

transfer

INFORMATION FOR REPATRIATING PROFESSIONALS

Mental health
in develop-
ment service
and after



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Better acknowledging
the burdens of “life
after service”

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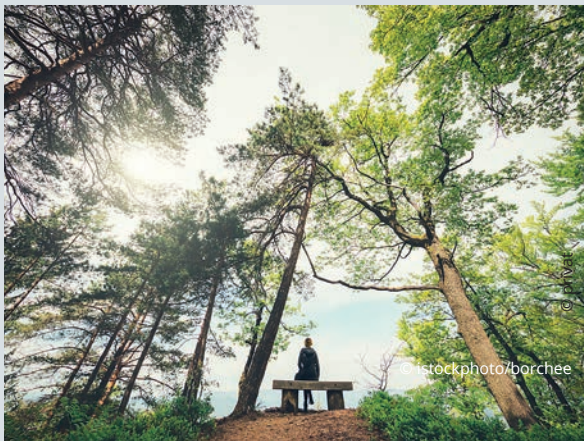
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Editorial

Dear reader,

Development service is an exciting and important undertaking: Professionals and the members of their family who accompany them enjoy a lot of good experiences. They get to know other cultures, and the work contributes to their personal development. But development service is also a huge challenge. It may involve distressing experiences, such as conflict, accidents, illness, or witnessing violence or poverty. And returning can be difficult too. What was once your home can seem foreign. Family and friends may not react as you expected them to, and it can be difficult to get back into the job market.

Professionals who use our counselling service often mention experiences of psychological stress during and after their development service. So during the past year we organised a consultation between representatives of development service agencies and relevant experts. It became clear from the discussion that this subject needs to be explored holistically and that psychological support must not stop when the development service ends, because such support is still important after professionals have returned to their home country.



In this issue our authors' very personal accounts of their experience show that the subject is multifaceted and that psychological stress can occur at any time during and after the period of service. Some of our authors have looked after themselves, while others have sought (and found) help.

You can find out what professional support might look like by reading our interviews: Kai Leonhardt from the counselling service COPE (COoperation with PErsonnel in Stress, Conflict and Crisis) tells us about the counselling which is offered to professionals working for GIZ and explains which kinds of psychological stress are most likely to afflict development service professionals.

Jochen Schuppener is a freelance coach who accompanies people through the entire process from departing for service until they have returned home. In our interview with him we address in particular the stresses and strains which children and young people are subjected to when they accompany their parents abroad and then return with them.

Anne Baumann, who has a degree in psychology, explains what we can each do to build up our own resilience and where it is possible to obtain professional help.

Enjoy reading - and stay healthy!

Yours,

Silke Westmann

Even when all hope seems lost, effective help can be found

The experience made me stronger in the end

Since March 2018 I have been working as a regional programme consultant for forumZFD in Amman, Jordan. Before that I spent five years in Lebanon, where I was involved in setting up and running a Community Development Programme.

My work in both countries has meant getting deeply involved in difficult and complicated circumstances, not only as regards the work situation, but also in terms of life as a whole. This has been combined with a lot of travelling and coming and going, all of which has been marked by a number of twists of fate and a lot of human relationships which have left their mark on me both physically and mentally.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO SWITCH OFF

I love my work and its various challenges and demands. And I can't imagine anything more interesting than working with people face-to-face – for example with refugees who have left their homes for various reasons, or with people with different experiences of conflict, traumas, fears, and hopes. A lot of these people hope that my colleagues and I will give them new prospects or immediate help. I can understand that very well. I would probably see things in just the same way, if I were in a similar situation myself. I chose my job deliberately. All of us here want to help. We aspire to promoting human dignity and

well-being. And we have to deal responsibly with the fact that a lot of people see us as a solid foundation on which to base their hopes.

This aspiration of ours makes demands on me round the clock, because I experience people's fears and misery at first hand. I analyse problems, try to come up with solutions, serve as a contact person, and often become a friend. The boundaries between private life and work often get blurred and this makes it difficult to switch off properly in the evenings and at weekends. I really am a born worker with down-to-earth training as a craftsman. And I worked in the building trade for many years. I thought I was well trained and prepared to cope with a lot of stress and a heavy workload. On top of that, Lebanon is a country which – in spite of the ever-present tension and conflict – has a great deal to offer in terms of nature, free time, relaxation, and variety. And through having lived there for five years, I was well integrated into a stable circle of friends. It's just the same in Jordan now.

Nevertheless, I was eventually forced to realise that I always come to reflect the broad dynamics of conflict in the countries in which I'm working. I sensed how the ever-present conflict and aggression were creeping into my everyday life and having an insidious effect on my behaviour and relationships.

Benedikt Brammer talks with some of the staff of a partner organisation about measures for the local communities of Syrian refugees and Lebanese people.

I SIMPLY IGNORED THE INITIAL INDICATIONS

I really have a lot of admiration for the way in which some professional peacemakers and development workers deal consciously with high levels of stress and are able to put up with such situations for a long time. Without noticing it, I eventually got to the stage where all the pressures and emotional demands had taken their toll, both physically and mentally. I simply ignored the initial indications and failed to pay attention to them as I should have done. It all started with lack of sleep, nervousness, irritability, and loss of weight because I wasn't eating properly. I felt that my life was getting more and more out of kilter.



In the beginning, clearly defined structures and routines — rituals which I could hold onto — still helped, in addition to my work tasks and the results of my work. I still felt that what I was doing was right. My German colleagues were very important too. They understood very well how to compensate for my loneliness a long way from my social networks back home. In Beirut, Tripoli, or Amman, I have a lot of acquaintances whom I meet on the streets during the day, who ask after me when I'm not around, who are always ready to join me for a cup of coffee, or with whom I can just talk about football. I tried distracting myself and taking time to relax, going dancing in the evenings, meeting with friends, going for walks, or simply hanging around. And sometimes a glass or two of beer was part of my strategy. But at some point I was no longer motivated to get up in the morning and go to work. My work felt like a burden instead of a challenge. I worried a lot, saw less and less point in what I was doing, and felt listless and down in the dumps. When panic attacks and anxiety came on top of all this, I knew that I had to do something. Then I experienced a sudden hearing loss and finally went to see a doctor.

I RECEIVED THERAPEUTIC HELP

I now know better with hindsight. It is very important to find a doctor whom you can trust as early on as you can, to be open and honest about your situation, and to accept help. I had a medical check-up to start with, in order to rule out physical causes or dietary deficiencies.

My doctor understood straight away how I felt and what would be the best thing for me under the circumstances. He immediately signed me off work for four weeks, so that I could have some time out initially and reduce the amount of stress I was under. He also prescribed medication to reduce the fear and anxiety and a course of psychotherapy to go along with it. I know that taking medication of this kind is a controversial issue. But I believe that responsible use of medication under medical supervision is a very helpful aid to enable one to begin functioning again.

The key thing, though, is the accompanying long-term psychotherapy. There is a wide variety of types of psychotherapy on offer. One should take one's time and try out various methods. I chose a form of talking therapy which is also available on Skype. During this time I also learnt how to deal with my situation openly and realistically. I made a conscious decision to be as transparent as possible with my employer. They and my colleagues were very understanding and supported my recovery in a trustworthy manner.

Now I'm back to being my old self once again. I'm in good health. And I'm working full-time again in the same job as before, but with the difference being that I am now very well aware of my limitations. That doesn't mean that I achieve less, however. On the contrary: I believe that I can now work much more effectively and efficiently.

GREATER SENSITIVITY TO THE WARNING SIGNS

I often think now about how one can recognise in good time that one needs to take time out. A lot depends on personal circumstances and predisposition. Nevertheless, I think comprehensive preparation is most important, especially in terms of learning how to cope better with stress and recognise excessive stress at an early stage, and learning about the various options as regards what you can do when you or a colleague is suffering. This applies above all to team leaders who have special responsibility for their staff. We should be well prepared and sensitised, so that we can recognise symptoms in ourselves or our colleagues, put appropriate measures into effect at an early stage, and integrate self-care processes into workplace culture. We need to take responsibility not only for ourselves and our staff, but also for those with whom we work in our partner organisations. I often ask myself: How do my local partners and colleagues cope with the stress, when they cannot simply fly back home, do not have a regular income, and do not have access to good health care? When programmes are being set up, we should of course ensure that good health care is available in the host country. And we should have an overview, which we can consult ourselves or pass on to people who need help, of the various kinds of help which are available. It would be good too to have guidelines, including checklists of personal qualities and warning signs.

Every professional peacemaker has access to a coach. These coaches should be sensitised, so that they can recognise warning signs and alert us to them. But I would also like there to be some form of independent emergency mental health centre in Germany. This would serve as an advice centre which professional peacemakers who are serving abroad can contact for medical advice, so that they are not alone in a crisis situation and can obtain a second opinion, if they want to.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude, however, with a note of encouragement to everyone who does not feel good and is overcome with anxiety. Even though things may sometimes seem very difficult and hopeless, good help is available. My experience has made me stronger in the end. I've learnt to take care of myself and to pay attention to what my body is telling me. My life now includes activities which are fun, which help me to recuperate, and which restore my emotional stability. I listen more to the people around me and pay attention to what they reflect back to me. And I also ask for advice. I have finally come to understand that I can only do things for other people, if I also do things for myself.



