

WELL-BEING THROUGH PLANTS

The project of creating a therapeutic balcony for underaged asylum seekers

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis was a development-oriented thesis, a project of creating a therapeutical balcony, using plant based activities for the well-being of the participants. The aim of the project was to create a plant dominated therapeutical area, a balcony, for the underaged asylum seekers living in a supported housing unit in the center of Helsinki. Another aims of the project were to get 3 participants to be actively involved in the process and through some plant based activities, to have a positive impact on their well-being.

The aim of the written part of this thesis is to give an overview of the process of planning and implementation of the project, also the results and the conclusion. The written part is based on project planning literature, in addition academic literature about the mental health of asylum seekers and green care was used. Some of the current issues concerning the critical situation of underaged asylum seekers were brought out.

Main result of the project was the plant based balcony, which was used by all of the residents of the supported housing unit. Purpose of the balcony, to serve as a peaceful and therapeutical area for the housing unit, was reached. For the 3 participants, who were actively involved in the process, the activities and time spent with me was important and meaningful. For future reference I would recommend a longer timespan and more sessions with the participants.

In conclusion, aims of the project were reached. I strongly suggest more similar projects to be carried out. Plant based activities and nature have endless possibilities for projects and programmes with clear benefits for those involved.

Key words: underaged asylum seeker, social work, nature, plants, green care, well-being, project plan

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the number of asylum seekers in Europe had risen to its highest since the World War 2. Reason is the severe conflicts and crises taking place in countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. (Refugee Advice Centre 2016.) In 2016, the total number of asylum applications in Finland was 5651, out of which 401 were unaccompanied minors (Finnish Immigration Services 2017). In case of unaccompanied minors, after their arrival to Finland, they are situated in group homes or supported housing units.

These children coming here have suffered many losses and traumas and are in need for support and care. This thesis was striving to give an example of how nature, plants and plant based activities could be used to have positive effects on well-being and health of people with stress, anxiety or social issues.

This thesis was a project developed during my work placement in a supported housing unit for underaged asylum seekers in Helsinki, run by the Helsinki Diacness Institute. The housing unit was home for about 20-30 male asylum seekers between the ages of 15 to 17 coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia.

The idea of the project, to use plant based activities and to build the residents of the housing unit a relaxing plant dominated balcony, was developed with the workers of the housing unit as they felt that the center was missing a quiet space with the intension of relaxing and calming down in case of stress or anxiety. As it was spring time and there was a spacious balcony unused, we developed an idea to implement some of the basics of green care in organizing a balcony with greenery. With these activities, I seek to improve the participants' well-being through active or passive involvement (Wise 2017).

The main building blocks of green care activities are contact with nature, meaningful activities and social interaction. Typically, the clients of green care include the elderly, mentally and/or physically disabled and immigrants. Several studies have shown positive effects of nature and plants on human health. The calming

effects of nature can be measured by heart rhythm or blood pressure. Moreover, in social and therapeutic horticulture gardening activities are also used for developing social skills and giving the clients a feeling of success. (Green Care Finland 2017; AHTA 2012.)

The objective of the project was to create a plant based balcony, a therapeutic and peaceful environment. In addition, the goals were to involve and motivate 3 participants to actively take part in the process and through these plant related group activities, to support their psychosocial development and to improve their well-being. These 3 selected participants had shown lack of social skills in their everyday life at the housing unit or just the need for extra attention.

In the written part, with the help of literature about project management, I will describe the process of the project following the principles of project planning. I will share the workplan and meetings with the participants in more detail. In the end, I will write about the evaluation and feedback. In addition, I will reflect on the challenges and the process of the project with recommendations for the reader.

2 BACKGROUND AND NEED

In this paragraph I will shed some light to the background of the critical situation of the underaged asylum seekers and their needs. I will try to justify the need for this kind of project based on my own experiences and observations during my work placement in the supported housing unit for underaged asylum seekers.

