that there was no one body providing an overview or coordination between groups, and many appeared to be working in isolation, unaware of others' involvement, and sometimes in competition. This was a considerable problem as there was no continuity of care for camp residents, nor were people able to build on each other's work. It was crucial for us to link with as many groups as we could and at times we enabled others to do so too.

Being in a refugee camp was new territory for us despite experiences of working with refugees in the UK, and it was unlike any context in which we had ever worked. Our first visit coincided with the destruction of the southern part of the camp by the French state. The bulldozed earth with remnants of residents' belongings surrounding the shelter where we first based ourselves, the menacing presence of the CRS (the French riot police), the residents in panic gathering up their belongings, and the fires sweeping through shelters, were a powerful visceral introduction to the camp. The destruction dramatically heightened the sense of uncertainty and threat for camp residents and radically changed their environment, creating an ever more densely populated site in a much more constrained space. The only apparent reason for this destruction was that the authorities wanted the camp, and the people in it, gone. It was a very public display of brutalising power, having the effect of increasing tension between people and exacerbating feelings of hopelessness.

An over-riding characteristic of the camp was its chaotic and ever-changing composition. Our mapping needed continuous revision. Refugees were continually arriving and leaving and, during our time of working from March 2016 until its destruction at the end of October 2016, the population increased to an estimated 10,000 residents at its highest. A defining dimension of the camp was the lack of safety, particularly for unaccompanied minors and for women. There were no protected sleeping places for unaccompanied children and adolescents, who had to survive sleeping in shelters with adult male strangers, leaving them extremely vulnerable to abuse and to traffickers. Women faced similar dangers. Child protection was seen as almost impossible to implement because there was no 'safe space' and unaccompanied children were very wary of statutory agencies because of their experiences of hostility and abuse from the French police, and their wish to avoid becoming officially

registered in France. Many hoped to be accepted in the UK and were worried that it would affect their chances.

We rapidly learned never to take anything for granted and to find ways to be able to respond in the moment. Although we always came with materials and ideas, we developed a very flexible approach, open to brief or lengthier, planned or spontaneous encounters as seemed to fit. The camp contained people from many different countries, amongst others Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and who spoke a multitude of languages. This created its own challenges in our offering support which relied on some speaking even when using art materials and visually based activities to lead to conversation. We often ended up 'borrowing' interpreters already working with other organisations.

The most important factor we took into account was that all refugees in the camp were still on their journeys to safety, seeking a home. The camp provided little privacy, little safety, severe privations and huge uncertainties, and it was evident that everybody had to stay in survival mode. Our role was to enable camp residents to sustain their resilience - supporting them to draw on both their personal resources and those within their communities. We understood resilience as described by Unger (2008) - being embedded in culture, context, and community, rather than simply an internal, individual attribute, and our conversations with people took account of this. Until the people in the camp were safe, we realised that the process of making sense of past traumas would be very limited. When traumatic stories were shared, therefore understood this as more a desire to connect with another person, and to have experiences witnessed and acknowledged, rather than an attempt to transform memories through reflection and meaning-making.

Alongside, there were small communities of support which refugees themselves had built up. Residents tended to group in the camp with those of their own ethnicity, to be able to speak their languages of home, share cultural traditions and support each other. But the 'main street' where people had set up makeshift cafes, barbers, and places of worship allowed all nationalities to mix, where people could charge their phones and spend time together. There were pockets of warmth and companionship in the midst of tensions, uncertainties and terrible living conditions. These communities of support and resilience were clearly vital in enabling people to hold onto hope and to survive in the chaotic conditions of the camp.

Our approach

Because of the camp's chaotic nature, we understood that what would be most important would be to offer a regular and consistent presence. Everything was temporary; one never knew if people (both volunteers and residents) would still be there from one week to the next. Our presence in the same place and at the same time each week was crucial to become seen as dependable to residents as well as volunteers.

