



VRJWILLIGERS
ACADEMIE Amsterdam

Masterclass

New doors of perception in care for each other Between we and I

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Objective: Exploring different ways in offering care to each other, how this could result in better care and the role each one could play in this. This specific masterclass focuses on what would happen if we would have a more 'we'-focussed society and what this would mean in related to people with a refugee background.

Sharing from experience: 'home is where I can disappear'

Babah and Renate talk about his experience when he arrived as a refugee from Sierra Leone in The Netherlands. It was the first time he realised he could no longer disappear in a group of people, but would be noticed directly because he stood out in the crowd. He realised that for him 'home is where I can disappear', not necessarily that you stay unnoticed (In his village in Sierra Leone there is much less privacy), but you are part of a bigger community, you disappear in the group. A network of relations creates the community. Something does not belong to a person, but belongs to the community. Ideas don't belong to one person and decisions about life are not individual. He relates this to a decision making process about illness in which the larger family plays a far more important role than in the Netherlands.

Between we and I

In The Netherlands the role of families is in a large part taken over by institutions. You call 112, the insurance company etc. He felt like a dossier. In Sierra Leone his last name is his CV, it shows the family he belongs to. Here it's his 'burger service number' and his customer number with different institutions. It is also related to developing sensitivity about which question to ask and in which way. Many of the refugees that arrived felt like the questioning was more like an interrogation as the sharing about each other's background was not mutual.

Being more than a number

In his trainings to people with a refugee background he teaches them not to be a 'refugee'. People are persons with areas of expertise, dreams and stories. If one starts sharing from that perspective it's easier to connect. People like talking with people about what they know.

Participatiesamenleving

Babah is critical about the 'participatiesamenleving' (participation society) as if it would be a real 'participatiesamenleving' it would be bottom-up, but it is initiated by the government in order to realise savings. For a participatiesamenleving it's necessary to loose control and move towards trust, but this is not in the government's interest.

Migrants and volunteer work

For people with a migrant or refugee background 'voluteerwork' has a different meaning. For people in your community you take care, this is not seen as voluteer work. Volunteerwork is more associated with humanitarian work like het Rode Kruis or Medicins sans Frontiers.

Also the reasons for doing it differ. Many people are waiting endlessly in an AZC and would do it to kill time, but also because in the end 'we all want to feel relevant'. Most of all we should first find out in which ways people themselves would like to contribute and which methods they would like to use. This will also contribute to more equal relationships.

Discussion with the group on using the thought of 'thinking in we' for better care

The conversation is followed by a discussion with the group in which people from all different background as ages participate, some of them have arrived in The Netherlands as a refugee.

Everybody shares ideas:

- Instead of looking at 'client' as separate entity, look at social systems and create more healthy social systems
- Find out why people do things and in which way they want to do it (not thinking for them). Support people in doing better what they do already
- Find ways to connect different initiatives and people with each other. Could the Vrijwilligersacademie play a role in this?
- Get out of victimisation and enable people to give back to society
- Instead of assigning a problem to an individual, consider it as a problem of the society
- Don't confuse 'responsibility', with "it's your own fault"
- Rules are often stumbling blocks; create informal networks and circles of trust.