

Risking on Purpose in Tanzania

“Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” Etched upon the memorial of the conservationist Professor Bernhard Grzimek 1909-1987 above Ngorongoro Crater.

In January 2013 I had the opportunity to travel to Arusha in northern Tanzania to deliver some PBs workshops to 3 organisations. This came about through a chance meeting on the island of Zanzibar, followed by a conversation over a cup of coffee with a consultant called Kate in May 2012!

Kate works as a consultant for The Caucus for Children’s Rights (CCR) – a local Tanzanian charity based in Arusha. From our conversation over coffee she felt PBs would be a suitable model to support CCR’s Child Protection work, and in particular improving the experience of children that come into contact with Child Protection Services in Arusha and supporting frontline practitioners working with these children. She also put me in touch with two international schools in Arusha – ISM and Braeburn – who were interested in PBs to help them develop strategies and a more cohesive approach to child protection.

As I started to learn about CCR I discovered another happy coincidence. CCR’s ethos is to support people to understand their world differently using “strengths-based” approaches. Examples of this include tapping into people’s feelings and emotions as powerful catalysts for change; building the individual’s self knowledge and self-belief as a precursor to enabling them to make demands on others and on government; supporting people to see that the expertise and the change starts with them. My approach to training compliments this ethos in that I am also an accredited Body Psychotherapist and have an interest in the neuroscience of our Feeling and Thinking and how this impacts our learning as well as being a Protective Behaviours trainer.

Recent neuroscience research shows that we learn by making new brain connections and we make new brain connections by repetition (real or imagined). In order for the new “neural pathways” created in my workshops to be reinforced as much as possible on an ongoing basis I was keen to find a way to ensure I delivered more than just a “one-off” input. This would increase the chances of participants adapting their Feeling, Thinking and Behaviour in sustainable ways which was one of the aims for all three organisations. CCR was also keen for me to include links between the body and emotions (particularly in relation to stress and trauma) given the high levels of abuse throughout Tanzanian society.

After several discussions by skype and email it was agreed that I would deliver my initial input to all three organisations in January, then return in April to run follow-up workshops to ensure participants were internalising the process in a PBs consistent way. I also offered email follow-up to all three organisations both after my delivery in January and beyond April as another means of building in as much “repetition” as possible for participants.

Child Protection – A Global Perspective & The Challenge for Tanzania

Child abuse is a global problem the scale of which can be hard to grasp. Research consistently shows that the majority of abusers in different cultures

are known to their victim. Abuse by strangers is a small minority of the total.

The most significant effort to respond to this global problem has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted by the General Assembly of the UN on 20/11/1989. It is a commitment by the signatories to develop policies that protect the human rights of children. 192 countries have signed. Only Somalia and the USA have not. The UNCRC offers a framework of simple ideals and consistent standards for signatories to strive for. However, in spite of the UNCRC there are some fundamental challenges in tackling this global epidemic of child abuse:

Firstly, there is no global agreement on the definition of child abuse. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention drafted the following definition in 1999:

“Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of trust or power.”

Even within this definition, cultural differences throw up further challenges in relation to beliefs about what is acceptable behaviour towards children. E.g. Physical abuse or reasonable parental chastisement? Emotional abuse or a young parent unaware of the consequences of manipulative behaviour? Neglect and negligent treatment or a poor, single mother doing her best? Exploitation or a rural community dependent on taking its children out of school to bring in the harvest?

Secondly, the age of majority (when a child becomes an adult) ranges from 15 to 21 around the globe. Many of the countries within and without the UN have adopted an age of majority of 18 and an age of sexual consent as 16 for heterosexuals. There are cultural exceptions. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, sexual relations are illegal outside marriage at any age. The legality and age of consent for homosexual relations varies widely.

Thirdly, such inconsistency even amongst the signatories of the UNCRC is compounded by even greater disparities in the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) which ranges from 6-12 in the USA (depending on which state your child is arrested in), 10 years in England and Wales and 18 in the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Clearly, in the UK the ideals and standards laid down by UNCRC are well embedded in the policies and procedures that underpin our Criminal Justice System, Social, Health and Education Services. However, even in the UK it has taken more than 30 years to change public attitudes to victims of abuse, whether children or adults complaining of abuse as children. That has been primarily driven by legislation, enforced with increasing consistency in an effective, and relatively speaking, trustworthy Criminal Justice System. However, the silence of victims for years, and decades in the recent exposure of Jimmy Saville and many other cases of historic sexual abuse, highlight that we are still a long way from really preventing and dealing with child abuse effectively.

Tanzania does not have this luxury. Whilst it is one of the most stable of African countries it is also one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the CIA World Fact Book the Gross Domestic Product per capita for Tanzania is 1,500 US dollars compared to 36,600 US dollars for the UK. Of its estimated population of 46 million, 45% are under 18. Some 30% of those under 18 are "street children". Orphanages are so over-stretched and under-resourced they turn children out on to the streets at the age of 5 years old. Almost three-quarters of both females and males reported experiencing physical violence by an elder as a child.