Within this ever-changing context, we negotiated as possible three different pieces of work: a group for unaccompanied young people alongside the Refugee Youth Service; a group for women and children in the French state run Women and Children's Centre; and group and

individual consultations for volunteers. Volunteers were from the Refugee Youth Service looking after unaccompanied minors, and from L'Auberge des Migrants/Help Refugees who were working tirelessly on managing donations and distributions within the camp. Médecins du Monde organised official papers each week for our permission to enter the camp and kept us informed of the level of risk.

We rapidly gathered a team of ten experienced systemic family therapists and clinical psychologists trained in narrative approaches, keen to contribute. We agreed that we would go in pairs or a trio to the camp for safety, and to enable a sharing of our responses to the disturbing things we witnessed to protect ourselves from burnout. The day was a long one, from 5:00am to travel to France, returning by 9:00pm, but allowed for preparation on the way and reflection on the way back. Because a different pair went each Friday, it was essential that we were able to build coherence in our approach to ensure consistency. Each pair did a full handover to those going next and we arranged regular supervision as a team. The team built on approaches developed by the Child and Family Refugee Service at the Tavistock Centre, in working with unaccompanied minors and refugee families in the UK (Hughes 2013; Hughes & Kaur, 2014, Clayton & Hughes, 2016). Even more importantly the team shared an ethos, bound by our passion for this project and our commitment to entwine our therapeutic approach with a political stance.

Our guiding principles were to acknowledge distress whilst recognising the socio-political context in which this was experienced (Martín-Baró 1996), and to validate the ability of people to resist hardship. We aimed to enable people to connect with and support each other, mindful that there were no volunteers around at night when the dangers were greatest. Our theoretical underpinnings of systemic-narrative and liberation psychology frameworks focused on supporting and strengthening resilience and resistance embedded in community and social histories. We particularly drew on the Tree of Life approach (Ncube 2006), response-based therapy identifying resistance to violence (Wade 1997, 2007), ideas about the importance of witnessing (Weingarten 2000), and liberation approaches (Martín-Baró 1996).

We aimed to enter into relationships in the camp, no matter how brief, informed by 'relational ethics' (Bergum & Dossetor 2005); embodying respect, engagement and being present - a response to the de-humanising context of suspicion, racism, and police brutality, and consequent fragmentation of identity ever present for camp residents. We attempted to find private spaces to talk with people wherever possible; we listened closely to what individuals were conveying, trying to take care to ensure we had understood, staying with people's distress, and holding onto our humility. In making our way through the camp we remembered to smile and say hello, staying open to encounters.

We were careful not to reduce problems (poor sleep, nightmares, self harm) to solely individual experiences by ignoring the structural reality within which they were produced. So we worked with groups of people together, constantly connecting them back to their cultural and social roots and asking questions about the political context (such as their experiences of police brutality, violence in the camp, racism from local people). We would have found it

ethically problematic to offer resilience based therapeutic help in the camp without committing ourselves to intervening in the political arena alongside. We did not see our role as to simply prop people up and develop tolerance to an intolerable situation. We did not want to support the status quo, and therefore viewed our input as a political act. In our work with camp residents we would acknowledge, name and highlight the injustices we witnessed (Martín-Baró, 1996), and let people know we were working to make these visible to the general public where we could.

The camp and the context in which it was situated provided an extreme example of the destructive working of power identified by Foucault. The negative discourses about refugees in France and in the UK fuelled hostile responses from some Calais citizens, the police and the CRS (the French riot police) towards the camp residents, profoundly impacting on refugees' sense of self. Foucault (1980) described the workings of 'modern power' relying on people accepting their position in the social order, viewing this as natural and inevitable. For people to remain in positions of subjugation, beliefs need to be maintained that they are inferior and the architects of their personal circumstances. It was a continual challenge to counter the internalisation of negative identities. "We are human too" was a phrase painted everywhere by the refugees on shelters in the camp.

