

**WAR TRAUMA PROGRAMME  
OF THE INCEST TRAUMA CENTER – BELGRADE  
GUIDED BY  
MALA SIRENA FOUNDATION, NETHERLANDS  
(NOVEMBER 1995 - JANUARY 1999)**



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## INTRODUCTION

In the times of no history of a “psycho-social care culture” in former Yugoslavia the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade was founded and reached significant growth. This fact is related to the period: January 1994 – January 1999. 90’s are the WAR TIMES here.

Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade is a women’s group, non-governmental and non profit organisation. It does two parallel programmes: child sexual abuse trauma and war trauma programme. In the other words, we are children’s trauma center. This is the only institute of this kind specialised in child sexual abuse/incest issue in Eastern Europe. It is the only local organisation in Federal Republic Yugoslavia (FRY) who offers for years continual counseling / therapeutic work to refugee children and their families. Children as a target group are the last focus of psycho-social aid projects in FRY. Treatment of the children’s rights place them as the last ones on the scale of human rights.

War trauma programme within the Incest trauma Center – Belgrade has been financially guided by the Dutch Foundation “Mala Sirena” (Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs as back up source). “Mala Sirena” has been through the war and post-war years supporting projects working with mentally distressed children and youth on the territory of former Yugoslavia. This co-operation exists since November 1995 and enables full existence of the Center itself.

This overview on the work belonging to the war trauma programe from beginning till now is made by three women. Strength and specifics of the picture we present comes from continual professional involvement all these years. Our professional views and experiences will be shared from the role of founders and closely working counselors / therapists / colleagues all these years. Our opinion is that exactly our expertise / experience united at this point will give you the maximum of idea around development and achieved results. This picture you need if you want adequately to join the future of the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade.

January 29, 1999

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## MODEL FOR ANCHORING PSYCHO-SOCIAL AID PROJECTS

In front of you is the answer of the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade on the model for anchoring psycho-social aid projects created by “Mala Sirena” Foundation, Netherlands, which follows an “organic structure”. The key task of the aid team to provide the treatment of children’s trauma within the context of a safe therapeutic relationship we find fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> Its function within this model is to be the part of argumentation on the road of institutionalising the existing work.

### Step 1: STRENGTHENING OF THE INTERNAL MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

When we got in touch with “Mala Sirena” in November 1995 we already had clear organizational structure. It is usual for local psycho-social aid projects in former Yugoslavia to be overwhelmed by managing content issues under the war circumstances and lacking to take the moment to invest in learning process around organisational issues. The reason to establish it in early stage lies in the following:

1. In our expertise were already included NGO-management sessions from various educational programmes (organised in Belgrade by international humanitarian organisations with local offices, e.g. Oxfam – UK).
2. Some of our staff members have been temporarily working directly in institutes abroad of this kind (USA, Netherlands, Switzerland, etc.)
3. Guidance by Marleen Diekmann, Dutch psychotherapist and groupdynamics expert, was from the start of tremendous significance.

Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade is a hierarchical organisation with high organisational clarity and counselors in their own autonomous positions gathered into team work. Staff counselors are women of different professions trained especially to work with child trauma and families. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Counselors’ expertise also includes the following areas: domestic violence, sexual assault, war trauma, NGO-management, group dynamics issues.

Starting with January 1995 team workers had own job descriptions created on the ground of expertise, previous working experience including personal preference for certain jobs. Full-time or part-time working hours differ depending on position in the team. All these criteria are regulated by working contracts signed up at start of professional arrangement (in regular intervals they are subject of evaluation). Reporting in regular intervals is obligatory.

The decision making process works on a day to day basis through consensus. In cases it is not to achieve consensus, Center Co-ordinator takes decision. Ongoing activities are under the supervision of Dutch therapist (through phone, fax, every two months) and evaluation of the work as a whole (the content plus organizational issues) is done in regular intervals.

#### Internal management structure in practice

Presented organisational structure was there in years behind to be practised. In division has made ongoing activities going on in a more smoothly way with no confusion around “who is doing what”. Job positions

1. Direct work on the child trauma with clients is in this document given as Chapter 2.

are nicely combining autonomy with co-dependency in team work, so it remained for the staff to learn about this balance and make the best out of team work. Fluctuation in the year of 1997 was a reasonable part of this process. Thanks to already transparent structure changes of persons in different positions in different positions were possible. Regardless it could have seemed or felt triggery at the moment itself, estimating from it caused no much turbulence.