2.1 Unaccompanied asylum seekers

By definition, an asylum seeker is a person who is in the middle of a process of seeking protection and right of residence in a foreign state (Finnish Immigration Services 2016). The reasons that have forced an individual to escape its own country and leave its home, can be horrific and unimaginable. Most vulnerable groups are children and women as they can suffer many traumatic experiences throughout their travels to a new country.

Studies about unaccompanied asylum seeker minors have shown that they are a highly vulnerable group who have greater psychiatric morbidity than the general population and higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in comparison to the norm populations and accompanied refugee minors (Huemer et al. 2009). Asylum seeker minors have often repeatedly been exposed to traumatic experiences and have suffered personal losses, like loss of home, belongings, friends, and family. They need to adapt to a new culture and society, they have limited access to resources, and their future is surrounded by great uncertainty. Furthermore, accomplishment of developmental tasks (e.g., identity formation) may be disturbed by the effects of traumatic experiences as well as lack of support and guidance. Refugee minors are therefore at a substantial risk of suffering severe distress. (Smid et al. 2011.)

A strong indication of the important support needs of underaged asylum seekers is a study made, shortly after their arrival to Western European host countries.

High prevalence of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms were reported. These high scores correspond with previous studies on the mental health of underaged asylum seekers. (Vervliet et al. 2014.) This indicates strongly to the importance of psychosocial support needed for their well-being.

In Finland, there are several treatment units and care providers for asylum seekers with post-traumatic stress disorder or other psychological and/or social issues. The first such units were the Crisis Service for Foreigners (1989) and the Centre for Torture Survivors in Finland (1993) in Helsinki, which operates nationwide (Nordic Work with Traumatized Refugees: Do We Really Care 2014, 41). There are similar units offering similar services also in other bigger cities in Finland. Treatment at these centers is generally implemented as either supportive or more intensive therapy, in combination with medication, physiotherapy and group activities (Nordic Work with Traumatized Refugees: Do We Really Care 2014, 42). There are also more holistic and alternative ways to promote the well-being of people with anxiety and soothe their stress levels like expressive art therapy and green care or horticultural therapy, which I personally am also interested in.

2.2 Need for the project

The need for this kind of project became clear during my time spent at work placement in a supported housing unit for underaged asylum seekers, where the underaged asylum seekers are referred to after their arrival to Finland. These group homes or supported housing units strive to serve a replacement for a home and give all the support the minors need, whether it be legal advice, social support or assistance in studies. In this group home, there were 20 to 30, 15 to 17-year-old asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Iran.

I noticed, how many different personalities were present in a group of teenagers living together in the center. As the unit was fully packed at most times, there

were situations where a quiet space or a silent room would have been much appreciated. Furthermore, the center has a significant role to fill in the lives of these boys- it serves as a home and should make the boys feel safe, comfortable and welcomed. In several discussions with the residents, it came up that the house would feel much more home like with the little touches like putting up plants or artworks on the walls. From these discussion, and with the initiative from the other workers, I decided to utilize the empty balcony in the unit and through this process to bring some nature to the residents' lives.

Here I want to bring out the importance of plants and greenery to human well-being as well as the need for more interaction between nature and humans. Institute for European Environmental Policy (later IEEP) has written a report reviewing more than 200 academic studies on the many benefits of having access to nature to human well-being and health (Neslen 2017). The report states the clear rise in using nature and plants for therapeutic purposes. IEEP reports, that access to nature and activities in nature improve well-being in disadvantaged groups and can contribute to improved mental health. In addition, the report says, how green areas are a crucial factor for individuals and communities, establishing a 'sense of place' and 'ownership' of the landscape or space. (Nature for Health and Equity 2017.)

Bearing in mind the positive effects of plant based activities, nature, plants and green areas, as well as the situation of the boys living in the housing unit, I find the project to have relevance and need. Moreover, the 3 participants who we had chosen to take actively part in the activities, have several gains from the time spent together and discussions.