Benedikt Brammer
Architect
2014 - 2018:
Lebanon, forumZFD
Since 2018:
Jordan, forumZFD

Benedikt Brammer
If you would like to know more about my experience or just need some advice, please feel free to get in touch:
brammer@forumZFD.de



Wolfram Metzger-Eisner (right), a professional peaceworker with ZFD, moderated radio programmes about peace in Cameroon.

Stay or go home?

Malaria, security risks, and stressful everyday situations – Not an easy time for the family

It is November 2015 and the start of winter in Germany. But we are driving through huge rubber, palm oil, and banana plantations on the road from Douala, the commercial capital of Cameroon, to Buea. We can see people hard at work, having been brought by bus to toil for long hours.

Then Mount Cameroon comes into view. On clear days you can even see it from Douala, 85 kilometers away. Mount Fako, as it is called in the language of the Bakweri, towers majestically to a height of more than 4,000 meters. Buea, the provincial capital of the Southwest, one of the two anglophone regions of Cameroon, is where we are going to live and work for the next three years.

We are: Catherina, my wife; my two daughters, Romi and Marla; and me, Wolfram. Romi is three years old when we arrive and Marla is four months.

Our sending organisation is Brot für die Welt/DÜ (Bread for the World/Service Overseas) and my partner organisation is the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, PCC for short. During the next three years I shall be running training courses in civil conflict resolution as part of the programme of ZFD (Ziviler Friedensdienst/Civil Peace Service). Subjects such as violence, non-violence, conflict management, peace, and communication will be at the heart of the programme. My colleague, Julius, and I form the peace unit in the church's communications department. We moderate weekly radio broadcasts on peace issues, run workshops, and put on events on special days such as the International Day of Peace and the Day of the African Child.

We were welcomed warmly with food and drink by Reverend Mokoko, head of the Communications Department, who is also a pastor and performs other official duties for the church. His genuine interest in people, human warmth, sense of duty, and unwavering faith in the good in people are a source of inspiration and motivation. Unfortunately it is difficult for me to get hold of Reverend

Mokoko, because he has so many duties and is often travelling, which can take a very long time, given the state of the roads.

The house which we move into is on church property and dates from the missionary era. It has been renovated and is simple, but adequate for our needs, at least to start with. The children can play all round the premises, among the mango and avocado trees. We will only spend a year here, though - a wonderful year with very dear neighbours.

DRAWBACKS

It wasn't long before we had forewarning of the major challenges which we were going to have to face. Marla, our little daughter, fell ill with malaria within a few weeks. And Romi later became ill with typhus and malaria as well. This was to happen more and more frequently, causing us to think seriously about leaving early.

Another problem was the everyday domestic violence in the neighbourhood, the beatings and humiliation which were meted out to children as punishment. We wanted to protect our own children and prevent them from witnessing this kind of upbringing on a daily basis. At the end of 2016, in order to gain more control over our children's health and education, we moved into a house a few kilometres away. It was not an easy decision for us, but an additional factor was that our lives had become too confined on the church premises and we needed more private space for ourselves.

As regards the question as to whether to go back or stay put, we were helped during this period by the supervision which Brot für die Welt offers its professional peaceworkers. Using e-mail and Skype and during our extended leave back home in Germany, we were able to reflect on our situation with the help of competent counsellors. While being supported in this way, we devised

a “road map” with an end date for reaching a decision about staying or going back to Germany. We were fortunately able to reduce the number of malaria episodes, so we decided to stay.

The emergency hotline of the Tropical Institute in Tübingen also helped us several times with medical advice and reassurance. The psychological stresses and strains during this period left their mark nevertheless.

We were always checking our children’s temperature and were often tense and nervous. This also led to a loss of “joie de vivre”, because we fetched the children indoors at 5 p.m. We called this “Mosquito Time”. We felt increasingly guilty about the children too. Were we really acting responsibly, exposing them to such risks?

Added to this, Romi was extremely unhappy in her new school to start with. She had experienced a Steiner-oriented kindergarten in Berlin and did not get on well with the school-like orientation of her nursery school. Fortunately Catherina obtained a contract as a development worker in the meantime and worked closely with Romi’s school as a school social worker. Among other things she introduced peace education, which led to the development of a culture of constructive conflict resolution. And there was no corporal punishment in the school.

We all stuck together as a family and enjoyed the support of our Cameroonian friends, colleagues, and neighbours. This helped us a lot in coping with our experiences, which we have to admit were very stressful. Some expatriate professionals, with whom we had become friends, were also very supportive. In order to relax and recharge our batteries, we drove several times each month to the beaches at Limbe, a nearby town. Enjoying cold lemonade and freshly grilled fish on the beaches of volcanic sand, we were able to forget some of our worries.

A BIG FAMILY

Several people were living in our house by this time: Lissa (with her baby), who looked after our children; Peter, who lived in a room in the basement. He was one of two security guards, who caused us a lot of problems. From time to time the two of them would get into a huge argument which sometimes even became physically violent - alcohol often had a part to play in it. And yet they belonged to our big family, as did Relindis, who kept the house in order. Employing people was altogether a new experience for us and sometimes pushed us to our limits. But all in all we were a colourful little band. Rozy, the guard dog, and Lotta, the cat, were part of our community too.

As the first year came to an end, we were content to be living in this place. We found renewed stability and enjoyed the natural world around us - and the food. And we found joy in our work too.

STRESSFUL EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

What was most stressful at this time was the violence done to children and the pointless deaths of people who would probably have survived without any difficulty, had they received better medical care. The authoritarian

regime of Paul Biya, who was plundering his own country and engaging in a lot of corrupt wheeling and dealing, worried us too.

As it turned out, in October 2017, our worries were well-founded. Teachers and lawyers protested against the president’s policies. And other people joined them. The lack of any willingness to engage in dialogue and brutal violence in response to the protests radicalised parts of the protest movement, which gradually turned from a federalist movement into a separatist one. Strikes were proclaimed and schools were only open sporadically. One consequence of this was that our daughter was not able to go to school regularly.

The country descended into a spiral of violence. When I was driving with a colleague in Bamenda and stopped behind a taxi with its windows shot out, soldiers arrested us without telling us why and did not let us free until the evening. Intimidation is a widespread tactic of the military. That same night I didn’t sleep a wink because of various exchanges of gunfire. At such moments, meditation was a help to me - along with the conviction that persistently spreading the principles of non-violent conflict transformation was the right thing to be doing. The escalation of violence and the outbreak of the civil war caused Brot für die Welt to relocate us to Douala after we made a visit to Germany in September 2018. Sadly, we never went back to Buea.

The disappointment of our colleagues and friends at our departure after less than three years and before Catherina had completed her contract, our concern about people in the crisis region, and the stress of our hurried and hectic move with little time to say goodbye still weigh heavily on us today. Back in Germany, news has come to us that our dear friend and employee, Relindis, died after the birth of her fourth child. And a friend has been arrested. We have also been distressed by reports of death and destruction in the country.

RETURNING WITH MIXED FEELINGS

When we returned, we were helped by traditional Christmas celebrations with grandparents and brothers and sisters. And the stress was much alleviated by having an apartment, a place in the kindergarten, and a place at school already organised. Our children feel very comfortable here and have probably settled in better than we have.

It has helped us a lot to know that, thanks to very generous fundraising efforts by our friends, our children’s carer, Lissa, and her daughter are taken care of for one year. And we were able to help with their move to Douala as well. There is no-one working in the banana plantations around Buea any more. The bananas are being left to rot, because the people are too afraid to leave their homes. We are back in a safe place with the unpleasant feeling which comes with being privileged and having to leave behind the people who have no other option but to stay where they are. Nevertheless, we would do everything just the same again. And we wish more than anything else in the world for the violence to end and for an era of reconciliation and peace to begin.



Wolfram Metzsig-Eisner
2015 - 2018:
Cameroon, DÜ/
Brot für die Welt

Interview:

It's about letting go, maintaining, and gaining



For many professionals, development service is a special time which they spend with their family in a foreign country where they have various challenges to face. The process of accompanying a parent and later returning home can be especially stressful for children and young people.

Jochen and Christine Schuppener and their team at Schuppener Global Transitions have for many years been supporting people during the whole process from when they leave until they return. Besides seminars,

workshops, and coaching for adults, they also offer accompaniment for children and young people. Jochen Schuppener was interviewed for transfer by Dieter Kroppenber.

www.schuppener-global-transitions.com

Mr Schuppener, in your seminars and workshops you support children and young people who have joined their parents in going to live in another country and later returning home. What does your work with children and young people look like in concrete terms?

