



RED PENCIL - EUROPE, Spain

Focus 2022

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Art Therapy Intervention for Asylum Seekers and Hospitalized Children

Art Therapy Intervention for Asylum Seekers in Málaga – Phase I-II (2020-2022)



**The
Red
Pencil
Humanitarian
Mission**

For many years now, Spain is the destination of a constant flow of migrant, refugee, and asylum seekers arrivals, mostly Single Men, coming from Africa (especially from Morocco and Algeria) and Latin America. In 2017 there was a significant increase in number of arrivals, confirmed in the following years and mostly in 2018 when the Western Mediterranean route (Strait of Gibraltar) has become the main Maritime route taken to reach Europe, with 184'567 arrivals between 2006 and 2021, according to the latest data from the Ministerio del Interior (December 2022).

Since February 24th, 2022, this unceasing flow of people on the move trying to reach Europe, and with it a future of freedom, emancipation, and dignity, overlapped with the rapid and unprecedented arrival, by land, of refugees, mostly women (64%) and children under the age of 18 (33%), fleeing the war in Ukraine. According to the latest statistics from the Ministerio de inclusión, seguridad social y migraciones (December 2022), there have been a total of 11'390 arrivals in the city of Málaga (CC.AA de Andalucía) and 86'625 throughout the country. To cope with the fast and significant arrival of Ukrainian refugees, the reception system has been strengthened nationwide with the opening of new C.A.R. (Centros de Acogida a Refugiados), 60% of which are managed by The Spanish Red Cross, Málaga becoming the fourth city by number of new arrivals, after Alicante, Barcelona, and Madrid.

Deeply impacted, on a psychological, emotional, and psychosocial level, by their different migration journeys and trauma/ violence suffered along the way, people on the move, and especially minors and UMA, experience what is defined in clinical terms as a "Migratory Grief". Grieving is a psychological phenomenon caused from the loss, both physical, like losing a loved one, and symbolic, such as the loss of one's country of origin, economic and social status, social relationships, and oneself, which forces adaptation to a new space-time reality and entails redefining one's identity. Continuously confronted with stressful situations, people on the move develop, in most cases, what is defined as the Ulysses Syndrome (Immigrant Syndrome of Chronic and Multiple Stress), which manifests itself through a range of symptoms such as depression, anxiety, dissociative and somatoform disorders, and, at the same time, need to work on their own emotions and develop coping strategies to adapt to the new reality, made up of losses, and create, from scratch, a new relational and social network. In such circumstances, art therapy, in line with the findings of the existing scientific literature in this regard, has proven to be a complementary practice to other strategies for psychosocial care since, in its metalanguage function, allows people with a migration background, and in primis minors, to start a rehabilitative post-traumatic process of empowerment and resilience.

"Aesthetic pleasure can be experienced like a protective cloak, shielding oneself from the aversive environmental conditions, bringing back a feeling of wholeness. Active creation of such aesthetic pleasure can be the means of experiencing resources, self-efficacy, and resilience", (Dieterich-Hartwel, R., & Koch, S.C. (2017). Creative Arts Therapies as Temporary Home for Refugees: Insights from Literature and Practice. Behavioral Sciences).

In order to respond to the needs for emotional support of the different population groups in transit and/or on the move, The Red Pencil (Europe) develops since 2020 in Málaga (Spain), in collaboration with The Spanish Red Cross, an integrated art therapy program aimed, on the one hand, at offering people with a migration background therapeutic support and participatory care to enhance their protection, strengthen their sense of belonging and give them a sense of future; and, on the other hand, to train local caregivers, who daily works in migration contexts, on the art therapy practice as an innovative tool for self-care and stress management/modulation.

"When individuals create art, memories are released. The physical act of the art process, which includes hand and body motions, further offers moments of regained power and aesthetic experience. As individuals depict their old houses,

homes, loved ones, aspects of themselves, and their stories through visual media, their identities can be strengthened and they can experience a sense of momentary home, stability, and remembrance”, (Dieterich-Hartwel & Koch, 2017).

Phase I (2020-2021)

During Phase I of the project (2020-2021), implemented in three C.A.R. and Independent Living Houses managed in Málaga by The Spanish Red Cross, art therapy was fundamental to mainly allow minors and youths on the move to process and express their emotions in a non-verbal way, beyond language barriers and social coding standards. The adoption of non-verbal expressive tools allowed young beneficiaries to express negative/traumatic emotions and feelings through the elaboration of symbols and individual metaphors, which captured and gave shape to the collective migration-related trauma.