3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As the literature on project management is emphasizing the importance of setting clear goals and objectives for the project's success and to minimize the confusion or even failure, I will define the goals and objectives of the project in this chapter (Heldman 2006; Heagney 2011; Richman 2002). It is crucial for all parties of the project to be aware of the goals and objectives.

Heldman claims that goals and objectives are very closely related and probably could be used interchangeably with-out a lot of confusion (2006). However, we can think of objectives being more specific than the goal statement and define results that must be achieved for the overall mission to be accomplished. Objective defines the desired end result. (Heagney 2011.)

In this project, the objective was to create a balcony, a therapeutic and peaceful area with plants, created and upkept by the residents. Heagney explains, how an objective statement should be SMART, which refers to the objective being specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic and time/cost limited (2011, 48). The following table will now show the SMART criteria of the balcony project:

Table 1. SMART criteria

S	Specific	The objective is to produce, with 3 of the residents, a plant based balcony for the use of residents of the housing unit. The 3 boys will take care of the plants.
M	Measurable	The objective will be measured, by determining if the plant based balcony was achieved or not.

A	Agreed upon	The objective is clear and agreed upon by all parties.
R	Realistic	The project objective, the balcony, is realistic to achieve considering the resources, skillset of the project leader and time.
T	Time/cost limited	The deadline for the opening of the balcony is 29.5.16 giving me a two-week timeframe. Budget for the plants is 300 euros.

(Richman 2002, 63)

The goals of the project were to involve and motivate 3 selected participants in taking part of the project and through these activities and sessions to support their psychosocial development. Caring for the plants should give the boys some purpose and the feeling of success. In project planning literature, it has been said, that also goals should be specific and measurable (Heldman 2006). However, considering the nature of this project, I felt that less was more and I did not take pressure to measure my goals (Wise 2015, 149). I will evaluate the process in the end of this written part with the help of the feedback received from the working life instructor and my own reflection.

4 TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS

Next, I will bring out the different stakeholders of the project and describe the target group in more detail.

By definition, a stakeholder is an individual, a group or an organization who has a stake or an interest and the potential to influence the actions and aims of the project (Brugha & Varvasovszky 2000, 239). Therefore, it is useful for the success of the project and a smooth process to be aware of the roles of all stakeholders.

The target group is the stakeholder, to whom the project is for. In my project, the target group was the 3 participants who were actively involved in the process of creating the balcony. These 3 participants were specifically selected by the working life director, based on her observations and discussions with the residents of the housing unit and other workers.

2 of the participants were 17 years old, coming from Iraq and the 3rd was a 16-year-old boy from Afghanistan. All 3 of them had notable social issues and were clearly in need for extra attention and support. One of them hadn't said a word for weeks. Often, these children who come to Finland, have been on the road for a long time. They have witnessed or experienced wars, torture or other dangerous circumstances. These traumas can manifest as obmutescence, depression, anxiety or aggressiveness. (European Migration Network 2009, 3.) The boys need care, attention and all the support they can get. Although the workers of the housing unit are doing their best in fulfilling the needs of the young asylum seekers, extra activities and support is always needed. Through plant based activities I focused on social interaction and hoped for empowering and positive moments.

Both me and the working life director agreed that only 3 participants is the best option for this kind of project because of the sensitive state of these asylum seekers. We thought that if the group were bigger, the boys would feel overwhelmed and not safe to open up.

Moreover, all the other residents living in the supported housing unit had a significant stake in the project. They got a therapeutic new balcony, filled with plants and greenery to calm down the senses and serve as a quiet space to have a positive effect on mind and body.

In addition, not only the asylum seekers but also the workers had a stake in this project. Because of the sensitive situation of the residents, the workers of the housing unit have a great responsibility to show extreme sensitivity and professionalism while offering the youth safety, care and psychosocial support as well as making the housing unit as home like as possible to support their well-being and everyday life. Therefore, the activities offered throughout the project and the relaxing plant dominated balcony played a significant role in the everyday lives of the directors as well. They gained an extra space for the use of all residents in the unit, also new insight into alternative ways of supporting the youth.