During the past twelve years we have been privileged to support people who have served with more than 100 different organisations in over 120 different countries. This has included a large number of families. On the basis of this experience, we have developed a variety of programmes for different age groups. Before we work with people, we start by finding out about their current situation, the particular challenges of the period of their lives which has just ended, and their hopes and dreams for the future. This information forms the basis on which we are able to offer the best possible individual support. During our special family coaching there are times when the whole family is together and times when we work with the parents and the children or young people separately. Our methods are holistic and very interactive. We work according to a variety of coaching methods and use a lot of creative, age-appropriate tools. So we may draw or describe the chronological sequence of events during a term of development service or work with modelling clay or story cubes to provide key words or symbols which are then used for telling stories. Reflection on the strengths gained during the time abroad plays a major role in our sessions. These strengths are invaluable resources which can be drawn on during the returning process.

What special challenges do children face when they move to a different culture? And which special challenges do young people face?

For children, it is above all the loss of their familiar surroundings which is the main factor. This includes almost every aspect of their life so far: the sounds and smells of the host country, the approach to life, the language, of course, and a whole lot of everyday habits. For young people, there is often, in addition, a feeling of being uprooted, the loss of their peer group, changes in their schooling, and sometimes the loss of whatever independence they may have already gained from their parents.

These children, so-called Third Culture Kids, could be described as secret immigrants, who find a lot of things in Germany strange or even incomprehensible. This can leave them susceptible to bullying.

Of course they often approach new situations with curiosity and adventurousness. These are precious resources which they should put to good use during their time of arrival. During this phase it is especially important, on the one hand, to acknowledge what you have had to give up and, on the other hand, to focus on the opportunities which come with starting a new life. It's about letting go, maintaining, and gaining.

How do children and young people approach such challenges?

They react in very different ways, depending on their personality and the support they get. Children who are supported by their parents and other people around them and who develop strong resilience approach the upheaval much more positively. And young people who understand what is happening to them and whose parents give them space to express their feelings often approach change with a much more positive attitude. Without support, some withdraw into a world of their own, others conform to an extreme extent, and yet others become aggressive or really bitter. It is normal, though, for children and young people to show certain symptoms for anywhere from a couple of weeks up to three months. A change in behaviour – when a child talks more than usual, for example, or is often withdrawn – is part of the transition. Some become very clingy, whereas others tend to be prickly. There may be loss of appetite, stomach aches, or physical symptoms which have no obvious medical cause. Small children may start wetting the bed again and may for a while lose the ability to do things which they had already learnt to do. But these are all normal reactions to loss and part of the grieving process or the process of adjustment.

At what stage should one start to worry about the possibility of a significant negative impact on their mental health?

If such symptoms persist for three or four months or even get worse, then you should go to a paediatrician. You should also take action if a child or young person becomes a danger to themselves or to others – through an eating disorder, for example, or aggressive behaviour towards others or towards themselves.

It is very helpful if a doctor or consultant has spent time abroad themselves or is familiar with the phenomenon of inter cultural transition, culture stress, and culture shock. We have often observed that problems such as culture stress are either not recognised or are belittled by people who have no experience of such problems.

What do you do if you notice during a session that a child or young person is obviously not well?

Very often we already observe a positive change in behaviour during a seminar or in the course of coaching for returnees – not only in children and young people but also in the adults. Something changes in the psyche. The burden is alleviated.

But if we observe that things are more complicated and lie deeper, then we discuss this with the parents and talk with them about what they might do and what resources they already have access to in their community. And we offer them on-going support, either from ourselves or from our network of consultants in the fields of paediatrics, child psychology, and child counselling. And, depending on the seriousness of the problems, there are also clinics which are extremely competent where such cases are concerned.

How can parents help their children during the transition phase?

It is important for them to see the transition through the eyes of their children. What has changed for them? And what is entirely new to them? What opportunities can I open up for my child even before our return, through contacts in Germany, for example? What can I do to prepare them using books, films, or the internet?

It is also important to include children in decision-making processes. What things do you want to leave behind? Which do you want to give away? And what do you want to take with you? What should your new room be like? When children are listened to, they play a much greater part in the whole process. And they can often take on tasks of their own during the transition process. You should then pay special attention too to the strengths they have acquired during their time abroad. In our two books, “Back Home – living with change after time abroad” and “Weltkind” (“Child of the World”), we have included a lot of practical tips on how parents can help their children both with saying goodbye and with arriving.

Sometimes children or young people have actually been through some really bad experiences – of violence, accidents, or extreme deprivation. How can one help them process such difficult experiences?

If the family is still in the host country, it is extremely important to make sure straight away that they are in a safe place and are comfortable. Then children and young people need space to talk about their experience and express their feelings. You can use creative activities such as drawing or painting to open up a space in which it is easier for them to express their feelings verbally. These kinds of creative activities are extremely important. When you then ask, “What have you drawn there?”, they often begin to talk and show their feelings. Children and young people find that this is a good way to relieve their feelings.

And then you should definitely seek professional help, if something potentially traumatic has happened. You should be able to find a therapist either in your host country or back home. And you are welcome to contact us in such situations too.

Are there contact centres for children and young people as well? Some do not want to or are unable to confide in their parents.

I already mentioned to start with that in our work with families we always schedule periods during which the children and young people are separated from their parents. Many of them tell us other things altogether and sometimes behave very differently. Then there are also Third Culture Kids groups and networks, some of which meet regularly for sharing and discussion. For older young people, who have already finished school, orientation years are now organised – usually by church organisations. Young people who have grown up in Germany and young people from abroad live together for a year. It is all about supporting each other and issues such as identity and developing one’s personality and choosing a career. In this context we have for many years been putting on seminars for young people who have been affected by this kind of culture shock.

What advice can you give to parents about how best to proceed, if they discover that their children are not well?

It is important to show sensitivity to start with and then to create space and opportunities for children to express their feelings and talk about them without anyone being judgemental. And, finally, one should seek competent support, ideally from people who, on the one hand, are familiar with the issues, having spent time abroad themselves, and who, on the other hand, possess the necessary professional skills.

Thank you, Mr Schuppener, for talking to us.

READING TIPS

- Schuppener, Jochen & Christine: **Rückkehr aus dem Ausland.** BoD 2016
- Schuppener, Christine: **Weltkind – Rückkehr und Transition mit Kindern.** BoD 2019
- Schuppener, Jochen & Christine: **Back Home – living with change after time abroad.** BoD 2017
- Pollock, Van Reken, Pflüger: **Third Culture Kids** Verlag der Francke Buchhandlung, 2014



Angela Grünert at the conclusion of a mentoring event of her Berlin-based organisation.

I looked after myself in the end

Facing culture shock on returning to Berlin

As befits the “career” of an Islamic scholar, I’ve spent nearly all of my working life in Islamic countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. I’ve worked as a journalist, ran the Goethe Institute in various places, and worked for political foundations. And I’ve been a professional development worker for DED in Sudan and for EED in the Palestinian Territories. Every posting was a challenge in its own way, but I experienced the biggest culture shock when I moved back to Germany after twelve years overseas.

In 2014 I had the opportunity to return to Berlin to take up a permanent post in a leadership role in the church administration. I was very pleased about this, because – after all the years of living in crisis-ridden countries, post-war regions, and situations of acute conflict – I was keen to go back home and live in well-ordered and familiar surroundings.

I had never moved straight from one job into another before. Now I was going straight from Beit Jala in the Palestinian Territories – my last posting – to Germany. Fortunately for me, a couple of friends of mine in Jerusalem had rented me their Berlin flat, which was very close to my new workplace in Charlottenburg. It really couldn’t have turned out better. I thought this would be an excellent base for settling in back home, step-by-step. There were many times in which I had painted a brightly-coloured picture of this process in my mind.

LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES

I felt cold from the day I arrived. It was the middle of October, the best time of year in Palestine, when it is still warm, as if it were summer, but no longer unbearably hot. In Germany it seemed as if the sun didn’t shine for months – everything was grey. I had forgotten how much energy you need to get through this dismal time of year.

My new job was very demanding from day one. My task was to win over the team of staff to accepting change in an organisation which set store by tradition. In theory at least, this was a very suitable job for someone who was at a point in life when everything was changing in a big way. As so often in the past in so many different places, I was back in the same old situation: dealing with the authorities, fitting into the system, familiarising myself with the infrastructure, informing myself so that I could make the right decisions and sign contracts, finding somewhere to live, working out how to get around, and so on and so forth.

I remembered – and longed for – the networks already established by ex-pats and local colleagues, which I could rely on to support me in every new country – with good tips, support, and a great deal of understanding of the difficult situation which every new beginning presents.

There was none of this in Germany. I found myself entirely left to my own devices during the process of arrival and orientation. Admittedly, family and friends were waiting for me in Berlin and it was great to make contact with old groups of friends. But I was now no longer an annual visitor who was coming from a long way away once a year, and for whom they all used to make time straight away. Now I was there “normally”. And “normally” means that everyone has their own life to lead – filled with numerous appointments, work, family, and a daily routine.

This routine includes periods of “free time”, of course, when one arranges to meet with friends or organises particular activities. But I first had to learn the ropes where this was concerned. And I still haven’t really got used to it. You can rarely get to see your friends whenever you happen to want to. You have to arrange to meet – often long in advance. You don’t just go along and ring the doorbell, when you happen to be in the neighbourhood. Visits are planned well in advance and

even telephone calls have to be scheduled beforehand, by sending a WhatsApp message, for example: "Shall we have a chat on the phone next weekend?"