When it is about implementing consensus and previously mentioned exceptional situations predicted by our procedures, I must admit it is not in memory of mine I have to take decisions myself. The clarity continually enabled free space to grow in the therapeutic knowledge and better listen to the needs of children and their families.

War trauma programme has involved number of 17 team members since November 1995. This covers 12 local team members and 5 from Dutch support. At the moment we are working with 10 which is (including one change) stable already more than a year.

The fact of strong internal management structure related to “Mala Sirena” through the period November 1995 – January 1999 (or: How is it from our point of view to have us as a project?)

Previously mentioned clarity in mission / aims / objectives, responsible implementation of them, awareness about expertise and openness for ongoing learning processes represents the term of Identity of Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade. We had our own identity already at the moment we met “Mala Sirena”. This meant through these years, I can imagine, easyness and not easyness at the same time.

Easyness could be recognised in the fact that this is the project that takes care of itself on its own. In the other words, when financial guidance is provided and it includes ongoing foreign therapeutic support in the role of consultancy / supervision – this is the project to relax with. It carries on its own responsibility.

Not easyness is in stubbornness of our identity of women’s group dealing with violence, NGO in Serbia, FRY. This identity makes difference comparing with other projects of “Mala Sirena”.

By definition, grounds to gather and found the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade in 1993 were already:

- A) Fight for “some of” human rights – in this case children’s rights and women’s rights
- B) Our primary purpose of existence from the start is to work on visibility of violence in society which is the net very strong general political aim.
- C) Keeping status of “real” NGO in Serbia, FRY. <sup>2</sup>

When you translate these grounds into a chance to have us as a potential co-worker they open no space to influence us for exclusively your aims. At the same time, as a funder you can witness inner struggle of us which combines full autonomy in performing very good work and the pride around it – with financial dependency, since there’s no other choice at this point. The art is to have an eye for this inner battle and respect for it.

Step 2: INITIATING THINKING REGARDING THE ANCHORING OF PROJECT IN THE SOCIETY

Step 3: EXPORTING THE PROJECT OVER ONE’S BOUNDARIES

Step 4: CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

My decision to unite these three steps is primarily because this process divided by “Mala Sirena” into three steps belong already to the “daily life” of Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade. The fact that war trauma programme HAS BEEN PERFORMED UNDER THE ROOF OF Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade and not as a separate project “with no name” (someone would say even starting pretty late in 1995) saved it from identity problems and took away starting zero position. The mission to influence visibility of child sexual abuse (CSA) in society and change position of CSA survivors gives the key task of continual communication with society (you have to break a taboo around violence in the family!)

Daily contacts that belong to the networking with different segments of support system for CSA survivors were the ones we rely on allthrough performing war trauma programme. In direct work with clients these segments are: health and legal services, centers for social work, school, police, different Ministries (e.g. Ministry for Marriage and Family), Refugee Committee, refugee collective centers, Red Cross, local NGO-s (territory of former Yugoslavia) and international NGO-s with local offices here or abroad, media. This is all what you need to work on the child trauma and it doesn't matter which programme child comes from: sexual trauma or war trauma.

Particularly, this support system the most efficiently is to use as a whole when you meet a refugee child with sexual abuse experience. Vulnerability of refugee children for sexual abuse is a known phenomenon. <sup>3</sup>

Imperative to communicate with society has been realised through:

1. Community education:

- a) Educational programmes for health services and centers for social work (professionals daily working directly with children, e.g. clinics, City Marital and Family Counseling Center). Trainings / seminars were performed by team members (local + foreign) or by guest trainers (e.g. Mrs. Francien Lamers-Winkelman, Dutch psychoterapist)
- b) University – performed lectures on child trauma for psychology students. This is a result of co-operation with teaching staff at the University. Co-operation started through attendance of our educational programmes by some teachers. Performing workshop on annual congress of psychologists (1998)
- c) Co-operation with youth centers through pannel discussions / tribunes / workshops.

