



### **Barbara Wizansky report – 30.7.2006**

Hi,

I have just returned from Friday and Saturday in the north where Bonnie Simon and I operated as one of 4 teams of 2 –all except one of us EMDR trained. Now that I'm home the deserted streets, the closed shops and restaurants of Naharyia, the empty road by the settlements along the borders, the constant booms of our artillery and the katyushas – all seem like another world, but, of course, they're not.

The organization by Shefi was good. Yael Shachar, ed. psychologist, EMDR trained, was amazing. She kept wonderful contact with us all the way, made sure that we had clear assignments and even guided Bonnie and me on Friday morning, when we were still fresh, through the border road that led to our first assignment. She also worked constantly herself, from shelter to shelter.

Our actual work was varied and we learned as we went along. Each of us, during the weekend, did a little group work, supportive and normalizing work, and a lot of resource connection – in spite of a kind of crazy beginning.

We began at a place (names omitted) where we were told by Yael that groups of children were waiting for us in a shelter. Here our main need was for more pre work organization. There were about 20 kids ranging in ages from 3 to 16 with a good sprinkling of 9-11 year old boys. When we came in the woman in charge had them sitting on chairs waiting to be amused (they had been to Superland, the water park, a couple of other amusement parks) and I made my first mistake by trying to start some talk going about what they'd been doing etc. Instead of doing some organizational work of dividing the group in some way. The three and four year olds started running around and jumping on mattresses while their sisters tried to get them to sit. The boys got rowdy. The big girls drifted off. When I gave out paper to draw with, the boys made airplanes and started throwing them at each other. We could see that there were kids there who were scared and anxious but in the group, they became unreachable. Bonnie was able to take one little girl aside who was obviously withdrawn, and make a direct connection with her. She brought two of her friends and a little 3 year old also attached himself and she was able to talk

with them and get them to draw some (I'll let her tell you about that experience).

I decided (or the situation decided for me) that I could only save my connection with the kids by physical play so I joined in the tug of war that developed and was able to do some "resource connection" by getting each kid to yell out the strongest thing he could think of before the pulling started. We got "tanks" "guns" "cranes" "Katyushas". We talked about "releasing the strength of those things" as they felt the pull of their muscles.

No EMDR there, but a pretty good game for a while. We talked to the person in charge before we left and set up the organization for the next team that will hopefully go there. We learned that, in a situation like this one - many children and only one adult - the person in charge must identify children in need of treatment, and must organize for us smaller homogenous groups who want to take part in a corner of the room, while she keeps the others busy.

In our other experiences, we felt more effective. In the second moshav 2 katyushas had fallen within the last few days and there had been a warning of a terrorist penetrating the border near the moshav the night before.

We had several referrals here; Among them, A year and a half baby who couldn't sleep and had become aggressive and unquiet during the day because of the "booms", a child who refused to leave his mother even for an instant and wouldn't go down to the shelter, a young woman who's couldn't stop thinking about that night when she sat worrying about her father still working alone in the fields. Bonnie and I split up, so that we could deal with all of them. Bonnie did some group work in the shelter while I worked in a home. We talked about the fact that it would have been good to have stayed for a few days at this place, getting to know and following up the people with whom we'd worked and being available for others.

We drove back to Naharyia in the late afternoon -empty, silent streets, a few soldiers here and there. The hotel where we slept was empty except for the foreign newspapermen who sat in the lounge with their laptops and their eyes glued to CNN. I asked one cameraman from the New York Times if he would be interested in talking to Israelis in the shelters about their experiences or to people at the "Moked" to get the Israeli point of view.

He looked uncomfortable, mumbled something about having to ask his editor, agreed to take my cell phone number but never made contact.

In the shelters the next morning I heard about the katyusha that had come so close, about the neighbor who had been killed and about the sound of rockets,

always in their ears. In one crowded shelter Bonnie worked with a family in one corner room; I in another, with a small group of neighbors and a very frightened 11 year old. Therefore, it went. A very small piece of the picture. It's getting late and I'm ready for bed, so I'll leave a better summing up of the group work and some of our conclusions until later. I can only say that I'm glad to have done this and hope to do more. It was very good to have shared this experience with Bonnie.

Barbara

### **Report of Bonnie Simone**

Dear All,

I thought I would share on a personal level. The two days in Nahariya and the other places along the border with my wonderful creative team mate Barbara left me reflecting about the experience of a volunteer in this situation.

As I reflected on what made it possible for us to handle this, I realized that I put my "personal" self on the side or "on Hold" and took my "professional" self to the north. It was this "professional" self that drove in areas next to the army as they were sending off explosives into Lebanon and to walk in areas that looked like deserted ghost towns. This "professional" self allowed us to drive around Nahariya and sleep in a regular hotel room when the whole city was sleeping in secure rooms or shelters. This also enabled us to do the work as we know how to do, and improvising as needed without allowing the stories we heard and the anxiety we saw around us seep into our personal self and take away from our ability to work...

When I got back, home and I took back, or reconnected to, my personal self, suddenly the pictures of the people we worked with and the powerful feelings of the experience emerged in full color. It seemed so bizarre being back at work today in TA like nothing ever happened...my TA clients had no idea where I spent the last 2 days (nor did I share this) and it was like being in a time warp...and after only two days, I found myself sensitive to the noise around me thinking I was hearing 'Boom Booms' like in the north until I reminded myself I am in Tel-Aviv and it is only the upstairs apartment.

In my talks with the local professional staff in Nahriya I understood that the stress they are under has encroached on their ability to keep their professional and personal selves separate...when they aren't working, they are home in the

shelters or secure rooms worried with their families... and when they are at work they are, of course, worried about leaving their families.  
For these reasons we volunteers (who don't live in the North) have the luxury to compartmentalize. Our families and our ongoing life are out of the danger zone so we can be focused and effective.

What I did learn for myself, and I strongly recommend it to all the volunteers, is that it is so important to take a time out in the middle of the day to rest and eat healthily, so that one can continue working effectively and not get pulled onto the trauma cycle...as we know first rules of dealing with trauma, also goes for us the helpers...rest and nourishment...

It was quit an experience...by the end of only two days a part of me felt I needed/wanted my own home and my own family around me and yet part of me felt so pulled in I couldn't imagine leaving there.....this also gave me an understanding of the residents, of the pull not to leave the 'cave' (read this *as* pull not to leave their shelters or their homes in these areas) even if the opportunities exist.

What is clear to me is that there is a need for our work now for those still up in the North, and for those who left their homes and are here in the Merz... but I believe there will be even more work for all of us to do in the North once this is over.....  
Regards to all...it is an honor to be part of this work...