The more the idea of refugees as 'other' is perpetuated, the more the current inhumane asylum system can continue (Lee, 2012; Lee, personal communication 2016). In the current migration crisis, seeking asylum has become framed as a crime, not a right. We became involved in challenging negative discourses about refugees predominant in the media in the UK, contacting journalists and politicians and joining with others in this task.

Re-connecting people with preferred identities

Because of the negative stories told about the camp residents, refugees were in danger of developing negative conclusions about their identities. Our narrative practices offered some ways of challenging these negative discourses and invited the telling (and living)* of preferred versions of people's lives - humane stories connected to values and hopes for the future.

We constantly looked for openings in conversations with people for alternative and positive definitions of identity. We had conversations about ways in which parents were working hard to look after their children in dire circumstances, and of ways children themselves had helped, or supported friends, looking out for one another. Following Allan Wade's (1997, 2007) work we were attentive in helping individuals notice small ways in which they had actively responded to extraordinarily difficult circumstances, their 'small acts of resistance'. How had they strived for their own and others' survival, and for justice, so that people were able to claim a sense of agency in the midst of much that tried to render them powerless?

As we understand identity as a socially constructed phenomenon, it was important that people's preferred identities were embedded in their relationships with others. We talked with people about the cultural roots of their identity – how rituals were conducted in their home

countries, how relationships were structured, and how they were holding onto aspects of their culture in the camp. It was important to hear stories of peoples' lives separate from trauma and distress. In one of our mother and children groups, a group of Sudanese women wrote a list of what made them proud of their culture, and sang a song from home together for the group. On another occasion, some Kurdish women drew pictures of traditional celebration dresses, and talked of their memories of celebrations. This 'doing culture together' felt like an act of resistance to the fragmentation of identity that traumatic experiences induce, and what Reynolds (2010) describes as resistance to oppression by keeping people connected to humanity.

Witnessing and 'stolen stories'

Weingarten (2000) argues that hope is not an individual and solitary phenomenon, but something that is lived in relationship with others, something we 'do' for each other. She suggests two important tasks in doing hope together: for those experiencing despair to resist isolation, and for those witnessing it, to resist indifference. This was very potent for us witnessing human misery and despair, feeling implicated, guilty that we were not doing more, experiencing alienation from our own privileged lives. Witnessing is an active process which enables connection with and validation of the other person's story. Weingarten proposes that 'compassionate witnessing' involves elements including the acknowledgement of losses, supporting mourning and grief, humanizing the enemy, and witnessing individual and collective pain 'with as much heartfelt compassion as we can muster' (Weingarten, 2003 p11.)

We listened to the accounts that refugees shared with us, paying close attention to openings in the conversation for descriptions of resistance, survival, support and hope. We became curious about those alternative stories which ran alongside the stories of trauma and distress, what White (2004) described as 'double listening'. Charlotte invited two adolescent girls to do some drawing and they began to talk of their hazardous journeys, indicating experiences of sexual and other abuse. Their drawing also illustrated their friendship and they explained how they had become friends en-route and vowed to keep connected and fight for each other. Together we celebrated their friendship and its strength in the face of trauma and present uncertainties. In this way, we were able to witness peoples' stories with less danger of their being re-traumatised.

Jessica Benjamin (2014, 2016) argues there is an urgent need to restore the function of public witnessing. She has highlighted the problem of the 'failed witness', 'a failure of those not involved in the acts of injury to serve the function of acknowledging and actively countering or repairing the suffering and injury that they encounter as observers in the social world' (Benjamin, 2014 internet ref), and the role of public denial in personal and collective trauma, particularly pertinent in comprehending the contexts of responses to refugees.

