Young Refugees as Peer Mentors to European Foster Children: A Suggestion for Integration

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1 title
assumptions
Versatility
Goal: Integration through Psychology
Young refugees: 16-25
- Highest levels of resilience

James Nachtwey
What is resilience?

• eliminating mental illness after distressing event
• developing as expected for their age
• subjective feeling of doing well altogether
What do they overcome?

**AS REFUGEES**

- aftermath of trauma: having lost their towns, their homes and their family members
- need for cultural adaptation within unknown language, tradition and societal context
- facing fear, suspicion and discrimination, evident in lack of professional and educational opportunities & in underestimation of their sexual liberties

**AS YOUNG PEOPLE**

- puberty
- conflicts with parents
- struggle to establish a personal identity and to prepare themselves for adulthood
Same basic emotions

Plutchik wheel of emotions
Similar bodies
How do young refugees overcome war when some people in the West struggle with simpler circumstances?
THOUGHTS

FEELINGS ➔ BEHAVIOURS
Can be communicated and taught
So how do young refugees think?
4 central thinking patterns/ cognitions

1) creating meaning
2) individual features
3) appreciation of help
4) discrediting stigma
1. Creating meaning

- Search security and acceptance
- Willingness to act
- Tolerate ambiguity (negative emotions along with positive ones)
- Logical processing of their traumatic experiences
- Spirituality

=> They don’t try to find meaning; they act to create it
2. Individual features

- Agency & determination to work for a better future
- Distraction from devastating experiences
- Achieve integration
3. Appreciation of help

- do better when they trust people who aim to help them
- are grateful to mentors, volunteers and institutions who try to offer them support
4. Discrediting stigma

- Rationalise discrediting attacks
- Safeguard their belief in the benevolence of people
- Trust that legal and political authorities will help them
Who can benefit the most from this way of thinking in Europe?
Vulnerable populations: Foster children

Becca Hoekstra
Foster children: underaged humans being brought up by someone other than a biological or an adoptive parent

Foster care: the bringing up or the overseeing of such children in the context of an organisation, a collective home facility or a private household by people who are usually reimbursed for their expenses in looking after them

Europe: different types of foster care exist based on the children they focus on
What problems do they face?

- Problems in childhood and adulthood
- Behavioural problems
- Eating disorders
- Dropping out of school
- Distrust to others
- Aggression (if physically or emotionally abused before or during foster care)
- Sexual recklessness
- Drug addiction
Common grounds between foster children in Europe and young refugees

❖ Challenges they endure
❖ Reactions they face in their altering environments
❖ Attempts to create normality in volatile conditions
Common grounds: Challenges they endure

**YOUNG REFUGEES:**
- unaccompanied by loved ones
- relocate for months on end
- find themselves in unknown and foreign to their own, cultural surroundings
- when relocated as communities: they co-construct meaning and do better

**FOSTER CHILDREN:**
- find themselves in unfamiliar contexts
- without their families
- moving across different foster families and settings
- with people from different cultural backgrounds than the ones that they originate from
- when relocated with siblings, they work together in making sense of their experiences in the foster system
Common grounds: Reactions they face

**YOUNG REFUGEES:**
- Stigma
- Distrust of locals in receiving societies

**FOSTER CHILDREN:**
- Societal stigma
- Antagonism with biological children who already existed in the families they are entering
Common grounds: Searching normality

**YOUNG REFUGEES:**
- trying to establish foundations in a stable environment in order to grow
- long for a definite home
- *develop resilience under adverse circumstances*

**FOSTER CHILDREN:**
- place effort in working with greater institutions, to normalise their experiences in the foster system (trying to build a feeling of permanent coalition with their foster parents and working hard to succeed in school)
- long for permanent adoption
- *develop resilience under adverse circumstances*
Suggestion of a peer-mentorship program
Private European Universities

- Young Refugees
  - Activation in community
    - Scholarship application/University Studies
- European Foster Children
  - Inspiration/Motivation
    - Higher grades

3-month lectures in University