2. Legal campaign started to change the Criminal Statute of the Republic of Serbia considering child sexual abuse / incest. Started in May 1998. Initiatives regularly submitted to the Republic Parliament and Serbian Ministry of Justice. Besides, our staff members were guest speakers at the legal annual congress speaking on children's rights generally (1997, 1998)

3. Police: Official contact was made from the start, but still they are the most closed (more to understand in Step 5)

4. Refugee Committee, Red Cross and management teams at refugee collective centers: Entrance to refugee children and their families is possible only through the mentioned bodies. Through years we succeeded to get permission to work on the following points:

A) Collective center “Olga Dedijer” settled in children's hospital in Belgrade, 60 families (end of 1995-1996)

B) Children refugees settled in private accomodation. They live in apartment building in the suburb of Belgrade built specially for mothers with children whose partners were Jugoslavian army officers killed in war, 20 families (1997)

3. Theme of the workshop at the annual seminar of “Mala Sirena“ for the projects from former Yugoslavia; held in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, October 1997, performed by Dušica Popadić.

C) Collective center “Rakovica” in the suburb of Belgrade. Settlement consists of 100 families (September 1997-1998-start of 1999)

The full number of children has got continual psychological counseling / support from week to week in the time-frame they attend(ed) our workshops. Mostly mothers are caretakers who were occasionally in individual / group treatment or at least all the time involved at the level of information / consultancy about their children. We give very special care not to disconnect child from caretakers by working only with children or making them disloyal to the caretaker.

Very good relationship with contact people from governmental structures who were / are on the road from children and us. Example: at the end of the last season we were asked by management team of collective center “Rakovica” to continue the programme this season also.

5. Local NGO-s (territory of former Yugoslavia): Co-operation has been realised through education or supervision activities. Our staff members are invited as trainers / supervisors mainly by women’s groups working on women’s and children’s issues (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia)

6. International NGO-s with local offices here: There is a subproject within the Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade called “Agency: Groupwork practice” which function as a bridge between international funding organizations situated in Belgrade and local women’s projects. <sup>4</sup>Our two staff members on the request of international funding organizations here provide education and supervision in the areas of content and organisational / group dynamics issues to women’s projects. Good insight makes more secure the investment of fundres (e.g. Fund for an Open Society, Star Delphi, etc.) and at the same time women’s projects fill the gaps in the practice.

International organisations abroad: Ongoing co-operation resulting in exchange of knowledge during working visits. Invitations to international conferences and our staff counselors showing up in a role of guest speakers or participants (UK, Netherlands, USA)

7. Media: Very good network has been built with the media through the years. We are here known for expertise in children and trauma. Equally often and good treatment by all media: press, radio, TV. Partly we already succeeded in main aim: educating them to follow the phenomenon of trauma and children in continuum. They understand better why is not to run for sensational personal stories of survivors of any trauma. More understanding of their own role in raising awareness in society on trauma issue.

Last few occasions realised with media (illustrations):

Radio: “Media center” broadcasting of the talkshow for 40 radio independent stations in FRY (28 min). “Media center” is the essential organisation here nowadays for independent journalism.

TV:

1. “BK” channel with round table discussion called “BK Parliament”. Guests in the studio were representatives from the Ministry for Marriage and Family and ex-minister for justice in Serbia. This is the most watched and believed channel here. It is private, very powerful one (there is also BK University, BK Mobtel Company, etc.) Duration: Monday evening: 8.30 p.m.-9.30 p.m.

2. RTS 1 – governmental channel, the most rigid one. Package of three epizodesaround children’s rights within morning educational programme for children and youth. Duration: 3 x 10 minutes week after week.

4. Women’s movement in FRY is very strong (around 60 women’s initiatives)

Press: Organised press conference on the following grounds:

A) New annual statistical data on CSA issue (the only valid data coming out of direct daily work with CSA survivors in former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe)

B) Legal campaign on CSA issue considering actual initiative submitted to the Republic Parliament.

Number of journalists present (12). During the same week all of them published their view from the conference. It included all daily newspapers and few weekly magazines which are of significance.

### Step 5: TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE AND INSTITUTION BUILDING

This phase has been introduced by “Mala Sirena” as entering rapid growth and setting up of special knowledge centers. This would be the stage when “Mala Sirena” would hand over the project to the local people and withdraw.