Our team became increasingly politicised during our work. We moved from experiences of un-empowered failed witnesses to more aware empowered ones (Weingarten 2000), finding ways to use our knowledge to try to effect change. Witnessing needs to be embedded in

knowledge about the political context of what is being told. We briefed journalists, wrote to politicians, took part in petitions and protests, and publicised wherever we could the humanity and plight of refugees and the shocking neglect by our and other European governments. We liaised with legal teams to report on general conditions and on mental health needs of unaccompanied minors to support their challenging of legal decisions about young people's right to come to the UK.

This was not without its dilemmas. We began to hear accounts from camp residents of visitors asking questions and 'stealing their stories' for their own purposes, while nothing changed for them. They hadn't been enabled to come to Britain, even those who had been told they had a right, and nobody had helped make the camp safer or given them a home. How could we bear witness to their stories effectively when our public witnessing failed to lead to any difference? Responding at a personal level often seemed completely inadequate when the intolerable conditions remained unchanged. This dilemma persisted throughout our work in Calais, but the responses - welcomes from people who recognised us, and for many, their visible relief that talking appeared to bring - were enough for us to continue. However, it felt crucial to continually evaluate our motivations for going to the camp so that our perception of our usefulness did not become overtaken by a mission to 'rescue' people.

There is always the question for whom we are doing this work? Is it to manage our own feelings of powerlessness and shame concerning our government's inhumane stance towards refugees, our wish not to remain observers and to be able to live with ourselves in these harsh times? Or are we really able to help create some difference in these very hazardous circumstances?

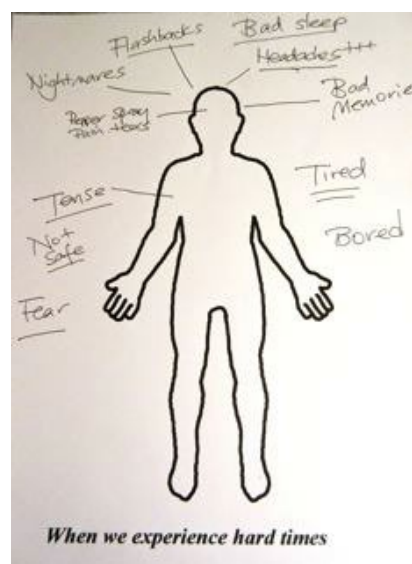
Resilience/resistance based work.

We quickly discovered that ideas about what we might offer were not easily transformed into practice on the ground. To be able to offer a group for unaccompanied minors we needed to meet and engage young people, to explain what we were offering (in many different languages), and find a space in which to run it. It took time to build relationships with the dedicated staff at the Refugee Youth Service before we could engage with the young people who already knew them and had learned to trust them.

We began to offer a weekly group in the MSF youth space shared with the Refugee Youth Service for whoever turned up, to support adolescents' connections with each other. The risk is that collective circumstances and responses become described as individual problems and the person can start to believe that they are falling short. This is why it was important to work as a group. Resilience as a concept can itself be problematic if framed as the ability of an individual to withstand adversity. With this approach, distress becomes cut off from the social conditions in which it is generated, and the tendency is to see the problem located in individuals who are not strong enough. Michael Ungar's (2011) research also challenges the concept of individual resilience and demonstrates its dependence on relational and contextual resilience. When a person accepts individualising definitions of problems, they become easily demoralised as the seeming impossibility of feeling OK in such extreme circumstances

reinforces ideas of failure. In whatever we did, we counteracted this tendency by connecting people to each other's accounts of distress, and by tracing their personal strength back to their social and cultural histories, to recover these enabling memories for them to draw on (Martín-Baró, 1996).