Lastly, my own stake in this project is relevant. My interest in art therapy and green care played a crucial role in managing and leading this type of a project. I gained experience not only in leading and managing a project but also working with a sensitive target group. Moreover, I deepened my knowledge in plant based activities and learned the endless possibilities to develop programs and projects in this area.

5 WORKPLAN

In the project, the objective was to organize a plant dominated area with the purpose of retreat and peace. During the process of organizing the balcony with greenery, I had sessions with the 3 selected participants, where social interaction played a key role as it enhances and develops participant's social skills (Wise 2015).

The budget for the project was 300 euros. Pots, paint and other necessities like gloves for the planting activities were donated by volunteers. Therefore the 300 euros was left for buying the plants to the balcony. Next you can find the detailed workplan, which was collected in cooperation with the working life director.

Table 2. Workplan

Date	Responsible	Tasks
19.5.16	<i>Meeting between the student and working life director</i>	<i>Planning the schedule, discussing about which boys to choose for the project and why.</i>
20.5.16	<i>Student</i>	<i>Recruiting the boys for the project. Goal- 3 specific individuals with behavioural issues and interest towards plants, who would possibly benefit from this project.</i> <i>Doing research, which plants and from where to buy. Goal- to get as many sustainable, easy to take care of suitable plants for the budget.</i>

	<i>Working life director</i>	<i>Doing the necessary documents for getting a permit to use the budget for buying the plants.</i>
24.5.16	<i>Student, the participants</i>	<i>The student will take the participants to the University of Helsinki Botanical Garden. Goals- to show the boys what kind of free options they have to spend their free time in the greenery in Helsinki, to discuss about if and what kind of feelings and thoughts the garden brings up in them, to get motivation and ideas for planning the balcony and to connect with the participants.</i>
28.5.16	<i>Student, participants, working life director</i>	<i>The student and the working life director will accompany the participants to the shop and we will then all together with open co-operation choose and buy the plants and soil. Pots, gloves and paint is available due to donations made to the supported housing unit.</i>
29.5.16	<i>Student, participants</i>	<i>Participants will do artwork on the pots and plant the plants. Goals- to motivate the boys to express themselves through artwork and working with plants and soils, to create an open and safe environment for free expression and conversation, to build social connections and develop social skills.</i>
8.6.16	<i>Meeting between the student and participants</i>	<i>Goals- to give practical tips on how to care for the plants, to check up on the balcony, to spend time with the participants and therefore to strengthen their social skills.</i>
8.9.16	<i>Meeting between the student and working life instructor</i>	<i>Goals- to discuss and find out, what observations has the instructor made in regards to if and how have the balcony and plants have had any effect on the boys, to get feedback about the project and its effects to the housing unit.</i>

	<i>Meeting between the student and participants</i>	<i>Goals- to get feedback if and how have the plants and balcony affected their well-being.</i>

6 POSSIBLE RISKS

When the objectives and goals have been established and agreed upon, and the workplan to achieve them has been done, it is useful to think about things that can go wrong or that could possibly prevent the success of the project. In this chapter I will assess some of the more likely risks which could have taken the project out of course and I will try to explore potential solutions or alternatives. (Heagney 2011; Richman 2012.) It is recommended to do the risk assessment in an early stage of the project to determine if to proceed, change the course or determine the project (Richman 2012, 72).

Here I find it important to mention, that no written risk assessment was done before the implementation of the balcony project, however some of the possible risks were discussed and pondered upon orally between myself and the working life director. Next, with the help of project planning literature, I will aim to give an example of risk assessment of the project.

Richman (2002, 71) suggests addressing questions like, what could go wrong in the project and what are the consequences, similarly, what are the uncertainties of the project. During our discussions and planning process, me and the working life director found, that there is a slight possibility that I will have problems with motivating the 3 participants to go through with the project because their mental state was unstable and future uncertain. The situation of not knowing the future of the boys made their lives uncertain therefore I could not expect them to be available and motivated throughout the project. Consequence and alternative of not having the 3 boys in the project was that I would finalize the balcony alone with the working life director. The balcony would still fill its purpose for other residents. Also, an uncertainty in the project was reaching the goal of having a positive impact on the participants' well-being due to the sensitive and fragile state of the individuals.