Even though individuals know that protecting children is important, Tanzania is still not investing in keeping children safe. Whilst the first legislation specifically aimed at dealing with children in conflict with the law - The Law of the Child Act - was introduced in 2009, many people, including judges, the police, social workers, are still unaware of it and do not know what it demands in relation to children. My partner, who is a barrister and Criminal Justice consultant, was training magistrates on this legislation in 2012 and he had to supply them with copies of the Act to do so!

There are no budgets nor services for child protection, no minimum standards for agencies working with children, and no clear form of redress when a child is abused. The most frequently used sanctions for children who come into contact with the law are corporal punishment, probation and supervision (whilst they have some detention centres for young people there are no "diversionary" projects or activities available yet) or custody (although this is often in adult prisons).

This is the backdrop to the PBs training I delivered in Tanzania.

My Protective Behaviours Programmes

1. Programme delivered to The Caucus for Children's Rights (CCR)

CCR is a strong and proactive group of institutions and individuals who are passionate about the rights and welfare of children whose vision is a time when Tanzania protects the human rights of every child, and when consideration of children's best interest informs policies, practices and decisions.

CCR recognises how abuse impedes the development of the child, and consequently Tanzania's development. Abuse can lead to a host of physical and mental disabilities that extend far into adulthood. The country faces a ticking time bomb from disenfranchised, unskilled young people who have experienced various forms of interpersonal and structural violence. These impact on the human capital of the country and Tanzania's chances of achieving its aspirations for development. CCR wants Tanzanians and government to recognize that the personal is political, that every choice we make about children has implications for the nation.

CCR works with five groups of people that they call their "Boundary Partners". These are specific, targeted groups that will have significant impact on achieving legal protection for children and encouraging a real financial investment in child safety. These groups are:

1. Tanzania's adults
2. Child care professionals

3. Legal professionals
4. Social service staff
5. Locally elected government officials

CCR has been collaborating with all these partners to advance the shared goal of developing a system in Arusha that protects children who are victims of abuse, neglect and/or violence. Alongside this they are working creatively by harnessing the power of SMS, radio, television and live impromptu conversations on public transport, to raise public awareness of child abuse locally.

It is through these means they hope to shift the cultural perspective from one of apparent passivity toward proactive reporting and prevention of abuse. By informing individuals and arousing their compassion such that they feel empowered to act, CCR aims to build sufficient momentum in public opinion that will hopefully reach a tipping point beyond which the local government will be obliged to engage.

My assignment for CCR was to improve the child's experience when they come into contact with the child protection system in Arusha by working with the individual frontline workers who serve those children. However, given the staggering rates of abuse in Tanzania it is likely that many of these professionals have themselves been victims of abuse. Consequently, CCR was concerned to support them as practitioners to understand their own emotions, thinking and behaviour and to understand the impact of their own childhoods on their lives. I would be training staff from CCR as well as staff from some of their Partner Agencies.

This was my first experience of delivering training in another country so language was obviously a key issue culturally as well as practically. The meaning of words is derived from the cultural context in which they are used; how we talk about the relationship between how we feel, what we think and what we do. So I was aware that to deliver a course successfully in another language depends in large measure on having access to someone who has a fluent grasp of both cultures, and who can provide the appropriate interpretation of the language. Some of the specific cultural questions I had included:

- **Visualisation** – how familiar and comfortable would they be with this?
- **How Emotionally Literate are Tanzanians?** Would they understand the notion of self-awareness? Would they respond to it?
- **How do Tanzanians view “mental health”?** - I was told there isn't really a culture of talking about problems or personal issues in Tanzania so I wondered how Theme 2 (We can talk with someone we trust about anything) might be received.
- **Would my UK references translate?** E.g. Unwritten Rules around mealtimes? Unwritten Rules for Men, Women, Children? Feeling, Thinking, Behaviour Circles examples in relation to using two of the three only (e.g. children often Feel and Behave; Thinking left out). Early Warning Signs metaphors such as “butterflies in the tummy”? Are there any Unwritten Rules in relation to who can/not be a Network Person that I need to be sensitive to?

Fortunately for me CCR appointed a new Programmes Manager in September 2012 who had spent two years in Chicago doing a Social Work Masters Degree. So she was familiar with both Tanzanian and “western” culture, practices and

concepts and was therefore able to give me sufficient clarity to plan my programme with reasonable confidence.

There was of course also the practical question in relation to language of whether I would need to work through a translator which would have big implications for delivery time and ensuring shared meaning. Whilst English was the second language for all participants we decided that a translator would not be necessary. Instead I identified a list of words or ideas I thought may not be easily understood and checked them out with the Programmes Manager and tried as best I could to hone my explanations of ideas into the simplest, shortest and plainest English I could without losing the meaning. A useful exercise in itself for me to do as a trainer.

The result was a 3 day integrated Protective Behaviours programme in which my focus was threefold:

1. Introduce participants to the principles and tools of Protective Behaviours and how our brains work in relation to feeling, thinking and learning
2. Incorporate activities and exercises which gave participants a “felt sense” of their own experience
3. Provide opportunities for participants to reflect on their Feeling, Thinking and Behaviour in relation to their own experiences and Protective Behaviours, thereby increasing their self-awareness.