Among other activities we used a 'body map' to enable the adolescents to identify the impact on their bodies of some of their past and current experiences. This was in response to RYS staff concerns that the young people were talking a great deal about bodily pains. Body mapping was first developed by Solomon (2002) as a narrative method in work in South Africa with women living with HIV/AIDS. G had developed this herself with a group of unaccompanied refugee children in London, mapping out together the physical responses in their bodies to distress and traumatic memories. It was a revelation to the young people in the camp that others experienced the same troubling responses, and that these were normal reactions to extreme events. This enabled talk about how to manage these bodily responses, and opened dialogue about an area that had seemed taboo and frightening. The mapping enabled a shift from understanding physical symptoms and flashbacks as madness, to realising these were common bodily responses to extreme circumstances, which could be shared and managed with the help of friends. The body map enabled young people to show us scars they had accumulated on their journeys and in the camp, after-effects of tear gas on their red and streaming eyes, wounds from tear gas canisters and rubber bullets - injuries that required referral for medical attention. One adolescent showed us deep scars up his forearms which he had done himself, and on each side just below his shoulder, he had carved two letters into his flesh - the initials of his parents. He did not want to say where his parents were or what had happened to them, although he indicated that his mother was dead.



A gentle, 15 year old Sudanese boy, Bashir * spoke ruefully of the violence that had followed him all the way from his home in Darfur, along the route of his journey, and was now all

around him in Calais. When asked about the different ways Bashir had found of responding to this violence, he said he had become very good at noticing when it was approaching and would move away to escape it, or keep quiet and small so that it would not alight on him. Gillian asked where he had learned these skills of keeping violence at arms length, and Bashir talked about how he was from a peaceful community back home. His father had always worked hard to avoid violence, and had taught his son to do this. This led on to a conversation about how Bashir was holding onto those values, even so far from home and how this connected him with his community. Gillian asked what it meant to him to carry this cultural history of non-violence and he talked about how this value was such an important part of who he was.

Another Sudanese boy was standing close and trying to listen, although his English was limited. Gillian asked Bashir if he knew this boy and if he would like to share any of what they had been talking about with him, and Bashir said he would like to do this.

Gillian could not change the material context for Bashir, but helped him to connect with aspects of his history and personal story that would help sustain him. She witnessed his account and invited him to have a second witness who might be able to connect Bashir's story with his own.

We also tried to connect camp residents with refugees who were now in the UK, and wished to lend support. A young man whom Gillian knew, Mohammed *, now settled in the UK and who had been through Calais several years before, longed to work with us. Mohammed felt very lucky to have received support and opportunities, and was keen to give back something to those still in positions of uncertainty and distress. He contributed by writing a letter to young camp residents about the hardships he knew they were undergoing, offering them acknowledgement of their difficulties and words of encouragement. He urged them not to get caught up in violence no matter how difficult this might be and said how important it had been for him to keep connected to friends to keep safe. Young people in the camp who read his letter asked questions about him and seemed buoyed up by the hope that this letter brought. When their responses were fed back to Mohammed, he was moved by their words and by the opportunity this gave them all to 'do hope together' (Weingarten, 2000).

Our negotiations with the French state run Jules Ferry Women and Children's Centre began by presenting our ideas to the staff for the running of a multifamily group for mothers and children to sustain hope and resistance in this unsafe environment. Our aims were to build on women's survival strategies, drawing on their social histories and resources, whilst offering the opportunity to share current challenges and concerns. We aimed to enable women to support their children and each other. Our initial plans to offer Tree of Life workshops gave way to more open-ended fluid ways of working with more children than mothers, with pens and paper, plasticine, and lego to enable stories to be told, and dreams to be shared, while always attending to the identifying of skills and resources. The children were hungry for play and focus, and mothers came and went. Language gaps meant our aims of thinking with mothers about how to respond to their children's traumatic experiences did not proceed in any

orderly way, but stories were told of hazardous journeys and children's drawings revealed memories of drownings at sea. The use of a map to illustrate journeys, and the creation of music - sounds from home, were incorporated into sessions which often included the drawing of familiar things from home as well as longed for houses. Creating play space in the midst of tensions, uncertainties, sadness and despair, offered short term relief alongside emotional witnessing, and identifying strengths and hopes. We had discussions with women about what they were most proud of from their culture. Women often made tea to share with us and at one point invited the team to share food to break a fast. Here, small rituals from home could be carried out and sustained when all else was uncertain, and enabled an enactment of culture and identity.