In addition, Heagney (2011, 50) proposes to assess the risks of failure of schedule and budget. In this project, the risk of failing to meet the deadline of opening the balcony, 29th of May 2016, was notable because of the uncertainty of having the 3 participants actively in the project and because of the possibility of timetable changes. However, we didn't see that possibility as an issue since the deadline was flexible. As for the budget, having visited the market beforehand and made approximate calculations regarding the prices of the plants, me and the working life director both agreed, that it was sufficient funds for filling up the balcony with greenery.

Risk assessment is beneficial to go through because it might give the project manager innovative ways of looking at issues and open new topics. Moreover, it may help you to avert some of the risks or to develop a backup plan. In conclusion, risk assessment will help to determine, if the project is worth the risks. (Heagney 2011; Richman 2002.)

7 IMPLEMENTATION AND MEETINGS

Next I will describe the implementation process and the meetings with the participants. After having done the workplan, with the help of the staff, the 3 boys who we thought would most benefit from the activities, were selected. The recruitment process went smoothly and the participants were excited to be part of the project.

We visited the Botanical Garden of Helsinki for motivation and to discuss the aims and idea of this project. Together, we planned which plants to buy and visited the market. I had planned a day, where we would come together and paint the pots or even some boards. We would have done this in a therapeutic manner, discussing freely what comes to mind. Sadly, this part of the activity did not take place due to lack of interest from the participants. Instead, the boys started with the planting and organizing straight away.

Throughout the project, I took notes of the process and meetings. After a few months, I had planned to meet both with the working life director and the participants and discuss their thoughts and feelings about the process. Meeting with the director was successful however I did not manage to meet the participants for feedback.

Every meeting and discussion with the 3 participants was confidential. I have not mentioned any details nor names in this thesis. The permission to write about the process, discussion subjects and feedback in a general manner was given orally by all parties.

The first meeting with the participants took place 24th of May and the last on 8th of September in 2016. General observation notes were taken after each session. No specific details, except for times and locations, were disclosed. Next, I will describe generally, what took place during the meetings.

Meeting 1, 24th of May 2016

I met all 3 of the participants in the housing unit at 11.00, the time we had all agreed on. They all seemed motivated to take part in the project. We walked from the center to Kaisaniemi Botanical Garden. Two of them were talkative and excited about our time together. The third boy, who didn't talk in the center either, was walking behind or front of us and kept to himself.

During our walk through the botanical garden, we talked about the nature and gardens in their home country and about the Finnish weather, both in English and Finnish language. The third boy asked in the middle of everything, having been quiet the whole time, what is the meaning of us walking there. One of the boys, as he came from the same country as him, took initiative and explained to him in their language, that this garden is free for everyone to come and relax in. He said that, this is a good place for them to come in summer and have a quiet moment, if feeling sad, anxious or if just in need for a place to hang out. We continued our discussions with two of the participants.

On our way back to the center, when the two boys were taking pictures and goofing around, the third one approached me and we started laughing at the other two. I felt success as the participant hadn't communicated with anyone in days.

We spent about 3 to 4 hours at the botanical garden.

Meeting 2, 28th of May 2016

Me, one of the workers and the participants met in the center at 11.00 From there we took public transport to the shop. During our way to the shop, we had some discussions about different cultures and about what they like to do in their free

time. All 3 of them were actively involved in these talks. This was a positive surprise for both me and the working life supervisor as the participant with obduracy was clearly opening up. It was nice to see him bonding with the other two and showing trust towards me as well.

In the shop, our co-operation worked smoothly and we got everything we needed, taking into account everyone's wishes and opinions. Participants were active in making decisions and the atmosphere was positive.