The day before I started I was told that there is a culture in Tanzania whereby staff expect to get paid extra for attending external training courses. CCR’s policy does not subscribe to this Unwritten Rule so in order to persuade the partner organisation staff to attend they were told I was an amazing trainer from the UK and an opportunity not to be missed ... so no pressure then! I was also informed at the same time that it is very common practice for participants on any training to turn up late, leave early without saying anything, talk on their mobiles, wander in and out at will, come to Day 2 or 3 but not Day 1 or 2. I was already anticipating this as my partner had experienced this happening in his training in Tanzania the previous year. And breathe deeply....!

So – how did it go? Firstly, I managed to keep all 11 bums on seats for three full days....RESULT! Secondly, participants’ feedback suggested I did manage to make a clear link for them between the PBs process and how it can support CCR’s context. Finally from observation, the practical and experiential activities seemed to really engage participants in spite of their “culture of silence”. One participant commented with feeling at the end of Day 3 “We just don’t get to know ourselves because of this Unwritten Rule of not talking about one’s personal experience.” So overall it went better than I could have imagined. I was delighted.

There were also a couple of things that took me by surprise.... Firstly, when discussing Rights and Responsibilities participants themselves identified that current Unwritten Rules in Tanzania result in children being given a lot of responsibility from a very early age yet, few – if any – of their rights are respected. I also got the impression that this then translates into little or no Choice or Control in relation to some aspects of their lives at least.

Secondly, the discussion about using the correct names for body parts got very heated; there seemed to be a powerful Unwritten Rule about using the slang terms in public rather than the correct ones. Fortunately participants were able to resolve this between themselves as I was clearly on thin ice in terms of my understanding of this aspect of their culture.

On the learning side....Although I was aware that English was participants' second language and tried to keep my English as simple as possible there were still aspects which I could improve next time. E.g. I would make some of my instructions even clearer and simpler; I would give participant's the option of filling forms in using Swahili not English (although this depends on there being someone who can translate them back for me) as it became clear that their spoken English was better than their written English. Whilst I did not attempt at this stage to translate some of the PBs language into Swahili for the training I did try to get a translation of the term Protective Behaviours. This proved interesting and I ended up with about 3 versions from different people!

Programmes delivered to Moshi and Braeburn International Schools

The programmes that I delivered to both international schools were two days and one day respectively and therefore focussed on a more typical PBs input. However, I included my 20 minute powerpoint presentation about our brains and learning at the request of both schools.

I trained 9 staff at each school from both Primary and Secondary levels and whilst participants represented various nationalities both schools teach in English so thankfully delivering in English was not a problem for them.

Both schools take day pupils and boarders and were looking to address the fact that attitudes to Safeguarding and Child Protection practice are constrained and undermined by the wider Tanzanian context described above. In addition:-

- Staff live and work in a transient population
- Children often come from families where either both parents work long hours or are separated, or both
- Parents include a healthy smattering of diplomats and foreign nationals, all with their own ideas of "law and order" (corporal punishment and abuse are commonplace)
- There is currently no reliable, trustworthy or responsive "SOS" system beyond school that staff can turn to when they suspect abuse; the local social services network - such as it is - can be easily manipulated. They can often feel like they are in a no-win situation here: If they do nothing the abuse will obviously continue but they can maintain contact with the child because to take action often results in the parents moving the child to another school but staff know the abuse will continue and they are unable to offer any support.
- Unwritten Rules in relation to teenagers and relationships and sex was a common issue too - e.g. the girls believe they have to flirt with and have sex with the boys from 14 years upwards

So the common focus at both Braeburn and Moshi was to use PBs to help them build as healthy and safe a climate in school as possible. And as with CCR, my input in January 2013 was to introduce staff to the theoretical framework of Protective Behaviours with a view to exploring putting PBs into practice and

building on their initial experience through my follow-up workshop scheduled for later in the year. Both these initial workshops were well received.

Sadly, I did not return in April as initially planned. This was mainly due to the fact that a major donor for CCR did not come through as expected which has left them in a very difficult financial position for the moment. Whilst they are clear they want to have more PBs input from me they will not be in a position to act on this until early 2014 when they hear the outcome of current funding applications. In the meantime, I continue to offer some support via email and skype to all participants. Some are responding to this which is heartening.

I had no idea how my Tanzanian adventure might turn out when I said “yes” back in May 2012. However, I certainly risked on purpose and have had an interesting, challenging and hugely enriching experience thus far. Whilst I feel disappointed that my return visit has not happened, I still hope I will get the opportunity to return next year.

In the meantime I am holding on to the fact that my training has had some impact as evidenced by this feedback from a participant at the end of a recent email to me about her progress with PBs.....“Oh, I also wanted to say that I have never been as deeply impacted by a training as I was with PB, it has actually made an impact in my life (and that of my family).”

I feel I have at least lit a candle – albeit a small one.

For further information:

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