The impact evaluation, carried out at the end of 120 art therapy sessions (12 cycles of 10 sessions), conducted in the dual mode Closed Format and Open Studio and reaching 83 beneficiaries (5-25+ ages), confirmed how art therapy allowed participants to reduce their anxiety, create empathy within the group, develop coping mechanisms, and regain their own voice and identity.

“I feel as though there is a before and after, it’s like a change... It has helped me to stop being so shy and let the energy inside me flow through the drawing. It has helped me to get over my fears, for example my shyness and other things”, Art Therapy Participant

During the same period, with the purpose of transferring the art therapy skills to the caregivers who intervene on the field as a tool for Self-Care as well as ensuring the replicability and self-sustainability of the program in the medium-long term, The Red Pencil launched the training Train-The-Trainer (TTT) organizing 8 sessions reaching 19 caregivers from The Spanish Red Cross.

Implemented in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which, according to a recent study led by the World Health Organization, due to the restrictive sanitary measures put in place to contain and stop the spread of the virus, has deteriorated, in 50% of cases, the mental wellbeing of people with a migration background located inside the reception centers, exacerbating the existing high levels of depression, anxiety, distress and loneliness, Phase I of the program ended up with an exploratory study, made in collaboration with The Spanish Red Cross, “Art Therapy Intervention addressing migratory grief and resilience for teenage asylum seekers in the context of COVID sanitary crisis”. Stressing how during the many lockdowns the lack of spaces for social interaction and exchange inside the reception centers has intensified the feeling of loneliness and social isolation, the study point outs that art therapy interventions have been crucial for youths as a practice for psychosocial support and care who, in the aesthetic and creative experience of art, have found protection and regained a sense of normality.

“Good. I’ve felt like I could express everything freely. Express everything like that, without hiding”; “The difference is that in normal art class I can’t express my feelings like that, so directly. Here I can do it however I want...it’s like nothing comes out of these walls, like what is said here stays here”, Art Therapy Participants

Phase II (2021-2022)

During Phase II of the project (2021-2022), The Red Pencil since February 2022 and in order to respond in a timely and targeted manner to the two-fold migration emergency in Spain, adapted its interventions by adopting an inclusive therapeutic approach articulated by the combination of:

- (i) “Standard” art therapy sessions intended for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, mostly Single Men (18-24 ages) mainly coming from Africa and designed to improve their Life Skills and foster the development of Self-Care Skills;
- (ii) “Psychological First-Aid” (PFA) art therapy sessions intended for Ukrainian refugees (women and children) focused on the mitigation of emotional distress and designed to stabilize their emotions and develop coping mechanisms.

The results obtained in terms of qualitative impact along Phase II, during which 12 cycles of art therapy have been organized reaching 126 beneficiaries (5-25+ ages), of whom 65 Ukrainian refugees, confirmed the validity and relevance of using art therapy, for its healing power, as a method of intervention facilitating stress regulation and emotional stabilization, as well as allowing beneficiaries to acquire coping strategies to mitigate PTSD symptoms, start a new life path, rebuild a new identity based on the acceptance of loss and the rationalization of fear.

“I would definitely say both the overall and specific objectives were met. This is confirmed by participants’ feedback at interview where they expressed that the sessions had given them a space to reflect, to dream and hope and think about the things they wanted to do. Participants expressed that they learned to use their imagination, to cooperate and work as a team. They also felt the physical space was inviting to make art, to imagine, build and try new things. They said Art Therapy gave them courage and confidence and they learned something new every week”, (Liliana Montoya de la Cruz, Art Therapist)

During the same period, the Arts-Based Capacity Building & Training (ACBT) has been launched, reaching 5 caregivers of The Spanish Red Cross working in the reception centers. The aim of the training was to provide the Staff of the partner organization with emotional self-regulation strategies, a space for meeting, dialogue, and exchanges on some project specificities and/or individual cases, and to stimulate the development of collective coping strategies. The impact evaluation carried out, among the participants, at the end of the training brought out the following results (i) a general improvement of their emotional well-being (reduction of anxiety, stress, depression); (ii) a development of their expressive skills (emotions, thoughts, feelings); (iii) the strengthening of their relational skills and competences (listening, assertiveness, interaction with the group).