Of course friends are always available if there's an emergency. But needing to integrate is not an emergency. Our busy lives leave no time for spontaneity. As people grow older they have their established circles of friends and carry responsibility in demanding jobs and for their family and partnerships. Time and space for friends is already taken up by those who have been with you for the past few years.

MY CALENDAR FILLED UP SLOWLY

When everyone lives like this, no one notices that you can't keep up as a returnee. I had my demanding job, but outside of that there were great long periods of unfilled time and no regular commitments to start with. My calendar is filling up like everyone else's now – with choir, book club, sport, and various social activities. I'm getting to know pleasant, interesting people, with whom I always have a good time. And I could easily imagine some of them becoming friends. But, to be honest, I still haven't really got the hang of how it all works.

I no longer have such a strong feeling that I can't get along in my own culture. Nor am I so anxious about sticking out like a sore thumb. But these feelings haven't gone away entirely. However, I'm now very good at managing my calendar. My weekends are often fully booked up. And if not, I sometimes dare to challenge friends with spontaneous invitations. This sometimes works! Which makes me very happy!

What still seems strange to me is the extent to which people are preoccupied with work, especially since a lot of people whom I know well and who are dear to me complain about their workload, about being overworked, about structures which are not fit for purpose, and about the way people behave towards each other at work. After three years in what was my first permanent job, but which soon turned out to be altogether insecure because it didn't suit me, I dared – with a certain amount of trepidation – to take a leap into the dark. With unemployment benefit as a safety net, I allowed myself to take six months off to reflect on my situation.

Throughout my working life, my current job had determined where I happened to be living. My move to Berlin was based on this logic too. The challenge now was to work out where and how I wanted to live in the future.

MEDIATING BETWEEN CULTURES

I'm now running a small association in my district in the south of the city, which provides mentoring for refugee children of primary school age.

I started this project two years ago together with another returnee. Although my "business" partner is now working in Africa most of the time, I've opted to stay in Berlin. I'm pleased to be able to work with like-minded people in an international community back in my home city.

I'm able to bring to this project all my experiences and

everything that I've learnt in so many years in different countries, including the countries of origin of some of the refugees I encounter.

I work as a mediator between cultures and am blessed to be able to do what I do best in my home city at last. I'm having to build things up step by step: negotiating with the authorities to obtain charitable status and applying for grants, for example.

But all the effort is well worth it. In the end I always manage to win people's confidence because I myself have confidence in what we're doing. Since I started devoting myself to this work, lots of things have become possible. It is no longer at all important to me, to measure what I have achieved in life according to my pay scale, job title, or income. I actually live on very little money, but it feels like I'm rich. There's no way you could buy what I like about living here, anyway.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THE RETURNEES COMMITTEE

Since I returned, I've also become an active member of Brot für die Welt's returnees committee (Rückkehr-Ausschuss, RKA).

We work in various groups or subcommittees on issues around deployment, return, and participation in global studies and development education work. We're keen to put our overseas experience to good use in Germany. So we meet together for this purpose in the RKA three times a year, in a different place in Germany each time. The RKA is a bit like family. Everyone has been profoundly affected by their stint as a development service worker. We're all still living between different worlds and see this as a strength. I meet the most amazing people in RKA: people who, after their return, share the same feelings of alienation which I've had to struggle with; and people who have developed alternative – sometimes daring and adventurous – ways of living, which are not just centred around work, money, and career.

I could probably have done with some sort of therapy or counselling during the acute phase of culture shock – when I first returned home to a place which had become strange and unfamiliar. I looked after myself in the end by managing to tap into what had made a formative impression on me during all the years abroad: doing things for other people and building community across cultural boundaries and political borders. That was – and still is – the best medicine for me.

I would recommend, to anyone who is adopting a similar "self-healing" approach, that you get in touch with RKA. We're still looking for allies and comrades to join us, so we look forward to getting into conversation with you! We especially welcome spontaneous e-mails at: info-rka@gmx.de

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Simone Lindorfer, a psychosocial trauma counsellor, and Leocadia Kabibi (left), a psychosocial counsellor, talk to a member of staff from Caritas Gulu and an assistant in a camp for internally displaced persons in northern Uganda (2006).

Better acknowledging the burdens of “life after service”

Responsibility for professionals’ welfare doesn’t stop after service

Every departure of a professional development worker is different. Their experiences of development service or civil peace service are different. And every return is different too.

During recent years, especially since the Civil Peace Service was introduced, awareness has been growing among sending organisations of the stresses and strains which professionals face during their term of service. Coaching, supervision, and counselling are now part of the norm underpinning the professional work of peace workers and development workers. In the beginning, such provision was sometimes regarded suspiciously. But, according to my own observation, the idea of providing continuous support throughout the term of service is no longer associated with pathology in any way and has become entirely normal.

The focus is now on the preventive nature of such provision: talking to a coach can prevent burnout or excessive stress. The stigma, as in “Anyone who has coaching cannot handle stress and is therefore unsuitable.”, hardly plays a role in the thinking of professionals anymore. This is very much to be welcomed.

I have been working as a psychologist, psychotherapist, and coach for various sending agencies since 2003 and I can see that this work has potential for empowering people, in particular because professionals no longer have to ask for support but are offered it as a matter of course. The positive impact of this kind of support has also been documented in evaluation reports.

However, it seems that this non-pathological view of coaching or supervision does not extend beyond the end of the service contract, so far as a lot of sending organisations are concerned. I have been watching this unfortunate trend for some time: A few years ago quite a number of organisations included in their support package further counselling following completion of the term of service. But now only a few do so. It would seem – or this is how one might interpret this trend among sending agencies – that excessive stress after the completion of the term of service is regarded as unusual, not particularly relevant, and not worth paying any attention to. The sensible logic behind the idea that coaching can relieve stress seems to break down at this point.

RETURNING IS A CHALLENGE

Returnees experience the process of returning in a variety of ways – because they differ as individuals, because they have different experiences to cope with, and because they live in different contexts after their return. But there is one challenge which they all face: reverse culture shock. The changes in the way in which we live, largely brought about by digitalisation, can be excessively demanding after years of an “analogue” existence where power supplies are intermittent. As a result, individuals can easily feel left out or marginalised. The changes include: differences in the way in which families organise themselves as regards paid work, housework, and caring

for the family; children adapting to the new situation; and, last but not least, experience with the German job market, where newly-acquired competencies do not necessarily match those which are most wanted here in this country. This can lead to feelings of rejection. I think of the experience of a good friend of mine who was a surgeon in northern Uganda during the civil war. She had to operate on serious gunshot wounds and mutilations, often without electricity and by candlelight and with a limited choice of anaesthetics. When she returned to Germany and applied for jobs as a medical doctor, she often had to answer questions about new methods of diagnosis and ways of carrying out operations and was rejected as a result. It is the clash of experiences, topsy-turvy values, and the unbridgeable gap between this world here and the other world over there, which can lead to an inability to talk, even to one's friends, upon returning home. This can all be very upsetting, unsettling, and stressful.

INADEQUATE PROVISION OF SUPPORT FOR RETURNEES

Work with returnees provides a lot of opportunities, and this is important. What is especially helpful are opportunities for sharing with other people who have had similar experiences, who understand what you're talking about – and maybe even understand without you having to say anything. Opportunities for returnees in the form of gatherings and seminars are not only helpful because they provide support for people in a special situation in which they face particular challenges. They are also helpful because they are provided by publicly funded organisations and this demonstrates social recognition of the difficulties of returning. And yet to me there seems also to be a need for systematic provision of counselling for returnees – counselling which does not pathologise, but rather anticipates the problems and the pain and regards this as normal and a part of the process which began with the initial departure. Such counselling should be available without individuals having to ask for it, let alone give reasons for their request and without them necessarily being in a particularly stressful situation, such as having experienced traumatic events in the host country.

PAYING THE PRICE AFTER SERVICE

A typical experience which I have often encountered when counselling professionals following their peace service is, for example, extreme tiredness and exhaustion, especially after years spent in extremely fragile post-conflict situations characterised by collective trauma. A lot of professionals keep going until their service contract ends – and are not aware of what they are doing or how much this takes out of them psychologically. They put up with the structural violence and blatant injustice in the countries where they work. They witness colleagues dying because of the lack of competent medical care. Every morning they see children begging in the midst of all the traffic – children who are just the same

age as their own children. They hear, through listening to the stories which people in their communities have to tell, how much people have lost and suffered and how much they continue to suffer. Every day and every night. You don't have to be a victim of traumatic violence yourself to feel the emotional blows inflicted by trauma.

We usually have two ways of coping psychologically with feelings of powerlessness, feelings which may not be very intense, but are nonetheless persistent: Either we become very close to those who are suffering and do all we can for them – and we may even go beyond our own boundaries and identify too strongly with such people. Or we distance ourselves emotionally and avoid feeling the pain and may even become cynical. Any attempt to maintain a balanced approach is doomed to failure.