This stage can come true on conditions that involve co-operation with the state we live in. To live in Serbia in 90’s is over here described by the proverb: “Spring is there and I live in Serbia”. It means economic poverty but more than ever poverty of progressive mind. A lot of alternative people left FRY. New wave in leaving country is happening in front of the eyes. The rest of movement which is active in resisting is 25 hours a day threatened to be suffocated. There is a veto on everything which keeps practicing independency and freedom through endangering free information system, taking away autonomy of the University, announced new laws considering NGO-s, etc.

The worst crisis ever is the crisis of values. It feels endless. To get the minimum of profit, individuals and/or organisations give up to the certain of full extent their starting beliefs / morals and join regime’s backwardness adding own part in full oppression. Mostly the content issues disappear or lose earlier sense. This can be also called the pure survival and progression of loosing track can be explained by the fact of being too long in unhealthy circumstances. Nevertheless, these who do not give in experience this trend as a defeating and discouraging one. Specially exhausting is occasional showing up a hint of chance that will come the change of regime. The hint (even can’t be called decently “a chance”) always quickly dies!

In the range of local NGO-s the Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade remained out of daily politics and out of compromises toward Serbian regime while promoting its mission. Our privilege is financial guidance by “Mala Sirena”. We have had “just” to work, build, grow. And we took this chance tremendously! At the same time we have been working on every co-operation which did no endanger our identity. We followed the principle of the content: this is about the child and the trauma and that’s what we are going to talk about with everyone who minds for this area. We can (un)fortunately thank also to the “positive discrimination” of children and children’s issues in terms of regime’s ignorance toward these basic human rights. “Children are people, too” is still not clear over here.

In the other words, at this point in Serbia, FRY, it is not possible to hand over our project to the local authorities with a healthy prognosis. In the years behind plus particularly at this moment when the whole world looks at Serbia with a sharp and clear judgment naming this country as eternal battlefield and dictatorship, it makes no sense to fit to Step 5 of “Mala Sirena”’s Model for anchoring of psycho-social aid projects. This is the difference comparing with other projects of “Mala Sirena” in Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina where the states are in the post-war period working in certain ways on restoration and not on further destruction.

STILL SOMETHING CAN BE DONE  
(OR: OUR PROPOSAL ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH US)

The Incest Trauma Center-Belgrade performing parallel programmes: child sexual abuse trauma and war trauma is fully aware that financial support of even very good projects in former Yugoslavia cannot be forever. It is in our own benefit to reach financial independency as soon as possible. These are steps in our proposed frame:

1. Providing one-term financial assistance by “Mala Sirena” in obtaining property that is going to be “the roof” forever for traumatised children. <sup>5</sup>
2. Providing financial assistance by “Mala Sirena” in performing the war trauma programme on usual terms for one more year.
3. Handing over the project to the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade whose responsibility is to provide financial ground for further. <sup>5</sup>“Mala Sirena” is in the position to ask for guarantees of continuation. For the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade is obligatory to provide them.

Basis of this frame is in the fact that the Incest Trauma Center- Belgrade will follow the line of co-operation with the state when is possible. The phylosophy of the Center is to reach legitimacy as an equal participant in the “affairs of state” which means to reach the status of equal participant in the society with a voice for children and trauma.

If this proposed frame is of significance for “Mala Sirena” to take into consideration, all steps are negotiable and subject to be worked out together.

## FUTURE PLANS

### Global planning for 1999

- Continuation of usual cycles of children's workshops (ongoing efforts to work on relationship with caretakers, mostly mothers)
- Further co-operation with the University
- Entering secondary schools with educational programmes on children and trauma and children's rights
- Follow up education for professional staff previously attending our trainings (health services and centers for social work, schools, University, NGO-s); coming first: workshop at children's psychiatry department at the Clinic of Neurology and Neuropsychiatry for Children and Youth in Belgrade
- Education programmes for legal help within the centers for social work
- Continuation of the legal campaign: stage of comparison USA, Dutch and Serbian law on children and violence and presentation to the media
- Media: one of activities within the Center is to follow daily newspapers and give the picture how much is written around children and trauma. Every six months picture will be given back to the press
- Translating and publishing following books: "Trauma and Recovery" by Judith Lewis Herman and "Courage to Heal" by Ellen Bass & Laura Davis
- Usual ongoing activities (every day Hotline, "1 to 1" sessions, self-help groups for CSA survivors, sharing hand-outs on the streets, etc.)