This activity lasted for about 4 hours.

Meeting 3, 29th of May 2016

I met the participants in the center at 13.00 One of them apologized that he had plans with friends and will not participate so in this meeting there were two participants. When I suggested, that we will start with some painting, neither of them was interested. When I tried to ask why not and encourage them, by explaining that it will not be judged by anyone and it can even be just coloring the pots, they still insisted that we start planting the plants.

During the planting process, we discussed things like their future, what professions they are interested in, their education, studying languages and many other things. I felt that due to the matter of our group being so small, me and two of the boys, the atmosphere was intimate and relaxed and both were talking continuously. I again took notice the positive change in the participant who had been quiet most of the times. He was making jokes and I felt a great trust between all of us. He expressed, how much he misses his garden back at home, that him and his father had and how happy he is to have the balcony and something to do.

Towards the end of the process, the third participant appeared and helped us to finalize the balcony. This meeting lasted for about 4 hours.

Meeting 4, 8th of June 2016

I was told by the working life director, that most likely all 3 of the participants will be at the center around lunch time. When I arrived, only one, the quiet one, was present. Together we spent some time at the balcony, caring for the plants and rearranging the places. He told me how he alone has cared for the plants. He expressed his disappointment on the lack of interest by the other two but said, that he loves spending time in the balcony. He explained that it gives him something to do and he feels like it is his sanctuary. We also discussed his dislike of going to school. I tried to explain with humor that this is something most of us just have to do.

I waited around for the other two for a while but they didn't show. I spent about 2 hours with the one participant, who was present.

Meeting 5, 8th of September 2016

I had planned to meet separately with the working life instructor and the participants on that day to discuss the project and get their feedback on the process. When I arrived at the center at 13.00, as planned, I met with the instructor. She told me that the housing center is going through changes and that it will be closed soon. Most of the boys who were living there during my internship, had been moved somewhere else. None of the 3 participants involved in the project were present on that day.

My discussion with the director lasted for about 1 hour.

Now that I have described the meetings and activities, next chapters will focus on feedback and evaluation of the process. I will talk about feedback I received from the working life director and reflect on my own work.

8 DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

For having control over the process of the project and being able to later evaluate it, documentation of every action taken is necessary. If not reported what and when was done, writing or talking about it later is basically fiction which means having no data at all (Heagney 2011, 95).

During this project, I took personal notes after every meeting with the participants. I wrote down details about time, place and the number of participants. Other notes, like discussion subjects were written down in a general manner, without any personal details.

Other documents were the workplan (*table 2. workplan*), printed out options for possible plants to be bought and notes of the feedback I received from the working life director.

8.1 Feedback

In order to learn, we need to have feedback. Furthermore, we tend to learn more from our mistakes, than success. (Heagney 2011, 98.) Reflecting on the process and getting feedback was important for me as a student for future references and for a learning process. Also, it can be beneficial to anyone reading this thesis or thinking about doing a similar project.

Due to the nature of this project and me trying to keep it as flexible and informal, I didn't prepare any feedback forms nor questionnaires. I had thought of some questions which I managed to ask the working life director during our last meeting.

During our discussion, I required constructive and useful feedback about the process from the working life instructor. She told me, how the balcony was a success both among the residents as well as the workers. It was used by the workers to

get silence and peace during their daily briefings and whenever a quiet moment was needed. Mostly, it was utilized by the residents. The main purpose of the balcony, to serve a place for relaxing and quiet time, went without saying. No aggressive or unpleasant incidents had taken place in the balcony. Small groups of residents spent time studying or just relaxing in the area.

As for the 3 participants, who took part in the project, she told me that all of them, especially the quiet one, would have benefited in more sessions with me. Although they all showed clear improvement in their communication skills and confidence level, soon after my last visit to the center, caring for the plants became a task for the workers as the boys lost their interest. We both agreed, that some more time could have been needed for planning this kind of project. She concluded that all in all, considering the state of the asylum seekers and the lack of time I had for planning, the project was a success. She would highly recommend plant based activities or projects to other housing units or similar centers.