Both these ways of coping with trauma carry a high price which has to be paid when we return "home" to people and places where it is not possible to explain what we have experienced. Some returnees feel very vulnerable and stressed out – and cannot understand why all this is happening to them now after they have returned home. "It feels to me like I'm getting depressed. I feel that everything I did was totally pointless." "Can I give myself time to digest all the things that have happened to me? Or do I have to start functioning again straight away?" "Everyone around me expects me to be the same old me again, but that just isn't possible. Is that wrong?" "What's wrong with me? I feel cut off."

This is the kind of thing which I so often hear in conversations – sometimes an amazingly long time after the person has returned. When I counsel professionals, I pay special attention to acknowledging the feelings of powerlessness which are prompted by living in structurally violent situations, because this acknowledgement relieves the burden and is crucially important at a human level.

RETURNEES SHOULD BE ENTITLED TO COACHING OR COUNSELLING

One of the things which helped me when I returned after four years in Uganda was reflecting systematically and scientifically on my experiences and working through them as I wrote a doctoral thesis. Liberation psychology is a Latin American approach which is not concerned with superficial healing of psychological problems resulting from experiences of violence, but rather seeks to empower survivors to change social reality. This was and is my answer to powerlessness.

That is why, in the debate about stress following peace service or development service, I am not solely concerned with the needs of professionals as individuals. I am also very much concerned with the need for structural social change as a response. An entitlement to coaching or counselling following peace service or development service would be one such response.



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AGdD Photography Competition

Marking 50 years of the Development Workers Act

The saying goes that a picture is worth a thousand words. We therefore decided to hold a photography competition to mark the 50th anniversary of the Development Workers Act. We wanted to use this as a way of portraying the diversity of development service, so we appealed for photographs from all five decades, from different parts of the world, from cities and from rural areas, and from as many different sectors or kinds of development work as possible. Photographs depicting professional development workers themselves and showing how they lived and worked were especially welcome.

As a result, we received 198 entries from all around the world. Some are colourful and quirky. And some tell profound and moving stories which underly what appear to be simple motifs.

It was not easy to establish criteria for the competition to start with.

The three-person jury, Professor Dirk Gebhardt (photographer and journalist), Brigitte Binder (education officer of AGdD, who loves pictures and has an eye for good photographs), and Dominique Chasseriaud (former CPS professional and a passionate photographer), used four criteria in the end: relevance to development service; ethical criteria regarding how people are portrayed; image quality; and the strength of the message of the image.

It was not easy to come to a decision, but the jury presented their three favourites just in time for the anniversary on 18 June 2019.

1ST PLACE: THE CIRCLE OF WOMEN



Dr Inge Baumann-May first went out as a development service worker with Christliche Fachkräfte International (CFI, Christian Professionals International) in 1994. Having trained as a midwife and nurse, she worked as a health advisor. After serving in Liberia and later in Uganda, she went into further education to study public health and obtained a PhD in health studies in Australia. Since 2015 Dr Baumann-May has been working with CFI again, this time in Nepal, where she supports the partner organisation's capacity building with the aim of bringing about a lasting improvement in the health of women, mothers, and children in isolated and disadvantaged regions of the country.



The picture shows women sitting in a circle in the mountains of Nepal, with Dr Inge Baumann-May (seen dressed in red on the left of the picture), who sent in the photograph. She writes: "I work as a health consultant promoting the health of mothers and children in Nepal. I went to this place when I was on a monitoring visit in the mountains. It was fascinating to listen to the mothers as they told us about the positive impact which our work had had on their daily lives."

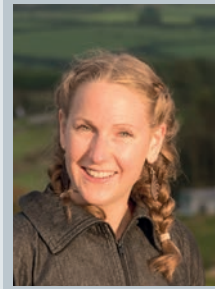
The photograph was taken in Nepal in 2018.

The jury's opinion: The circle of women, with the professional development worker among them, against the backdrop of the Nepalese mountains, made a huge impression on us. The composition of the image is excellent, with the circle as the foreground element which seems to the observer to merge with the outlines of the mountains. Then there are the simple huts which emphasise the remoteness of the place, showing how much work has to be done by the professional and the development service agency to make an impact in the most far-flung corners of the country.

2ND PLACE: NIGHTFALL

The image shows a house at nightfall in Cambodia in 2016. The photographer, Linda Behnke, says: "What I like about the picture is the evening mood, the rain clouds, and the light in front of the house. I took the photograph at the end of a long day at work. My Cambodian colleagues and I had been interviewing survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. The occupant of this house was one of my clients and he told us that he had lost several members of his family during the reign of the regime."

The jury's opinion: This picture says a lot and is very well executed photographically. The shadow of the dark rain clouds contrasts with the light at the entrance to the house and in a mysterious way reminds us of the story behind the image. The light is like a glimmer of hope in the process of working through Cambodia's dark past.



Linda Behnke worked for the Civil Peace Service of GIZ in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from 2013 to 2016. As a lawyer, she took over the representation of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, who were applying for admission as plaintiffs at the UN Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal. While in Cambodia, Ms Behnke also discovered her passion for photography. She is currently working for the United Nations in New York.

3RD PLACE: THE SEWING LESSON

The image shows a sewing lesson, part of an adult education programme in Ethiopia in 2007. According to the photographer, Hartmut Stichel: "You can see the difficult conditions: no electricity and only a little light from a small window. Especially committed occupational training organisations were funded through a KfW competition. As a DED professional, I assisted in the planning and implementation." (KfW, the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, is a German development bank.)

The jury's opinion: The imagery is perfect: the play of light and shadow creates tension which can also be sensed in the working conditions. The patch of light and the line which has been hung along the wall serve to lead the eye into the furthest corner of the room, which could easily be overlooked otherwise. The image shows that certain basic conditions must be met for good work to be done.



Hartmut Stichel introduces himself: "I'm 68 years old and I've been retired since 2013. During my career as a master toolmaker I spent 14 years altogether working in development service with DED and Brot für die Welt in Tanzania, Peru, Ethiopia, and Rwanda - in projects for the promotion of small businesses and in occupational training. For the past five years I've been participating as a volunteer in overseas missions of the Senior Expert Service (SES)."

Looking after yourself

How you can maintain and build up your own resilience

Anne Baumann has a degree in psychology and works at the University Hospital in Cologne. She has been a research worker and has completed training as a psychologist/psychotherapist. For more than ten years she has actively participated in the selection, preparation, and support of people who do voluntary service abroad.



Professionals who undertake development service and members of their families who accompany them enjoy a number of good experiences. However, they also face challenges before, during, and after their development service. Some experiences are distressing: experiences of conflict, accidents, or illness, for example, or witnessing violence or poverty. Returning home can be difficult too. What was once your home can seem strange; family and friends may be less understanding and sympathetic than you expected and it may be difficult to find your way around the job market. It is important to pay attention to your mental health at every stage. Depending on how much psychological stress you are subjected to, even small adjustments can help you feel better. But sometimes you need help from someone else. People can react in very different ways to similar experiences. You should therefore be sure to keep an eye on the other members of your family as well, especially if you have children with you.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Establish a daily routine! A regular pattern to the day from the time you get up to the time you go to bed, with set mealtimes in between, creates structure and provides orientation.

2. Get moving! Regular exercise, going out for a walk in the fresh air, or going for a bike ride is good for both body and soul. You don't have to run a marathon. Ten minutes easy walk each day may be all you need.

3. Get together with other people! Maintaining contact with people who share an interest or who seem to understand you helps you not only to feel connected with others, but also to get out of the house and to gain new ideas.

4. Do something! Perhaps there's an activity which you used to enjoy but haven't undertaken for a long while. Or something which you've always wanted to try out. Sometimes it takes energy to become motivated, but it is important to do or experience things, if you want to stay healthy.

5. Eat good food which is wholesome and tasty! Food is an important part of our lives. Regular meals - of fresh food which tastes good - make a big difference to your well-being.

6. Talk to your partner and/or your children! If you are abroad together, you will experience an intensive time together. On the other hand, daily life just goes by sometimes. Be sure to take time for conversation and discussion.

7. Give yourself time to relax! There are many ways in which you can consciously create short spaces of time for relaxation. Yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, or a walk in the woods can help you to stay well-balanced.

8. Live mindfully! Mindfulness means living consciously in the present moment without judging anything or anyone. We are often thinking about the past or the future. That distracts us from the here and now and prevents us from shaping the present and looking after ourselves.

9. Maintain a list of good things! We often overlook small positive happenings, especially when we're facing a lot of challenges. That's why it can help to keep a list, perhaps by taking a moment or two each evening to write down three "good things" which you experienced during the day.

10. Tell people about your experiences! It might do you good to tell other people about what you have experienced and what you've learned. This will help you to process your experiences and pass on the knowledge which you have gained during your time abroad, perhaps by giving lectures.

11. Meet with other professionals! We are less alone when we get together. It is easier to overcome a lot of problems, when you talk about them with other people, either in your host country or after your term of service, e.g. at a seminar for returnees or in a regional group of your sending agency.