### Recommendations for the reader:

#### Materials available at archive of the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade:

1. All content / organisational documents considering Center's procedures.
2. Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade bulletin (June 1998, CSA issue)
3. Advertising material (hand-outs of both programmes: war trauma and sexual trauma in children)
4. Video tape (war trauma programme, December 1998)
5. Photographs (war trauma programme, October 1997, December 1998)

END OF CHAPTER 1

*Workshop about fears (children named whom they are afraid of):*

*Indians, Muslims, Chinese, American, Gypsies, maniacs, Germans, Turks, Huns, kidnapers, ghosts, magicians, war, witches.*

*Question: What do you think you can do to feel less afraid?*

*To get to know them, to make friends with them, to call police, to kill them.*

*May 19, 1996*

Along the years we have been working with children refugees and their families who're traumatised by the war. They come from Croatia (Knin, Plitvice, Zagreb) and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Children we have been working with are settled in Serbia (around Belgrade) in collective centers:

A) Collective center within children's hospital "Olga Dedijer"

B) Private accomodation (apartment building built specially for mothers with children whose partners were Yugoslavian army officers killed in the war)

C) Collective center "Rakovica" in the suburb of Belgrade

Target groups:

1. Refugee children
2. Parents (mostly mothers; killed or missing fathers; separation / divorce of parents during a war)

Age of children: 5-18

Age of children when they became refugees: 2 to ...

Age groups: pre-school (6-7), middle (8-10 and 9-11), oldest (12-14)

Evaluation of our work has showed:

The war brought unwished, painful changes for refugee children. As the result showed up the life which included degradation and they were suddenly forced to live it. We have been working on the cause of their problems: the war and its meaning (what does it take away, what does it bring in). This was to sanate acute situation. However, effects of the war emerged as well. They were at certain point even more difficult for children to cope with – they did not choose for this life which doesn't fulfill basic needs. How to make the past and the presence compatible? We've decided to follow their needs since they are the best experts to define the help they seek for.

The working through war trauma has a frame that within the Incest Trauma Center – Belgrade we call Children's programme. Practically it has a shape of workshops. Stages that follow represent (I call) "the stages in healing process of children". To move from one to another goes slowly, occasionally they mix or suddenly you can just simply see the progress. The structure provides safety for children. They start felling free to express thoughts, emotions and behavior.

Evaluation of every stage has been done according to 4 points:

1. children's play 2. children's conflicts 3. children's aggression 4. children's verbalisation. These points represent feelings, opinions and behavior. They've helped as an orientation what to do in every next stage and how.

### STAGE 1 "Direct work on the war trauma"

#### Background of a "new" life:

Children settled in "Olga Dedijer" hospital were with various chronic illnesses. Illness (asthma, diabetes, etc.) was the criteria to have the roof over one's head. In the periods when the health would get a little bit better, mothers have been working very hard to get (false) medical certificates that the state stands still.

On the other side, children from private accommodations we worked with were living in an apartment building particularly built some years ago for them and their mothers. Criteria to have this roof over child's head is a father's "hero" figure, dead soldier (highly ranked). This child regularly attends celebration days of Yugoslavian Army and gets a regular package-present. Rewarding madness of adults is the message.

Our little clients for nowadays are coming from collective center "Rakovica" where one or two families live in one room (3 x 3 m). Around 20 rooms are in one barrack, 4 toilets and 2 showers. Food is provided for the age under 18 and above 64. This roof over the head you can lose if an adult in the family finds a job.

In which moment you meet a child? Children recognise what happened and look for comfort, recognise loss of their homes, parents (killed or missing, separated or divorced (specifics of mixed marriages), friends, toys. They've been listening to bombing, witnessing murders, tortures and wounding, running away and hiding. The task was to work on the following: no safety, fear, too much pain, guilt ("perhaps I could have done something, but I didn't), confusion, hopelessness, feeling that world turned upside down, powerlessness, horror, frozen feelings, sadness.

The work depend on the capacity of children as well as on the capacity of parents to be supportive for a child. Other factors to take into account are the length of living as a refugee and support network (Refugee Committee, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Fund for Humanitarian Rights, Belgrade Red Cross, women's groups, etc.) – availability and extent of using the network by parents.