8.2 Evaluation

The purpose of a project evaluation is to determine where improvements need to be made, to review the process and to learn. There can be two types of evaluation. External evaluation is done by someone who has not been part of the project. This type of evaluation is generally used with big projects with a wide project team. Internal evaluation on the other hand, is done by the project members themselves. It reflects on the actions and processes and is a tool for development. (Päällysaho 2017.)

Based on the notes I had taken throughout the project and the feedback I received from the working life director, I will conclude that the objectives and goals of the project were reached, in the time frame agreed upon and in the budget available. As the working life director said, the balcony with greenery was very successful and beneficial for both the residents and workers. Based on my personal observations during our meetings and the feedback from the director, I feel

that the meetings and the plant based activities did have a positive effect on the 3 participants, especially the one with obmutescence. However, as for future improvements, I would recommend more systematic meetings for a greater impact for the boys. I would recommend to keep the meetings shorter and have more of them. Looking back on the process, I think that the reason for the participants not wanting to do the painting, might have been the matter that the meetings were too long and they didn't have the patience for another long session.

Next, I will reflect on some of the challenges I had throughout the process.

8.3 Challenges

I felt that time was the main challenge. The idea for this project came spontaneously during a brief discussion with the working life director. The idea of using plants and plant based activities got me interested and I thought that this could become a success even without much background work. Although the objective and goals were reached and I enjoyed the process, I have learned many other possible ways of carrying out similar projects.

I find that the implementation of the project itself went smoothly and without any issues. I could see and feel how these activities were enjoyed by the participants and that made me more motivated. I do think, that the painting process and the whole idea of it could have been better explained by me for the boys. We also could have taken a separate day for that so that the meetings would have not lasted for such a long time at once. This could also be a reason why they were not so interested in painting.

Final words or final feedback from the boys was missing. The last meeting on the 8th of September was meant to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the process but none of them was present. I think that their ideas would have been useful for myself as well as for the working life partner and for the reader of this thesis.

9 CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The thesis has brought out a critical and current issue, the sensitive state of a group of young people who have been forced by circumstances independent of themselves to leave everything behind and move to a different country with a strange society. It is clear, that these changes and the traumas they have experienced in such a young age, leave a mark on their well-being. Based on what I had seen and experienced during my work placement, as well as implementing the project, it can be said that extensive therapy and other psychosocial support will be needed for many of these asylum seekers to become a part of this society and to be healthy and happy.

The purpose of this thesis was to create a plant based balcony for the youth living in a supported housing unit in Helsinki. Into the actual creating process, I included 3 participants with social issues, trying to give them my time and attention and focusing on social interaction between us all. The workplan, the implementation and feedback have been described in the thesis in a general manner, leaving out any details.

After every meeting, I took observation notes for future reflection. Feedback was given orally by the working life director. The feedback I received, was short but constructive. Same issues, that I myself had pondered on, were discussed with the director.

For future reference, I can recommend for the project leader to familiarize themselves extensively with the subject of green care and all its possibilities. It is a wide area with many activities and possibilities. Having familiarized myself with the theme of green care in depth while writing this thesis, I now realize that I only scratched the surface.

However, I also learned, how meaningful even the littlest actions can be for others. Coming into a new country with very different values and morals, every bit of time and action they get with the locals or anyone outside of their housing unit is much valued. Even though the project was small, I am happy if it had a positive effect even on one of the participants.

I feel that more similar projects should be developed. Plant based activities are widespread all over the world, especially in working with the elderly and trauma patients. In Nordic countries, it is not yet as popular as it could be.

Through this experience I learned, how important an extensive background work is for a confident project leader and for optimal results. I enjoyed this process because of my own interest into the subject of plants and because I enjoyed my time spent with the participants. Both the goals and the objective of this project were reached and I hope this thesis will give some other students motivation to try out different ways of developing their thesis.

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