We were able to offer some family therapy sessions in the Women and Children's Centre when staff identified particular concerns about relationships or children showing considerable distress. Charlotte worked over several months with other team members with Amir*, a 7 year old and his mother who could not understand his challenging behaviour towards her or the other children in the Centre. We met in a separate room or at the side of their bed in their shared dormitory when either was feeling unwell. Our initial meeting was dominated by her shame about his behaviour exacerbated by other women and staff's criticisms. We managed together to find ways to try to make sense of his behaviour and confusion, his sense of responsibility as well as why he sometimes blamed his mother. While his mother focused on their future, Amir was very sad about having lost his childhood friends. To lessen his confusion Amir's mother was able to begin to talk to him about how they came to be in the camp, and to reassure him that her sadness was not his fault. We also focused on his academic abilities as a wonderful resource which she could support by reading together, and a different way to interact. Alongside it seemed important to challenge the staff's negative views of this family and to try to enable them to be able to identify and support the mother and boy's resourcefulness.

Supporting the supporters

'The violence of the world's true stories can crack you open. You lose the shape you were moulded in.' was how Chris Cleaves (2016), a journalist who had been interviewing refugees, described the impact on him. Many volunteers we met working in the Calais camp seemed to have been 'cracked open' by what they had witnessed. There was a powerful sense for them, and ourselves, that our lives had been profoundly changed by what we had experienced. In our support of volunteers we were also aware of the potential of secondary trauma (Smith 2012, Maslach 1982).

Refugee Youth Service (RYS) staff let us know that they might value time to think about particularly challenging situations they were having to manage. Working closely with unaccompanied minors faced them with strong feelings of powerlessness, of not being able to provide what they really needed - safety and a home. Like many of the organisations which had been set up to work in the camp, RYS had grown organically without taking on board the importance of sustaining their own well-being in the face of overwhelming demands. They

wished to think about particularly vulnerable children and how best to respond to situations of risk and self-harm when there were no safety measures which could easily be put in place. Many staff had found little time to reflect on their experiences and sustain their own resources. Two staff, themselves refugees, working as interpreters, reported experiences of mistreatment and disqualification by volunteers from other organisations, exposing some contradictions within some 'helping organisations'. However, this reinforced their own commitment to try to ensure the young people they worked with were treated with dignity and respect.

The team had a chance encounter with a volunteer in the camp who relayed how stressed she and her peers were, with a few no longer able to function. This led to our contacting the organisations Auberge de Migrants / Help Refugees with whom she worked to see how we could enable practices of self-care and reflections to be incorporated in order to stay resilient. The challenge was to engage passionate overworked volunteers with no experience of the importance of taking care of themselves to see that this was also a way of helping camp residents. We agreed to offer a 'pit-stop' group weekly – a place to refuel, to be able to continue with the work. Themes which came up in the many heartfelt and passionate discussions we had together concerned doubts about sustaining a horrendous living situation for residents when this wasn't a solution and how to manage the inability to give refugees the safety and shelter they so desperately needed. Volunteers often witnessed incidents of police and other violence and were often at a loss about how to respond to stories of horrific journeys and abuse. Thinking about legal and emotional ways to respond was an important thread. In the face of overwhelming need it was a tremendous challenge to feel they deserved to take any time off and we continually spoke to the importance of enabling themselves and each other to know when they needed to take a break to be able to carry on with their valuable work. Discussions included passionate critiques of governments failing in their duties with volunteers stepping in to fill desperate need, and how to talk to people 'back home' and bridge the gap between what often seemed like parallel universes. These themes resonated with our own reflections as a team, thus enabling some fruitful collaborative discussion. We also felt it important to help them identify, mark and celebrate their crucial work, and highlight the values and principles which had brought them to the camp and helped form the strong community spirit among volunteers, in spite of the stresses and tensions involved.