More direct work on the war trauma was possible with children from "Olga Dedijer". Mothers were aware what happened to them. They had clarity at which point they were today and what they would do the next day. This was basic potential to be helpful for own child. They needed tools only. To touch war experience with children from private accommodation was not exactly possible. Great frame of working through war trauma made by our colleague Charlotte Kolff had to be used dosed. Programme made by Charlotte (Dutch therapist specialised in children) is rich in tools on the following themes: (sudden) changes, loss, mourning, feelings, memories, how to cope with the past in the presence, future (wishes, hopes, expectations). Themes walk hand in hand with trauma and healing.

In-take talks with parents (and children) from "Rakovica" defined a road of following actual daily needs of children. Choice for this "non-direct" work on trauma means our respect for survival / defense mechanisms of children in repressing memories and at the first glance avoiding to touch "deep" topics.

In acute situation we reacted in terms of sanitating the wound / painful place and later on when there are conditions which are for children acceptable (safe), it's possible to work on the source of it.

## STAGE II War trauma + Difficulties coming out from a “new” life (Adaptation process)

In which moment you meet a child? Settlement with no privacy, economic powery, isolation, illness, disability, separation from parents, friends, relatives, influence of surrounding which is also affected by the war effects (and politics), embargo for years already, depression, sadness, helplessness, despair, no acceptance from surrounding (loyalty to the old life: rituals, language), anxiety, loneliness (Description is related mostly to the period: September 1997 – June 1998)

This stage gives special attention to actual needs of children (and parents). As a counselor you touch the sea of problems in every day life of children. Identity of The Refugee is overwhelming. It feels never to get rid of it. You belong to the group of people with whom you have one spot in common. Your name is not Maja, Boris, Brankica, Danijel. Even the worst nationalists in Serbia don't care for ethnically “clean” Serbian name of newcomers. Your name is Refugee. Still this stage in the work puts emphasise on effects of the war with being alert in every second of showing the face of trauma.

### Themes

Youngest group (pre-school age children): Working on the concentration and the length of attention, cognitive processes, separation from parents at the moment of starting school, working on developmental problems typical for every child (Distinction what is “normal” / developmental and what is caused by the war), violence issues.

Middle groups: Concentration, attention, cognitive processes, developing group cohesion, violence issues.

Oldest group (adolescents): Relationship with parents, friends, school, body... Questions, dilemmas, problems that belong to growing up.

In this stage we learned that keeping simple approach brings you to the trauma of a child.

## STAGE III War trauma + integration in surrounding where children live now

In which moment you meet a child? Acceptance / no acceptance from surrounding, ongoing adaptation process, what does it mean to integrate; 1 day in the family which is now a part of this city; anger, rage, worthlessness, isolation, fear of others' opinions, doubting oneself, doubting people and that they can be good, doubting own rights, questioning if there is positive tomorrow; difficulties in taking decisions, confusion, being overwhelmed;

### Themes

Youngest ones: “Going out in the world” – visiting school, supermarket, ptt, railway station, river, theater, cinema, getting to know the parts of the city, tram drive through the city, etc. We have taken care about actual happenings in the camp which were affecting children in positive/negative way. Working on self-respect and self-confidence.

Middle groups: Agression and conflicts belonging to their age but provoked by living in the camp without human living conditions.

Oldest group: Continuation of the programme “Umeće odrastanja” (The Art of Growing Up) through following actual situations from the camp and talking about existing problems there.

### Activities

Once a month is organised a visit to the cinema or theatre. Occasionally free time to socialise in the Center organised.

Important for this stage: How to cope with all the content, how to succeed to enter this life “for real”, how to become the part of surrounding, win the trust of people, feel safe, feel self-confident. Our task in the Center is to be the model in demonstrating that they are real part of “us here”, that we’re offering sincere help to work on building the autonomy in life. Important message to send to children is that they will not be used for political purposes.

Trauma can be “cured” only within the community where the person lives, healing is not possible without rebuilding or linking the person with own environment (with whom and where she/he lives).

### STAGE IV Future plans

It will be tried out more direct implementation of previously mentioned cycle of workshops proposed by Charlotte Kolff. The reason why this programme now is in the fact that conditions to work on cause of trauma are fulfilled: children reached safety, security, they trust enough to express in more direct way what they think or feel about what happened to them, they feel more free and feel they’ve got the place to talk about it. This programme should enable them to share, understand and express untold thoughts and feelings as well as to “fight them back” in the presence and in the future.

