## Circle of Courage – a fire burning overseas in Europe

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**European history of the Circle of Courage**

Working with children and youth displaying difficult behaviour or being diagnosed with emotional or behavioural disorders is a challenging profession. Making connection doesn’t happen in a obvious way. These kids show distrust, explore limits, and many times conflicts arise. People who work with these population hesitate about their professional action.

It is in this context that Franky D’Oosterlinck, the pedagogical director of the Orthopedagogical Centre “Nieuwe Vaart” in Ghent (Belgium) saught, in the beginning of this century, for a comprehensive method to train his staff. In this centre about 60 children and youth are served together with their families in the school for special education and the multifunctional centre. Knowing the work of Aichorn, Redl and Wineman, Trieschman, Whittaker and Brendtro, he discovered the book of Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) , a verbal method for conflict management that seemed theoretically based and clearly worked out. He went to Spearfish, South Dakota in 2000 and was trained in LSCI by Mark Freado, Master Trainer of the LSCI Institute.

The practical application in the home setting was the ultimate validation of this method, and in 2002 the question arose to organize a first training for several facilities in the East of Flanders, and to translate the textbook and the training materials in Dutch in 2003. LSCI grew quickly in Belgium and the Netherlands, partly by scientific research and the doctoral dissertation of D’Oosterlinck (2006) on the subject. With the formation of the European Federation of Conflict Management and Treatment in Education and Care (EFeCT, [www.efect.be](http://www.efect.be)) in 2008, a European group of organizations working with the same target population annually meet during conferences to exchange about vision and methods.

Meanwhile and also through several meetings with the Reclaiming Youth International movement, these group of Europeans got attached to the model and beliefs of the Circle of Courage. In 2010, Mark Freado was invited to lecture for the staff of OC Nieuwe Vaart and the staff of De Zande, one of the closed facilities for youth delinquents in Flanders. By now the Circle of Courage inspires many Flemish professionals who agree on the vivid meanings of the universal human values and needs which are reflected in its dimensions. Within the scope of the doctoral dissertation of Bram Soenen (2014), LSCI was implemented in OC Sint Idesbald (Roeselare, Belgium) a school and residential program for about 450 children and youth. During the process of implementation, the Circle of Courage was found to be a strong source of inspiration, by means of which the staff started to believe in the power of communication and strength-based thinking.

In March 2013 the first Belgian training in Response Ability Pathways (RAP) was organized in Belgium and one year later, in August 2014 the first RAP training for trainers was held. In a cooperation between Starr Commonwealth (US), OC Nieuwe Vaart (Belgium) and Jeugdwijs (the Netherlands), the RAP book and materials were translated and at this moment the first teams in organizations are trained in RAP. This method is also in Europe valued as a comprehensive method to make connection with relation-wary kids and restore broken circles. By implementing RAP, we feel that the ideas behind the Circle of Courage became more teachable.

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| Figure: Circle of Coaching | Moreover, also within the context of professional coaching, the Circle of Courage was experienced to be a helpful model. In the set-up of a tailored coach training for professional care takers, the Circle of Coaching was designed, inspired by the Circle of Courage. In coaching we agree on striving for the same qualities in the relation between the coach and the staff member, as we strive for in the relation between the staff member and the child. We believe that the needs, as described in the Circle of Courage, are universal and basic, as well as for kids, as for each staff member, as for the team in the organization ‘an sich’. |

The climate in an organization is determined by the vision and skills of the staff members and its congruence in the organization. Off course these skills can be taught by training of methods, but coaching will remain very important. Virtues can be used as concrete manifestations of underlying values. The ‘right’ skills can be ‘empowered’ in a strength based climate, when staff members get positive feedback on moments when the coach is able to observe manifestation of skills. Being near and present is thus a ‘condition sine qua non’ for a coach.

By using the Circle of Coaching four questions arise, which can be used by the coach and the coached staff member to evaluate the coaching.

1. *Do you feel safe enough to build on the relationship?*
2. *Is there enough competence to approach reality with in a wondering way?*
3. *Is there enough power to come to creative, new solutions?*
4. *Are you willing to face challenges?*

When plying these models we feel that by using methods that tally with it (as RAP and LSCI), the Circle can be a source of inspiration for working with children and youth who are at high risk of outrunning chances because of their difficult behaviour. The pioneering work of Franky D’Oosterlinck and his group and the work of trainers connected with the training centre Create have inspired many schools and care facilities in Flanders and the Netherlands. The common ground for these organizations is that they choose for a conflict-positive policy. The vision and mission of these organizations are a solid basis to build upon, by means of which a fruitful climate of care can arise for youths and their families and staff members. In the following, two of these “good practices” will elaborate about the position of the Circle of Courage in this whole.