12. Contact your sending agency! The sending agencies - and the AGdD Foundation - can share tips and experiences related to overcoming the problems which can arise during or after a term of development service. These are also the organisations to go to for information about the various kinds of support which are available.

ASK FOR SUPPORT

During difficult phases of life or if you are under a lot of psychological stress, you should not hesitate to seek professional help at an early stage.

Anne Baumann has listed for transfer the key places to go to.

Psychosocial support in different countries

Every country has a different psychosocial support system. The following list contains examples of contacts and organisations and can give you an idea how to find help in your country.

HELPLINES

If you need help immediately, a telephone helpline can be a good first step in order to speak with a well-trained volunteer counsellor. They can also give advice about how to find other local psychosocial support organisations. Find a helpline in your country:

www.ifotes.org/en/ifotes-members

www.telefonseelsorge.de/?q=node/7651

FAMILY DOCTORS / GENERAL PRACTITIONER

Every country has their own health system with their own pathways for finding a doctor. Look for the terms “family doctor” or “general practitioner” when searching for them in your country. These doctors have networks in their area and know how to get psychosocial support in your country.

The website www.expatca.com/healthcare offers information about healthcare systems in a number of different countries.

You can find a doctor, for example through these websites in the following countries:

Belgium - www.chsbelgium.org/en

France - <http://annuaire.sante.ameli.fr>

Germany - www.kbv.de/html/arztstuche.php

Netherlands - www.zorgkaartnederland.nl

Spain - www.mscbs.gob.es/ciudadanos/centrosCA.do?metodo=busquedaCa

United Kingdom - www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/GP/LocationSearch/4

COUNSELLING

The International Association of Counselling has a list of different organisations on their website that offer counselling. Many of them work in a specific country:

www.iac-irtac.org/?q=Our%20Partners

The International Commission on Couple and Family Relations has a list of institutions in different countries that offer counselling for couples and families:

PSYCHOTHERAPY

There are also big differences between psychotherapy in different countries. The Huffington Post has an informative and entertaining section on psychotherapy in different countries:

www.huffpost.com/feature/you-should-see-someone#masthead.

This article presents views on psychotherapy in a number of countries worldwide and gives a short explanation of costs and the systems: A short description of the situation of psychotherapy in different European countries can be found on the website of the European Association for Psychotherapy:

www.europsyche.org/situation-of-psychotherapy-in-various-countries

A very popular, evidence-based form of psychotherapy is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). If you are interested in cognitive behavioral therapy, these organisations help you find a therapist in different countries. In Europe, the European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (EABCT) has a list of national associations that can help you find a therapist in your country:

<https://eabct.eu/find-a-therapist/>

The International Association for Cognitive Psychotherapy (IAPC) is a worldwide organisation. It has a list of therapists in different countries:

www.the-iacp.com/therapist-referrals.

Psychoanalysis is the classical form of psychotherapy developed by Sigmund Freud. It usually takes place more than once per week and therefore might cost more money, if you have to pay for it yourself. If you are interested in finding an analyst, the Europäische Psychoanalytische Föderation has a list of all the national psychoanalytic societies in Europe:

www.epf-fep.eu/ger/page/epf-societies

Many of the national websites have a section called “Find an analyst”, where local psychoanalysts can be searched for.

On this website, psychotherapists from currently 15 different countries worldwide can get registered:

www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

Some countries have their own website that give a comprehensive overview of psychotherapists, for example:

Belgium - www.chsbelgium.org/en

United Kingdom - www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Austria - <http://psychotherapie.ehealth.gv.at>,

<https://iccf.org/about-iccf/associated-organizations>

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The organisation Mental Health Europe has issued a map of helplines and organisations for young people in different countries in Europe:

www.mhe-sme.org/library/youth-helplines/

Many of the services described focus on suicide prevention, but they will also be happy to offer support with other issues children or adolescents might be dealing with at the moment.

If you are looking for support for your whole family, family therapy might be an option. The International Family Therapy Association provides a list of national organisations:

www.ifta-familytherapy.org/linksassociations.php

PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Peer support groups can help to provide emotional and social support, knowledge and practical help. Unfortunately, there is no international central organisation for finding peer support groups.

EMERGENCY AND HOSPITALS

There are rare cases in life, in which immediate help is needed. If you are worried about your own or somebody else’s well-being, “112” is the emergency number in all 28 member states of the European Union. People in distress can call day and night, 7 days a week to get immediate assistance from a medical team. Calling this number is free of charge from every fixed or mobile phone in Europe. The teams can also refer you to the nearest hospital.

The following website by the European Commission provides more information on “112” and other emergency support services in different countries:

<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/112-your-country>.

We have created an info flyer for professionals on the topic “Development Service and Health - How to look after yourself and where you can get help with psychological stress”.

The info flyer can be downloaded here: www.agdd.de/en/after

A long process, but an essential one

Psychosocial work in the Palestinian Territories

“Development of the competencies of psychosocial trainers and improvement of the mental health of victims of violence” – In 2009 I successfully applied for this CPS (Civil Peace Service) post with GIZ in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I took special leave from my job as a clinical social worker in a psychiatric hospital in Berlin and worked from 2010 to 2012 as a CPS worker in Palestine.

A HUGE CHALLENGE

A CPS job promoting psychosocial provision for the local population of the Palestinian Territories is a huge challenge. There has been relentless conflict in this region for more than 60 years. In addition, the political situation of the Palestinians has worsened irreversibly, leaving the people there with less and less living space and less and less autonomy.

Our Palestinian partner organisation was an established Christian charity, which already had experience of providing psychosocial services in Bethlehem. The aim now was to extend the provision of support throughout the West Bank. New partners included the Christian village of Taybeh, near Ramallah, and the Christian community in Nablus.

Both places are surrounded by Israeli settlements and there is a strong military presence. Nablus, in particular, was cut off from the rest of the world by road blocks for

a long time. The people suffer time and time again from violent incursions by the army and seemingly arbitrary actions and violent attacks from settlers. They live in a situation which can easily lead to traumatisation. Other factors which are detrimental to mental health include isolation and loneliness which induce high levels of mental stress. Humans are social beings who need to spend time together with like-minded people. The conflict has also left people with feelings of powerlessness, which engender both a lack of self-efficacy and hopelessness.

FROM YOGA CLASSES TO WORKSHOPS

By building up the organisation of the psychosocial counselling centres and meeting places in the two communities, so that we could offer a continuous programme, we created a feeling among the people in our target groups – women, families, and elderly people – that here was something which they could rely on. The people felt valued and that they “hadn’t been forgotten” by the international community.

We began with yoga groups, which were fun and fostered physical health, the ability to relax, and the feeling of self-efficacy.

My Palestinian colleague and I then introduced guided discussion groups: shorter discussion sessions about everyday issues and structured workshops on more emotionally laden topics. We devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to the planning and preparation of the workshops, during which we employed a variety of didactic tools and other methods. There were some heated discussions during some of the workshops. We made sure that everyone had a chance to speak and that other views besides those commonly accepted could be expressed, so that everyone could learn from one another. This led to a strengthening of the feeling of togetherness. And our discussion groups were always well attended.

When we tackled particular topics such as fear and panicky feelings or problems of addiction, we invited speakers and also conducted individual counselling sessions. Our aim was to start from a place where people could do something to improve their situation themselves.

As time progressed we were able to tackle increasingly difficult issues, such as what it feels like when you have to go into a local old people’s home because your children have gone to live abroad due to the lack of prospects in their home country. A lot of older people found

Yoga classes were part of the programme of the Psychosocial Counselling Centre and Meeting Place in the West Bank.



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this very humiliating because they had been used to life in an extended family. "They would feel as if they were being chased out of the house like a dog." The outcome of this very emotional workshop was that the residents of the local old people's home received regular visits, so that they could continue to have a sense of belonging. Taking more responsibility for other people once again is a good way to feel that you are needed. And in this case people's fears about the future were lessened as well. So on a small scale it was possible for some people to experience greater self-efficacy and for other people's lives to be improved. This led individuals to feel more content, so that there was less pressure on families. We fostered interaction between the three groups through additional programmed activities, such as regular gatherings and joint festivities.

We chose a variety of venues, so that each community could take a turn at hosting the gathering and the others could travel there. Some people had not left their villages for years because they were afraid of being subjected to arbitrary harassment or were afraid that they might not be able to return home. But they found the courage to travel together in a group – within the West Bank. The newly-won freedom, the novel impressions, and the change of scenery had a lasting impact.

BURDENSOME FEELINGS OF POWERLESSNESS

As GIZ development workers we were required to live within the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This was helpful, because it meant that we were better able to understand the psychosocial stresses which afflicted local people. Life behind the so-called security fence inevitably has an impact. The checkpoints, the feeling of being at the mercy of Israeli soldiers, and the unpredictable waiting times – it can take several hours to travel 80 km – could grind you down.