Working the contradictions. Inequality and moments of mutuality

Working in the camp highlighted to an acute degree questions which had always faced us as professionals. What makes sense when we are implicated in contributing to the intolerable difficulties facing people, and we are unable to give people what they need?

Mental health professionals have always had to manage the tension between working to improve mental health and participating in a system contributing to conditions which endanger mental health. This tension presented itself starkly in the camp. We were working within a context that was totally disempowering, dangerous and oppressive and where

alternative forms of action were very limited. It was obvious to volunteers and refugees alike that we were unable to provide residents with what they really needed - safety and a secure home. We were working with people who had gone through many traumatic experiences, but the trauma was ongoing and there was no safe base from which to address this.

We wanted to be helpful but we were also implicated as citizens of a government which was turning a blind eye. We heard young people's frustration that many people were coming and asking questions, but nothing changed. "What use is talking? Why is nobody doing anything?" we were asked on a number of occasions when despair and frustration became overwhelming. At those moments, it felt wrong to ask about acts of resistance as it seemed that what was being asked of us was to witness and acknowledge the injustices being perpetrated, and to sit with the discomfort of the situation.

Our approach was entirely informed by this tension. We and the camp residents shifted, at times startlingly suddenly and within the same encounter, between different relational positions: collaborators, helpers-helped, witnesses-storytellers, citizens-dispossessed, withholders-claimants, nurturers-nurtured and inhumane-humane. This often left us wondering whether we could be helpful at all. This mirrors the dilemma Da Heine and Rober (2016) so eloquently described in their wish to offer 'hospitality' in their work with refugees in Belgium and their need to acknowledge when this was contradicted by other positionings. They suggested that Derrida's concept of hospitality offers helpful reflections on the ethics of relationships, identifying how therapeutic positions intertwine healing and violence, and how complex therapeutic responsibility is, as a 'form of supportive, healing presence that necessarily and simultaneously involves power, appropriation, and inequality' (Da Heine & Rober 2016).

Our power and privilege, (alongside its abuses), were always palpable, which we had to own with its discomfort, alongside our wish to bear witness and fight inhumane systems on the camp residents' behalf as well as on our own.

In these most unequal relationships between those of us who could come and go as we pleased, in particular to homes in Britain where many refugees longed to be, and those, dispossessed and living in uncertain and horrendous circumstances, what were we able to offer, given we couldn't just take people home with us? The wish to do just that, to take a young unaccompanied adolescent or a mother with young children home, was often very powerful.

Despite times when acute frustration about talk rather than action hit a nerve, making us wonder whether anything we offered could make any sense, the idea of 'doing hope' for another (Weingarten 2000) held out a line. Reflections on the journey there and back and with the whole team were invaluable. Within the accounts of experiences of trauma there was always resistance to abuse in the stories of how people responded, and survival skills which could be owned and honed for the next phase of journeying. Sometimes just staying present, alongside grief, injustice, and the dangers survived felt a significant and moving encounter. This was sadly made more so by the way refugees were treated by police and others, as if

they did not count as human beings deserving of respect and dignity. "Why do the police beat me? Why do they hate me?" were unanswerable questions.

And there were 'golden moments' of a different kind, small episodes of warm connection, such as when a camp resident's remark about a plasticine figure Charlotte had made looking like a police officer, became a shared joke while acknowledging experiences of police brutality - shared hilarity creating a 'moment of mutuality'. Such moments shifted relationships to more equal interchanges, despite the marked differences. A young adolescent offered us his lunch the day we heard the camp was to be demolished, smilingly insisting we have something to eat, while we tried to persuade him he needed his strength for the coming days. It brought home not only the generosity of residents but also the importance of their being able to claim agency. We were mindful of building such opportunities in our groups for unaccompanied minors, and for women and children.