Art Therapy Intervention to hospitalized children affected by cancer and other long-term illnesses in Lebanon and Egypt (2022)

The collaboration with The Red Pencil initiated in 2020 at the Reception Centers in Málaga managed by The Spanish Red Cross confirmed the value of art therapy as a non-verbal practice, complementary to other types of psychosocial support and care, in different contexts of extreme vulnerability and social exclusion, such as the migration ones. Based on the excellent results obtained in terms of qualitative impact on minors and young people on the move and on Red Cross caregivers, in 2022 Alta Mane decided to extend and diversify its support to Red Pencil (RPE) initiating a new support in favor of an art therapy project, in Lebanon and Egypt, intended for children affected by cancer, caregivers, doctors and nurses. The aim of this double mission was to strengthen (Phase II), in Lebanon, the art therapy program, successfully launched in 2020-2021 in 6 pediatric oncology hospitals in Beirut and Byblos to ensure the sustainability and durability of art-therapy activities at local and community level; as well as to pilot in Egypt (Phase I) the same program to introduce the practice of art therapy in contexts of healthcare distress and in favor of children affected by cancer, hospitalized at The Borg Al Arab University Hospital (BAUH), and/or during their disease remission phase.

Phase II (Lebanon)

Over the past centuries considered one of the most prosperous countries in the Mediterranean, Lebanon has been experiencing, since 1970, a slow and inexorable economic and social decline worsened by the civil war (1975-1990) and the permanent military and terrorist attacks. In 2020, the economic hardship and political turmoil rapidly deteriorated with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, whose several lockdowns and the enormous pressure on hospitals (lack of beds, healthcare personnel and intensive care places) made the situation even more dramatic. In this context, sick children suffering from cancer and long-term illnesses have been the most dramatically affected: already challenged by the sufferings associated with the disease, the distance from their parents and friends, as well as the school interruptions, COVID-19 dramatically exposed them to a state of constant anxiety due to their state of immunodepression. In order to mitigate the psycho-emotional vulnerability and healthcare hardship of children affected by cancer, aggravated by the Beirut port blast (4.08.2020) which deeply impacted their psychophysical wellbeing (panic attacks/anxiety), Red Pencil, upon the request of the local organization MySchoolPulse, launched in November 2020 the Pilot Phase of the art therapy project in 4 main hospitals in Beirut (St. Georges Hospital, Geitaoui Hospital, Makassed Hospital and Hôtel Dieu de France Hospital). During the Pilot Phase, RPE: (i) organized an Online ToT (Training of Trainers) in Self-Care, Visual Journaling & Mental Health Awareness intended for 11 MySchoolPulse caregivers; (ii) organized several online art therapy sessions reaching 45 young patients affected by cancer, 13 parents and 28 siblings.

“Often, good things come out of adversity, and partnering with The Red Pencil is a perfect example of it. The stress from the situation in Lebanon, added to the Covid-related pandemic, and the Beirut port explosion would have been too much for anyone. Through our sessions, I discovered that self-care is essential and that feeling guilty is normal. I am trying to apply the idiom: “You cannot pour from an empty cup”. I am eternally grateful for the support and care I found within this amazing group of women”, Rana, MySchoolPulse Team

During Phase II (January-December 2022), 4 certified art-therapists operated inside 6 hospitals of Beirut and Byblos, equipped with a pediatric and an oncology department, and conducted 615 individual and group online art therapy sessions (for a total of 534h) which reached 57 young patients affected by cancer, as well as, through a systemic approach, 20 siblings, and 7 mothers. During the same period, 13 Online Refresher Sessions were organized reaching 9 MySchoolPulse caregivers.

The cross-evaluation, carried out at the end of Phase II to measure the impact of the program on the different beneficiaries, highlighted, on the one hand, the social and emotional benefits of art therapy for children affected by cancer, pointing out that art therapy sessions provided them a non-threatening and safe space where express emotions, feelings, and experience joy and a sense of accomplishment. On the other hand, underlined that the Refresher Sessions enabled

MySchoolPulse caregivers to strengthen their Life-Skills, improve their mental and physical wellbeing, and enhance synergies between the team members, the young patients, and their parents.

“My motivation for the educational work has risen, just as the complicity between myself and the kids. Relationships have evolved toward more trust. The Red Pencil programme helped to strengthen and enrich relations between MySchoolPulse and the kids and their families”, MySchoolPulse Team.

