

Dragana Knezić, psychologist
Rehabilitation Centre for Stress and Trauma, Zagreb

IFLA Library Services to People with Special Needs
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RCT: who we are?

- Non-profit organization
- Established in 1993
- Started working with civilian war victims, torture survivors
- Currently: groups in risk of social exclusions
- Partner in „Book for roof” project in 2011/2012

Definition of homelessness

- Homelessness: lack safe, stable, and appropriate place to live
- Croatian Social Welfare Law (2012) – homeless person is one that has no residence or assets which could satisfy the need for housing and is temporarily placed in a shelter or resides in public or other places not intended for habitation
- Excluded migrants, insecurely housed (low-income tenants, facing eviction, youth in alternative care, persons residing in institutions, persons temporarily living with friends and relatives)

Psychosocial Factors Associated With Homelessness

- Heterogeneous group
- Extreme poverty
- Lack of stable social support network
- Substance abuse
- Mental health problems
- Experience of foster care and institutionalization

Why services offered by Libraries are important

- Avoids stigmatization
- Accessibility
- Untraditional and informal source of support
- Foster social inclusion
- Access to information and structure
- Offer respite

What are the challenges to non-professional support?

- Establishing trustful relationships
- Maintaining healthy boundaries
- Dealing with resignation, passivity and inertia
- Dealing with impulsiveness, anger and impatience
- Mental health problems and substance abuse
- Structure and discipline

Guidelines for providing psycho-social support to homeless by non-professionals

- Program accepted and supported within your institution
- Introduce yourself with the program – basic orientation to support staff
- Provide basic training and support
- Individual approach – avoid generalization
- Be informed on available legal, health, housing and other services – create database
- Set priorities – health and safety first
- Provide short and simple information on what to be expected at start

Guidelines for providing psycho-social support to homeless by non-professionals (2)

- **Practice active listening:** „put in a brackets” your own assumptions, personal experiences, viewpoints
- Be focused on what service user is saying AND how he feels while saying it
- Help yourself (and service user) understand
- Be empathetic but guard yourself (provide/seek support)
- Maintain positive attitude and hopefulness (do not lie)
- Refrain from double standards inconsistencies

Emotional responsibility

- Define and communicate responsibilities
- Be clear on responsibilities with service users and yourself
- Encourage service users to act independently
- Practice not to take responsibility for service users feelings:
they are his/her responsibility

Maintaining healthy boundaries

- Explain your role as service provider and the limits of your availability – be consistent
- Be cautious in self disclosure – do not make it about yourself
- Avoid duple roles
- Avoid lending or borrowing money, receiving or giving valuable gifts
- Avoid carrying out duties and tasks instead service users
- Refrain from discussing with service users other staff, volunteers or other users
- Allow yourself to feel uncomfortable, angry or anxiuous about service users – its nothing to be shame about

Learn and respect your limits!
Your burnt-out does not help anyone

Dragana Knezić
dragana@rctzg.hr