



Due to her project, Susanne Stein was honoured by the German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier in 2018

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Better to light a candle than to complain about the darkness.

Picture Books for Refugee Children

Children who have survived war and violence often suffer from the shadow of traumatic experiences, even after they have reached a safe place. For them, Susanne Stein, educator, trainer of the Ruth Cohn Institute for Theme Centered Interaction, and personal developer, has created two booklets. Moshe Mitchell and Yara Khajat, members of the MUN-Society of the University of Haifa, are translating them into the Hebrew and Arabic languages. A conversation about an unusual gift.

It was on a sunny Sunday in October 2013. Many refugees had already fled to Europe, especially from Syria. Every evening you could see terrible pictures of bombed houses and injured people in TV. A discussion about the right to get asylum had already started. Germany, in a welcoming mood, began to organize the hosting of more and more refugees, who tried to save their lives through flights.

Susanne Stein and her husband intended to bring a parcel with toys to a nearby refugee camp and were also interested to know how the refugees lived in their neighbourhood after reaching Hamburg, Germany. In the camp they met a family from Syria: a father, a mother, a boy and a girl. They started talking to each other. Back in the car, ready to drive home, Susanne asked her husband to stop the car and go back. The loneliness of the family left such a strong and sad impression, that she wants to ask the family if they wanted her to come back the next weekend. They agreed, being astonished about such an offer.

About MUN

Model United Nations (MUN) are realistic political management games. Students simulate the conferences of the United Nations. Moshe Mitchell is actually the president of the MUN-Society of the University of Haifa, one of the biggest MUN-groups in Israel.

This was the beginning of a close and long lasting relationship with this family, their friends and neighbours. Susanne and her husband spent hours and hours drinking tea and coffee together with the families and they started to bring more toys, clothes, bikes and other items to the camp. They spend more hours reading and explaining German schedules, looking for Kindergartens, schools, flats, jobs and enjoying parties ...

Having this close contact Susanne learned more about the situation inside of the families. "So I noticed step by step, that there was a lot of love, but at the same time a lot of tension. More and more tension between parents and children. The parents told me about the problems of their children, who could not sleep at night with nightmares, screaming, and were unable to sleep alone in their beds, showing auto-aggressive behaviour. They felt helpless to address, what was really hurting them. Another example: Most of the children did not use the playground in front of the houses because of the airplanes passing by. So I understood that many children suffered from post-traumatic stress and I saw that they needed help."

A booklet against the fear

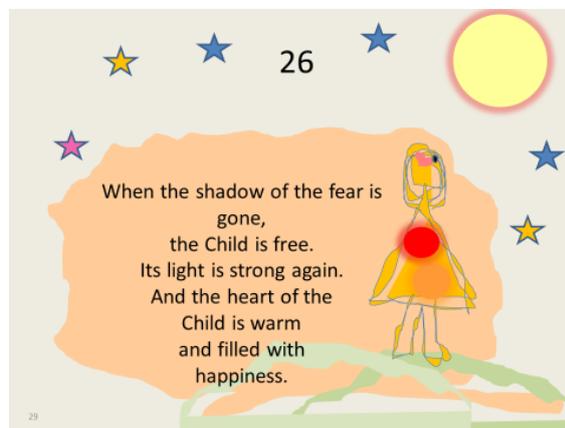
Susanne looked for help from trauma-therapists in Hamburg. They were all busy, they had no time left to visit refugee camps and she did not find free places for therapies immediately. So Susanne decided to do what she could do herself to help. Not by offering therapy, which is not her profession, but by explaining

what is going on and what can help. We call it psycho-education. It is a small but important component of trauma-help.

Susanne started to write and to paint a booklet for the families she knew personally. It is the story of a child, who experiences a war and survives a terrible situation. His parents decide to fly with him to a safe country. But the shadow of the terrible big fear is following him and makes him suffer a lot. At the end the child is successful in getting rid of the shadow with different kinds of help.

Trauma-therapists of different schools supported Susanne, while writing the book. Experts of the University Hospital of Hamburg proofread it, before Susanne published it on her website starting with three languages: German, English and Arabic.

“You can hardly imagine, how terrible the situations were, that many children experienced - and survived,” said Susanne. “We want to support their selfhealing-power. And we want to open the door to a professional therapy a little bit. Children and parents should know that there is professional help and that they can be healed.”



A cooperation for help

What started as a support for a small number of families has now become a big international project. The booklet “The Liberation of the Child from the Terrible Big Fear” is now available for free download in **13 languages**. Her second booklet, a special pictured guidebook for parents, how to help their children, is already available in **11 languages**. See www.susannestein.de

Nowadays families, teachers, therapists, paediatricians and volunteer supporters use the booklets in Europe, Syria, Turkey and the Iraq. “I am glad to say, that you find people who are willing to help, all over the world. That really makes me happy”, Susanne said.

For example Moshe. He is studying Asian and Political Science at the University of Haifa and he is the one who already translated the “Trauma Picture Sheet” for parents into the Hebrew language. Now he is working on the translation of the “Trauma Picture Book” containing about 60 pages (*published in July 2021*). Every Monday he meets Susanne via Zoom: “We are talking about God and everything else in the world”, Susanne told us. At the same time Yara Khayat translated the second booklet for parents into the Arabic language, an important counseling tool for so many refugee families in so many countries.

“My booklets cannot replace a therapy.” It is important for Susanne to underline the difference between a first little trauma aid and therapy. “The booklets cannot really stop suffering, but they can make it easier, to go on. They are able to strengthen hope and confidence. While working on this project I am following a Chinese saying: It’s better to light a candle than to (only) complain about the darkness.”

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