For counselors this will be opportunity to check own growth through more practical implementation of the programme than earlier.

### CHALLENGES AND INNER STRUGGLE

#### (Counselor’s personal view)

Working with children traumatised by the war raised up a lot of questions for me. They relate primarily to my role and responsibility in it. Acceptance of the programme by children and parents and their participation have been defining my feelings in large extent these years.

Coming upon unadequate treatment of children refugees as the most vulnerable group in the society at this moment (both by family – often neglect and/or abuse – and by society) I could have “caught” myself (fortunately in time) in front of traps of blurred boundaries between the collective center and our center or, in the other words, boundaries with reality. Do we give children what they need? Where does our “power” to provide something they like stop? Traps of getting into overprotection or general overresponsibility were “smiling” to me and I placed them immediately as transparent topics in supervision.

My knowledge and awareness not only about processes of the “soul” but also societal ones which are influencing the healing of children by pulling in back or forward had to be worked out, too. To put aside the anger and rage toward this regime which is responsible for the war and misery of refugees is not easy. This has been time to work without feeling pity for children and with no transferring own feelings and attitudes. This has been the moment to behave like: “let’s just do it! You (children) are here, so shall we see what we can do together! Let’s try! (and we’ll do it!)”

LITERATURE used in war trauma programme  
(November 1995 – January 1999)

1. “Učionica dobre volje” – Tinde Kovač-Cerović, Ružica Rosandić, Dragan Popadić.
2. “Igrom do spoznaje” – Tinde Kovač-Cerović, Marija Krivačić, Slobodanka Janković, Svetlana Kijevčanin, Snježana Mrše, Milena Jerotijević, Tatjana Kecman.
3. “Ja – podsticanje samopoštovanja kod dece” – Iboja Gera, Ljubica Dotlić.
4. “When Someone Special Dies” – “Mala Sirena” Manual.
5. “When Something Terrible Happens” – “Mala Sirena” Manual.
6. “Living Witch Changes – Family Puzzle” – Charlotte Kolff.
7. “Vrata prema nenasilju” – Irena Berić, Berry Hart, Maja Uzelac (Health Reach; McMaster and UNICEF).
8. “Sukob i tolerancija” – Aida Bagić with colleagues.
9. “Juče, danas, sutra – razgovarajmo” – Dr Gilbert Benson, Dr Maria Mercedes Sarmiento (Bogota, Columbia).
10. “Umeće odrastanja” – Marija Krivačić, Svetlana Kijevčanin, Dragan Stojanović and colleagues.

## A VIEW FROM EYES FROM ABROAD

Since the founders of this Center immediately from the start knew that they needed not only money but also a view from eyes from abroad, I was from the very start involved in the development of the project. I will tell something about: the country, the founders, the clients, the work, “the bridge of the society”, the supervision from abroad and “the paradox”.

1. THE COUNTRY: A place in the world where the leader does not mind to have his people bombed and life in threat of bombing for a month, where it is horrible to come back as a refugee. “Your” nationality does not give you any care. You are put in inhuman life circumstances in which you are caught since you do not have the right to work. When you earn money you don’t have the right to be in the camp which provides some minimum of support and makes you dependent without a chance to regain autonomy. So, apathy is the only thing you can do or to walk in the circle or to try the black market. Deprived from everything you had, with personal losses, without hope for future, you have to educate your children in the most sad atmosphere with no family living space. This country is a place in the world where you can protest on the streets endlessly and nothing changes. It only gets worse. A place where you are boycotted when you take your right to vote and you are about 30. A place where newspapers and TV channels can disappear in one day, where all initiatives you take to change something are discouraged, where the help from abroad is under suspicion, where violence goes from leader to soldier to family to child, like it is taken for granted.

In such country where you yourself internalised paranoia, mistrust and the system itself, where there is no line in anything anymore, even not in what will be celebrated and when: religion, political inheritance, history – you must have a courage to start the Center like it is described in previous chapters.

2. THE FOUNDING AND THE FOUNDERS: In 1994 a few women working in the area of women and violence decided to create their own center. They were already aware of the danger that within each group in this corrupted unpredictable chaotic society without safety the same characteristics can grow as in that surrounding society. They wanted to be a real counterforce, against the war, the violence, their own hurt, the system. They succeeded in the past 5 years to grow out of instability, personal dynamics, uncertainties, to grow out the internalisation of the system brought in through their upbringing – into a stable, well organised, more and more clear and democratic group. The Center is with own style and own autonomy (only not in finances). The Center is known in Belgrade with growing professional strength offering education to society. One might think that this is a big enterprise when reading everything above but it is a small center in a small rented apartment with a dwarf in its logo in a big bad world that starts to get to know them.