It was easier for us as international professional workers – and much less dangerous. But almost every week we witnessed the humiliation of Palestinians going through the checkpoints: People being arrested and blindfolded and made to kneel facing a wall with the sun burning down on them. We saw human rights violations and could not intervene directly, but could only ring to alert an aid organisation. We felt increasingly powerless ourselves as a result. And the sense of injustice was further strengthened by the knowledge that we were in a better position than the local population. We heard about house searches and people being denied help because they were not allowed access to health services. We heard all these stories and even knew the people concerned. Again and again there was the risk of secondary trauma for those in a helping role, due to their empathy with the people who had suffered trauma directly. We suffered growing inner tensions, which caused us to become potentially aggressive. The anger could build up inside them to such an extent that they would suddenly explode. Some people suddenly became unable to relax and turned to alcohol to help them do so. Their own relationships, either within the family or among the



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community of development workers, came under stress as a result. This caused a lot of conflict within the groups of professionals.

PROVISION FOR PROFESSIONALS

GIZ's CPS professionals were given group coaching. And they were sent on a weekend retreat twice a year. Professionals working in Palestine originally received a hardship allowance because of the special circumstances and extra stress. This enabled them to give themselves space and to allow themselves to take time out in addition to the set weekend retreats, depending on the level of emotional stress they were having to cope with. Unfortunately, this hardship allowance was cut by the BMZ (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) during my term of service.

I found the personal supervision very helpful. I could talk about other issues and challenges besides psychosocial stress, such as acceptance in the workplace and the right to participate in decision-making, etc.

All these kinds of help were effective and were felt by us professionals to be immediately helpful as regards lightening the burden.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

For a long time after my term of service I asked myself: What is the point of promoting mental health, when people are traumatised again and again by the circumstances and when what's really needed is a political solution? But this endless conflict shows just how long things can take, which means that it is important, simply for humanitarian reasons, to promote the provision of psychosocial services. Anything else would be a failure to render assistance.

One of **Martina Kohmann's** (right) tasks was to provide psychosocial support in Taybeh, a village with an ageing population.

Martina Kohmann
2010 - 2012: Palestine, GIZ

Interview:

The sooner you find someone to talk to, the better



Kai Leonhardt is the director of the internal psychosocial counselling service, COPE (COoperation with PErsonnel in Stress, Conflict and Crisis), of the German Society for International Cooperation (Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH). He and his team offer GIZ employees – those in Germany as well as those working abroad – support with working through their problems when they are going through a personal crisis.

Mr Leonhardt, what exactly does COPE have to offer? What sort of advice or counselling do you provide?

With COPE, GIZ offers its employees the opportunity to talk to someone in confidence without having to jump through a lot of hoops. Most people who come to talk to us, do so because they're facing a crisis in their lives. So the number of crisis interventions in our counselling work is correspondingly high.

People contact us by phone or by e-mail: We can be reached by telephone on a stand-by number 24/7. We straight away arrange an appointment in the immediate future, when we can speak with the staff member concerned, either via Skype or on the phone, and agree on a form of support which is likely to be helpful to them. About five counselling sessions are usually enough to resolve the issue, so that the individual can continue working independently. However, if it becomes clear during the initial discussions that the problems are unusually severe or complicated, we arrange for the person to avail themselves of the services of a therapist, mediator, or coach. This may either be someone near where they're living at the moment or someone back in Germany. We sometimes recommend that they spend some time in a clinic.

Who are your services aimed at?

We offer our services to every person who is employed by GIZ, but primarily to those who are serving abroad. This includes development workers, staff who've been sent out to work abroad, and also professionals who've been sent out to work in our projects as part of the CIM (Centre for International Migration and Development) programme. In recent years a growing number of local staff have been coming to us for support as well.

What issues and concerns do employees come to you with?

People come to us with all sorts of issues which are causing them to suffer. They're very often the typical

problems of stress, being overworked and overloaded – even to the extent of suffering burnout. However, they also include conflict at work, in the team or partner organisation.

And more and more people have experienced violence in recent years – ranging from burglary and robbery to violent attacks, sexualised violence, and kidnappings. This is the context for a lot of people who come to us and ask: How can I cope with my fear of terrorist attacks? What can I do if I'm actually being attacked or threatened?

Problems within the family are a major factor, too. Many people take along their families when sent abroad, and the living situation inevitably has an impact on the family. When couples separate and the issue arises as to who has custody of the children, this often raises existential questions which are likely to escalate the conflict – especially in binational families. In such cases we refer those seeking advice to specialised counselling services.

Are there particular stressors which professional development service workers are especially likely to be subjected to?

A lot of problems – those which we've already mentioned, for example – don't have anything to do with the kind of organisation which people work for. However, professionals who work in development service are vulnerable to additional forms of stress. Their places of work are often more strongly integrated into the local culture and infrastructure. And a lot of them are in more rural areas where people cannot easily obtain support. They often work alone and frequently under unusually difficult conditions. As they live closer with the local culture they are often directly confronted with suffering, poverty, and hardship, and this is a source of significant psychological stress.

Then elements of their biography play a role as well. For instance, there are a lot of younger people among development professionals. They don't yet have much life and work experience. On the other hand, there are also the "old hands", who may misjudge a situation because they've known "worse" in the past.

Are you also able to support professionals who need psychosocial counselling after they've completed their service contracts?

Sometimes, after a certain period of time, returnees discover that difficult experiences during their time with GIZ have after-effects which cause them problems. We naturally provide support in such cases too. And then, at the end of their term of service, there are the returnees gatherings, during which they also talk

about their prospects for the future. COPE is present at these events and offers counselling.

What psychological stressors do you come across in connection with the process of returning home?

Returning home is still often overlooked as a process. A lot of people are more likely to think that going abroad is the major challenge. When it comes to returning, they think: Now I'm going back to where I come from, to my old familiar surroundings. But when people have been abroad for several years, a lot has changed back home during that time, and the individuals themselves change even more, so that they suffer a sort of "reverse culture shock".

The feeling of suddenly not being important is another typical phenomenon. The individual had a meaningful task when they were abroad; they were in contact with a lot of people and may even have been a "VIP" at the local level. Now they've gone back home and are suddenly sitting all alone in a big city in Germany. Furthermore, it isn't always easy to reorient yourself in the world of work or to get back onto the career ladder. Another thing which is often overlooked is returning with a new partner from the host country. This can put a lot of pressure on the family, because what is a return for one person is a departure for the other.

Do you have any tips as regards what professionals can do for themselves when they're under a lot of stress?

It's important to find someone you can talk to about your problems. That person doesn't always have to be a professional counsellor, either in the host country or back home; they might just as easily be a colleague, your line manager, your partner, or a friend. The important thing is to talk about the problems which are bothering you – ideally with someone who is understanding and doesn't play down the problems or even dismiss them altogether – with someone who will listen and may perhaps make suggestions and provide information.

It is always true that the sooner you find someone to talk to, the less the problems will build up. Too often in our experience as counsellors, people come to us at a relatively late stage and we're actually the first people they've spoken to at all about their difficulties. Sometimes it can be a good thing just to get away from it all, so that you can look at the problems from a distance. It might be possible to bring forward a holiday, so that you can get out of the stressful situation for a while. This gives you a chance to relax and reduces the stress level. You should always bear in mind that the more stressed you are, the more your ability to solve problems diminishes.

What can professionals do – as a preventive measure – to strengthen their resilience both before and during their service?

There are a lot of things you can do. It depends very much on the particular situation and the person's individual needs. It's essential to make sure that you have time and space for yourself where you can relax and

look after yourself. It's important to sleep properly and to have times when you can get away from your work. Social support plays an important role as well: support from colleagues, friends, and family, and from other people, with whom you have a trusting relationship and whom you can open up to.

It's important to take time for reflection too, to regularly take a step backwards and ask yourself: What am I doing here? How do I feel right now? Am I looking after myself as I should be? Do I have ways of taking my mind off things? Do I have enough time and space for myself?

What do you think could be done to improve or change the provision of psychosocial counselling?

A lot has changed in the past ten years. More and more organisations are paying attention to the psychosocial situation of the professionals they've deployed abroad and provide appropriate services, although there is still scope for improvement.

Another thing which has improved enormously is that more attention is being given to psychosocial factors during the preparation for service. Most sending agencies run specific preparation courses which deal with the security situation in the host country, for example, and which include safety and security training and sometimes self-management and stress management as well. This means, among other things, that people identify problems sooner, and that they feel less ashamed about talking about psychosocial problems or about contacting us and asking for help at an early stage. We're now able to observe this improved awareness of the problems in our counselling sessions.

Why is it important and worthwhile to have a specialist counselling service?

Development service is an exciting and important undertaking. At the same time, it's also a huge challenge for those who take on the task. These people are willing to invest a great deal. They invest the whole of themselves, and even the whole family very often, and go into situations which are sometimes not only alien to them but also very challenging. At the same time, they give up many of the sources of support which they have at home. So it's very important for sending organisations to take steps to care for their professional staff by having answers to the problems and challenges which they're likely to meet. Our counselling service is one of these answers.