Phase I (Egypt)

Deeply impacted by the COVID-19 crisis that, de facto, has slowed down the implementation of new political measures and structural and macroeconomic reforms which, before the pandemic, initiated a process of economic stabilization, Egypt is facing by decades several challenges in terms of economic growth, civil rights, welfare, and medical care. With respect to the healthcare system, few facilities have the resources and funds to offer adequate care to children affected by cancer (according to the latest statistics, there are about 8'000 new cases of paediatric cancer every year), and especially to those children belonging to the lowest social classes, members of single-income and/or low-income families. In order to reach out and offer, free and indiscriminate medical care to all children affected by cancer, since 2019 The Alexandria Pediatric Oncology Hospital (APOC) - a local NGO recognized by the Ministry of Social Solidarity of the Egyptian government in 2012 (N.2934) - collaborates with The Borg Al Arab University Hospital (BAUH), an avant-garde Pediatric Oncology Center, under the supervision of the professors and members of the Faculty of Medicine of Alexandria University Hospitals. With a capacity of 80 patient beds, since 2018, the BAUH has received about 4'900 children with cancer from the Governorate of Alexandria, Al Behira, Kafr al-Sheikh, and the Matrouh provinces, offering them free of charge care during their hospitalization (from the oncological diagnosis, the surgical phase, the radiotherapeutic to chemotherapy phase). Within this framework, the introduction of art therapy, through the training of the medical and nursing staff, aimed to guarantee all children affected by cancer a holistic and integrated assistance, based on the medical care and the stimulation of the emotional intelligence through the artistic expression.

During the Pilot Phase (March-December 2022), 10 sessions of the Arts-Based Capacity Building and Training program have been organized to sensitize the medical and nursing staff to the practice of art therapy, as well as to train 18 caregivers (physicians and nurses) from The Borg Al Arab University Hospital to use art therapy as a tool for Self-Care and stress modulation in their everyday professional lives. In parallel, 6 follow-up training sessions have been organized to empower the 18 caregivers to use the art therapy practice with 32 of their young patients affected by cancer. The impact evaluation carried out, among the participants, at the end of the training disclosed the following results: (i) improvement of the empathic relationship with the young patients and their parents; (ii) stress reduction, improvement of self-esteem and expulsion/elimination of negative energies; (iii) development of Self-Care.

“I experienced positive changes after applying the tools and guidelines shared with us during art-therapy sessions. It made an impact on me”. “The sessions were very cool. They also helped release a lot of negative energy and pressure”. “It gave us hope and peace”, Borg Al Arab University Hospital caregivers.





THE PROGRAM IN FIGURES (2020-2022):

- 209 migrants, Asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees participated to art therapy sessions;
- 89 young patients affected by cancer, 20 siblings, 7 mothers participated to art therapy sessions;
- 33 caregivers and 18 doctors and nurses have been trained on the art therapy practice;
- 831 art therapy sessions;
- 4 trainings and 6 follow-up sessions on the practice of art therapy;
- 1 exploratory study "Art Therapy Intervention addressing migratory grief and resilience for teenage asylum seekers in the context of COVID sanitary crisis";
- 3 C.A.R have been involved in the implementation of the Art Therapy Program;
- 7 Hospitals have been involved in the implementation of the Art Therapy Program.

OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION:

Successfully implemented since 2020, the Art Therapy Program in migration contexts in Málaga (Spain) and health distress in Lebanon and Egypt has contributed to:

- **promote the professionalization of the practice of art therapy as a complementary practice to the psychosocial, medical, and therapeutic care;**
- **systemise clinical-therapeutic models to be spread and replicated in other contexts of migration emergencies and health distress;**
- **give people on the move the opportunity to bring out the traumas suffered and their feelings in a positive way, allowing them to start a post-traumatic resilience process;**
- **improve the emotional wellbeing of young children affected by cancer, reduce their anxiety, and strengthen their coping mechanisms;**
- **offer caregivers a new and innovative tool to modulate/reduce stress and strengthen Self-Care;**
- **transfer the skills of art therapy practice to local caregivers, doctors, and nurses, thus ensuring the self-sustainability and replicability of the program in the medium-long term;**
- **disseminate and replicate the Best Practices of art therapy through the elaboration of Case Studies and Clinical Reports.**