3. THE CLIENTS:

- Children born in the camp in the traumatised surrounding from traumatised parents, not knowing the world, a shop, a movie, a theater, a kitchen, with regression in their development (born traumatised).
- Adolescent girls at the time of waiting for NATO bombs not daring to share their fears, “better not to talk about it!”, transferring fear in frightening fantasies, still giggling and blushing and flirting a little.
- School children using rough words around sexuality without knowing anything about it because sexuality is everywhere around in these camps and further while none talks about it.

- Fighting little boys making their own little copy of the war and adult aggression, feeling unsafe about that.
- Abused 16 year old girl, not able to leave her house since then her brother and sister will be on their own with the offender. Still, coming to the Center's girls' group trembling and out of breath.
- 13 year old girl from the camp asking in the workshop about sexuality "my niece (she herself?) gets presents when she undresses herself for her grandfather".
- Children who do not want to go back to the camp enjoying the atmosphere, the warmth, the toys and decoration.
- Psychologists, counselors, women from women's groups coming for Workshops about trauma and other topics to broaden their knowledge.
- "Mothers" from the camp who cannot answer the question "Can you tell something about yourself?" They forgot.
- Father from the camp who didn't tell his children (also little clients in the Center) that their mother is dad already for 2 years.

#### 4. THE WORK (according to the examples above)

- Picking up the stage of development by offering an opportunity to attach, for intimacy and safety, trying to help children born in camp to catch up their development without making them disloyal to their parents. Letting them play with dolls' house kitchen, playing out stories, taking them to the zoo, McDonald's, showing them a little of the world.
- Helping to share fears offering a place for it and ways in which you can cope with fears.
- Making a topic out of sexuality for all ages to show them that you can try to speak out "the unspeakable". Linking sexuality with intimacy and relating. Giving information through showing nice books with pictures adapted to their age. Trying to take away confusion and acting out.
- Offering drama and other ways in which you can express anger and talk about it. Making expression of anger safe for one moment.
- Establishing self-help groups for young adults with abusive experience in their history. Aim is to start up a healing process.
- Providing a safe place in which you can find help. War trauma encounters trauma by abuse.
- Providing safe, warm place with toys, books, nice things of the world including "Christmas" decoration.
- Organising workshops with lecturers from abroad and out of own Center.
- Organising "Mothers" group to help them to be also women with a name again.
- Helping to start up blocked mourning processes.

5. THE BRIDGE TO SOCIETY: To make this bridge you have to be smart. For instance, taking advantage of the fact that attention for abuse issue is in Serbia also fashionable and than taking care that society is confronted and not only nourished by sensational stories (see above). Or, by inviting qualified specialists from abroad to give lectures and in that way seducing professionals working in governmental institutions to open themselves to the fresh knowledge and fresh thinking.

6. SUPERVISION FROM ABROAD: Real autonomy in the content can only be achieved when one is aware of what one needs and being open for that. After working a lot throughout the whole former Yugoslavia I think that this is really a strong point of this Center. There is an eagerness to learn and to be open for counterforces (needed for small group in a big world with own internalisation of the system) without losing any self-respect and authenticity is impressive. It makes it into pleasure to work with this Center and to create the work really together.

7. PARADOX: The existing of this Center is sincerely jeopardised. The point is that even when you exist in a society like this, alive and growing in strength, even then you cannot exist. You can come far in the

autonomy and be anchored in the society but you cannot be supported financially by the politics which rejects you. So, no money in spite of stable existence. This is what I call a paradox.

Dutch government invested a lot of money in this Center and that was great. But what is the sense of it if we do not try to find a way in which it can survive under these specific circumstances. I think it is better to take care that what is already built to make it stay then to go back to zero and invest somewhere else again.

This is not only the Center that helps children. It is also a counterforce against the system which is bad. Providing this Center with an apartment which would be their possession would give the chance to survive.

With crossed fingers of hope, sincerely yours.

END OF CHAPTER 3

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