And it is, of course, also a measure which helps people get through difficult and problematic times and stay in their placement, rather than leave before they've completed their contract. We invest a great deal in selecting, training, and sending people out. We shouldn't simply accept someone failing to complete their service because of a problem which could have been solved in the course of a couple of good counselling sessions and with a little psychosocial expertise.

Thank you very much for talking to us, Mr Leonhardt.

Interview:
Dieter Kroppenber

Avoiding risks and developing your potential

On the dual benefit of psychosocial counselling for development service personnel

Daniela Pastoors is a peace and conflict research worker and consultant and a member of the academic staff at the Institute of Educational Science at the University of Marburg. In 2011 she worked in a peace-building project of *medica mondiale*, and in 2012 she was a human rights observer with the International Peace Observer Network (IPON) in the Philippines.

She currently lectures in the fields of conflict transformation, nonviolent communication and psychosocial counselling and is undertaking research for a doctorate on psychosocial staff care for professionals in the Civil Peace Service. She has conducted a series of interviews on this subject – not only with professionals but also with coaches and staff of various sending agencies. In this article she presents some of the results of her research.

Organisations have a duty of care towards their staff. This has increasingly often been a subject of discussion at the international level in recent years. The triggers for this were mostly experiences of violence and other dramatic events and people quitting their jobs or being absent from work.

The fundamental question is: What are the threats to foreign professionals and how can they be handled? Looking at the manuals and concepts of organisations which operate internationally, it is noticeable that safety and security, stress, and the prevention and management of risk, threats, and stresses and strains are frequent themes. The dangers of (secondary) trauma, burnout, and mental illness are raised increasingly often as significant issues and are frequently one of the justifications for spending money on providing support for

staff. In the Civil Peace Service (CPS) coaching/supervision counselling is justified to a large extent by the argument that peace service entails “working in conflict on conflict”.

At the same time, many of the actors in the field are concerned with issues around learning and training, competencies, professionalisation, and quality management. The key question here is: How can professionals be supported, so that they stay healthy and do a good job? Although the answers to these two questions can turn out to be quite similar, the two areas of “psychosocial support” and “learning and capacity building” are rarely considered together.

WHY IS STAFF SUPPORT NEEDED? WHAT FORM DOES IT TAKE EXACTLY?

Depending on one's perspective and starting point, a variety of questions may be asked in this context. These then influence WHY measures are developed, WHAT is done, and HOW it is done. These are the questions which I am addressing in my research, so I have analysed how CPS professionals are supported in their work. In what follows I shall summarise what I have been able to learn from interviews with various CPS professionals, supervisors, and sending agency staff. Of course crises, critical incidents, and on-going stressful situations occur time and again and therefore make staff care necessary. Professionals are concerned not only about significant stress factors and challenges, but also about other issues and questions which preoccupy them, but which they do not think of as problems or stress factors. They want to talk about these issues, think over particular questions, receive feedback, and find greater clarity and better orientation. Or they simply want to be seen and heard in a particular way, to feel that their work is recognised and valued.

All this can be provided by staff support services. Fortunately crisis intervention, emergency psychological

Daniela Pastoors creates a structure for the large amount of information which interviewees have shared with her.



help, and days of rest and recreation are only a part of such services and they are by far not the only ones, which strengthen and protect staff.

BEFORE STARTING SERVICE AND DURING THE INITIAL PHASE

A lot of support measures are preventative and not only promote the well-being of professionals but also help to ensure a good quality of their work:

- when, for example, conflict analysis and needs assessments are conducted beforehand; partnerships with local organisations are firmly established on a long-term basis; and good foundations are laid by the creation of projects which are worthwhile and by the selection of suitable professional staff;
- when preparation courses and on-the-job training help professionals to understand the different expectations and clarify the mandates; to reflect on their own role; and to work out how to deal with hierarchies or unequal power relationships;
- when personnel officers and regional managers make themselves available to establish tripartite relationships on a sound foundation; to clarify the financial responsibilities of professionals for the project; and to combine the roles of project manager and external advisor;
- when a relationship of trust is established with a coach during the pre-assignment phase in order to help professionals develop, before their departure, an awareness of their own resources and strategies for self care;
- when staff care programmes are firmly established within the organisation and staff are not left with the responsibility to practice self care.

DURING THE TERM OF SERVICE

The double effect of psychosocial staff care can evolve during the assignment:

- when regular team meetings, supervision, and focussed team-building or mediation establish and maintain constructive working relationships in teams and organisations;
- when exchange between experienced and new professionals in mentoring relationships facilitates the informal transfer of knowledge;
- when coaches help people to find ways of dealing with ever-present global injustice, inequality within an organisation, or with structural limitations; reflect on intercultural issues; or question their own motivation and biographical backgrounds;
- when there is time during meetings and regional conferences for discussion on the impact and sustainability of the work; or questions about the ultimate purpose of the work can be addressed in collegial consultation or coaching sessions;
- when coordinators on site listen to the professionals, facilitate conflict resolution, and take the load off them during their daily work;
- when professionals can go on training courses or have

access to expert consultations, and financial resources are made available for this;

- when ombudspersons and staff representatives are available to talk about employment issues.

DURING THE FINAL PHASE AND AFTER THE COMPLETION OF SERVICE

Towards the end of the service period and after professionals have returned home, staff care can be effective in both respects:

- when, thanks to final discussions, strategy meetings, and debriefings, there is a successful hand-over, knowledge is passed on, and projects are completed well;
- when professionals are informed in good time about the returnee support measures which their organisation and AGdD provide;
- when seminars for returnees take place, where professionals can get together - ideally with their families as well - for exchange, networking, and mutual support;
- when organisations provide opportunities for staying involved beyond one's term of service, for taking up a job as a returnee, or for participating in campaigning or development education activities to share their own experiences in the process;
- when professionals have the opportunity to discuss issues relating to the end of their contract and their own career prospects during coaching, which is still available to them for several months after their return, to help them through the reintegration process.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

This colourful array of topics and elements of staff care makes it clear that psychosocial health is very closely related to learning, professionalisation and the development of people and organisations. Professionals often do not demand more specialised psychosocial services but are happy when they enjoy a good working environment and get effective and reliable support during their daily work. Good working conditions and structures which enable professionals to bring their abilities to bear and at the same time develop through their service contribute to the well-being and health of professionals just as much as they do to the success of the projects. It also becomes apparent that a lot of the insights in the field of "mental health and psychosocial support" can be applied to basic staff care in the field of international development cooperation: The "duty of care" manifests in the establishment of an organisational culture of mindfulness as part of a "culture of care".

Portraying diversity

International experience paves the way to becoming a writer and publisher of children's books



Karin Beese is married and has three daughters. She works for GIZ in Berlin and is PR advisor of the European Climate Initiative (EUKI). She also runs her own publishing house, the HaWandel-Verlag, and has now published her second children's book in a series entitled "Nelly und die Berlinchen" ("Nelly and the Little Berliners").

No sooner said than done! – except that it wasn't quite as simple as that. By a stroke of luck I got to know an artist who wanted to try her hand at a children's book. We set off on a journey together – at a snail's pace, alongside family – my third daughter was born at this time – and my work at an environmental policy institute. It took two years until we finally held the printed book in our hands. A whole lot of friends and acquaintances supported us along the way and we learned an awful lot from their feedback. I dived headlong into the publishing business as a complete novice and learned everything I needed to know about setting up a publishing house, book catalogues, commercial contracts, and all sorts of other things too.

We were rewarded for our courage and perseverance with overwhelming feedback from lots of little fans – and big ones too – of the Little Berliners. We have received an award from the Berliner Ratschlag für Demokratie (Berlin Alliance for Democracy), seen our book included in several lists of recommended titles, and been invited to give numerous public readings. And we are still getting moving feedback and "thank you" e-mails from every corner of Germany – three-and-a-half years after the book was published.

Looking back, it is clear to me that the foundation stone for all this was laid more than ten years ago during my work as a trainee on a scholarship with DED (Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst – German Development Service) in Cameroon. The experience which I gained at that time in the field of public relations not only determined my subsequent career to a large extent, but also inspired me to keep taking on new challenges. But I have to say that, more than anything else, I have my three wonderful daughters to thank for a children's book coming out of all this. Their joy and imaginativeness give me new inspiration every day.

"I saw your book in the museum!" – I could hardly believe what my friend was telling me. But it was true. When I contacted the Hygiene Museum in Dresden, I was told that my children's book, "Nelly und die Berlinchen" – published in 2016 by the HaWandel-Verlag, which I founded specially for the purpose – really was on display in a special exhibition about racism – in a glass display case right at the end along with other good examples of non-discriminatory children's literature.

How did that happen? When people ask me how the book came into being and about the founding of my publishing house, I'm very happy to tell them the story: Some years ago I was looking for children's books which portray the diversity of people in Germany, without overtly making a big thing about diversity or portraying it as a problem. In online forums and conversations with other parents I kept coming to the same conclusion: In Germany it is very difficult to find children's books with black children or children of colour as the main characters, unless the books are about subjects such as integration or adoption. My somewhat defiant reaction was: "That's no good! I'll write something myself!"

Karin Beese
2007 - 2008:
Cameroon, DED