**Circle of Courage as inspiration for organizational change in residential care**

During the past decades, the Orthopedagogical Centre (OC) Huize Terloo (Bellingen, Belgium) operated as a warm home-like residential program for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems. As society evolved and new insights arose, new expectations were formulated. The new paradigm of care requires a multitude of services which should be offered with a great flexibility. At the same time, the target population of this center showed an increasing amount and seriousness of problems. These evolutions created need to rethink the organization. As the vision is a fundamental factor in organizational change, it was decided to use the model of the Circle of Courage as the foundation of the process of change.

At the start of this process the content and background of the Circle of Courage was introduced in all departments. Teams were asked to make a detailed description of daily life in the organization and to give these a place within the Circle of Courage. Soon they experienced how the Circle of Courage can give value-based vivid meaning daily practices. For example, ‘at 5PM, Paul helped Jana with here schoolwork’ is an example of generosity, or ‘the group moment before dinner’ is an example of belonging.

Further, within the different teams, it was discussed what belonging, generosity, independence and mastery mean in terms of needs for all staff members personally, for the team, and for the youth cared for in the different teams. During this process, the Circle of Courage became an integral part of how we wanted treatment to be in OC Huize Terloo, and as such a part of the mission of the organization.

All staff were trained in Response Ability Pathways (RAP), with the goal to offer insights and guidelines on how to deal with the increasing problems of conflicts and aggression. The implementation of RAP was a realization of the renewed mission statement. Over time, we sensed that the Circle became more integrated. For example, in writing vision and guidelines in dealing with the use of social media, the Circle was used as guideline and touchstone. By doing so, we could agree on how the use of Facebook does not have to be ‘something dangerous’, but can be used to fulfill youths’ need for belonging.

Of course, our core business remains the treatment for individual youths, within the context of a group children and adolescents with several needs. For this, individual and group treatment plans are made as guidelines for daily action. The format of both the individual treatment plan as well as the group treatment plan was revised. Within the new formats, the needs of the individuals and the needs of the groups are formulated starting from the four different parts of the Circle. As a logic result, all the actions point that are formulated on the individual level and on the level of the group, and thus the core of our treatment, focus on belonging, mastery, independence and / or generosity.

It can be concluded that OC Huize Terloo is an organization that is, together with society, continuously evolving and developing. Although it is probably impossible to reach perfection in developing treatment programs, it has been shown that the Circle of Courage has been helpful not only in gaining insights in the needs of our youth, of their families and of the staff working for them, but also in developing services that answer these needs as good as possible.

**Circle of Courage in Don Bosco Groenveld - Evolving from individual commitments to a common focus on values and care.**

Our organization is a vocational school, in which youths aged 12-21 can learn a trade to be prepared for the labor market. Providing quality education is our main task. But there's more. In addition to providing education, there is the distinct need for a comprehensive policy of care for youth, because the majority of our students are struggling with severe care needs and as often this is expressed in destructive behaviour. Until six years ago, school policy seemed to be losing the battle. In 2008 our school chose to implement LSCI to support these youngsters in crisis. Yearly five colleagues get the opportunity to be trained in LSCI. Today, 65% of the colleagues are trained and engage as teachers and coaches of these students. The results are undeniable: less conflicts, increase of the learning ability, higher sense of security, self-confidence, and a feeling of belonging. And yet, despite the visible and positive results of the implementation, it remains a fragile process. The implementation of a real professional approach of students in need was reached after introducing 'Containment’ as a subject for the colleagues and after ‘translating’ the universal values ​​and needs, as described in the Circle of Courage. These implementations in the staff team led to a renewed organizational culture. *“Containment is thought to occur when one person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it, processes it and then communicates understanding and recognition back to the other person. This process can restore the capacity to think in the other person”* (L. Steckley). Listening unprejudiced to the approach of the colleagues, gave us the opportunity to see, not only their strengths, but also their needs. Everyone who works daily with young people in need, is regularly put under psychological pressure, experiences stress, and should be able to rely on a caring professional environment. Knowing this, we chose for a new style in supporting and coaching. We found the answers in the use of the Circle of Courage as our guideline and touchstone.  
The Circle of Courage offered us a clear framework of values. With a representative group of colleagues we translated the universal values ​​and needs, as described in the Circle of Courage, into a clear and achievable action plan and policy.

Some examples of concrete applications that reflect the dimensions of the Circle of Courage:   
• **Mastery**: peer moments, training on demand, development of a personalized job description, coaching of the new staff-members, permanence team to deal with a crisis , co-teaching …  
• **Belonging**: developing a meeting place for teachers, sharing good and difficult moments, team building, interested vicinity, offering support,…  
• **Independence**: self-organizing work groups, consistent open communication, encouraging initiatives, involvement, compassion, …  
• **Generosity**: unconditional attention for colleagues, providing assistance when asked, partying together, containment, compassion, …

The effects of this policy are visible and incontestable. There is a clear increase of commitment and any sense of (un)well-being is perceived and communicated. The policy as described is not an intervention plan to use in moments of crisis, but the description of the growth of our school to a enriching environment.

It takes a village to raise a child; there is need for an authentic caring ecology, for all concerned, to develop credible education and care for every child.

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