Smiling, saying hello and responding to cheery or not so cheery invitations to interact as we moved around the camp also sometimes felt like small fleeting moments of human contact in damp and dreary circumstances.

Our identification of these experiences led to our enabling volunteers and staff to identify such 'mattering moments' (Shotter 2016) too, to counter feeling overwhelmed by the impossibility of being helpful in ways that made a significant difference.

Lessons learnt and recommendations for future work

The experience of this work has taught us a great deal about how to go about similar projects in the future. Our key points of learning were:

To ensure our practice remained ethical, it was vital to examine carefully what our motivations were before embarking on the work, and to review this constantly to avoid a colonising mentality. Having the space to reflect on the work, with an external consultant, and keeping these conversations live within our group, has been essential. These conversations have also helped us review our professional and personal views about how people 'should' respond to extreme and traumatic circumstances, and held these in check.

Coming up against the limitations of our professional frameworks was challenging, and dismantled some assumptions about ourselves and our ways of working. Learning to adapt to ever-changing contexts and honing our ability to 'make small spaces of meaningful connection' in the midst of ongoing chaos and crises was crucial. Our team's group-relational-reflexivity helped to ride our feelings of impotency and hopelessness, and our 'teams of solidarity' (Reynolds 2011), writers such as Poh Lin Lee, inspired us to take part in responsive, emotionally moving moments within this brutalising context.

Having a good structure for looking after ourselves was essential so that we were able to remain clear about our guiding principles and that these did not become clouded by the emotional impact that the work inevitably had at times on our judgements.

A systemic stance was invaluable in actively making links with other organisations to ensure we were coordinating with and complementing the work of others. We needed to work closely with those on the ground every day, to be guided by their knowledge and experience to remain close to the experience of the refugees and continual shifts in the camp context.

Working with other organisations was important too to develop guidelines for how to address disclosures of sexual abuse, self harm and violence, to try to ensure that the available support and legal structures, however patchy, were used when necessary. Concern about risk needed to be shared to enable a coordinated response for keeping people as safe as it was possible in this unsafe context.

In order to minimise the sense that people had of their stories being 'stolen' and bringing them no relief, we needed to observe carefully and ask for feedback from those we were trying to support, and be clear at the start about what they wanted from conversations with us (as far as this is possible). The narrative principle of keeping the person centred in conversations has been very useful to ensure that our personal agendas do not take over and that we continued to attend carefully to what people were bringing.

Witnessing, personally and publicly, and naming and acknowledging injustices has been central to this work. It is jointly standing against injustice which creates solidarity (Reynolds 2010), and goes part way to challenge the inequalities of privileged-unprivileged, helper-helped relationships within the camp. Solidarity forms contextual resilience, and it is contextual resilience which fosters individual resilience.

Holding in mind all that we have learnt, we now feel we would do this project again following the same approach, because the contexts of temporary refugee camps do not allow for anything more planned and structured. We have learned that projects of this kind require persistence, patience and commitment in order to build the possibilities of carrying out this type of work.

Conclusion

This was a deeply humbling and profound experience. We have witnessed extremes of human misery and of hope and resistance. We saw how, in such a squalid and degrading environment, people found ways of honoring their traditions, supporting each other and holding onto dignity and respect.

We end on a political note, without which we could not have carried out this work. The injustice of the refugee crisis is an injustice against all of us, against humanity. We hope that we as a nation will be able to look back and wonder how a place like the Calais camp was ever allowed to exist, and then destroyed in such an inhumane way. A public inquiry into police abuse is desperately needed and questions asked at a government level about the actions / inactions of the authorities, how no state facilities were put in place (drainage, sanitation, basic shelters, education for the children), and how the camp came to be cleared

before the children were moved to places of safety. We desperately need our governments to develop a vision of how best to offer 'hospitality', with all its contradictions, to an ever increasing number of refugees, fleeing intolerable situations, in which we cannot wholeheartedly say we were not implicated.

Footnote

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All the names of people we met through this work have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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