



# Building bridges, breaking barriers between mental health and its super-divers community'

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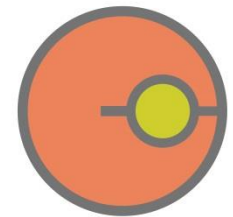
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**SOLENTRA**  
*wz brussel*

# Introduction

- Not for profit organisation within the psychiatric unit of the children's hospital of UZ Brussel
- Overrepresentation of children with a migrant background at the Center against Child abuse
- Underrepresentation of this group at the child psychiatry unit
- Due to various obstacles on both sides

# Introduction

=> Need for an alternative methodology, in 2001

Target group:

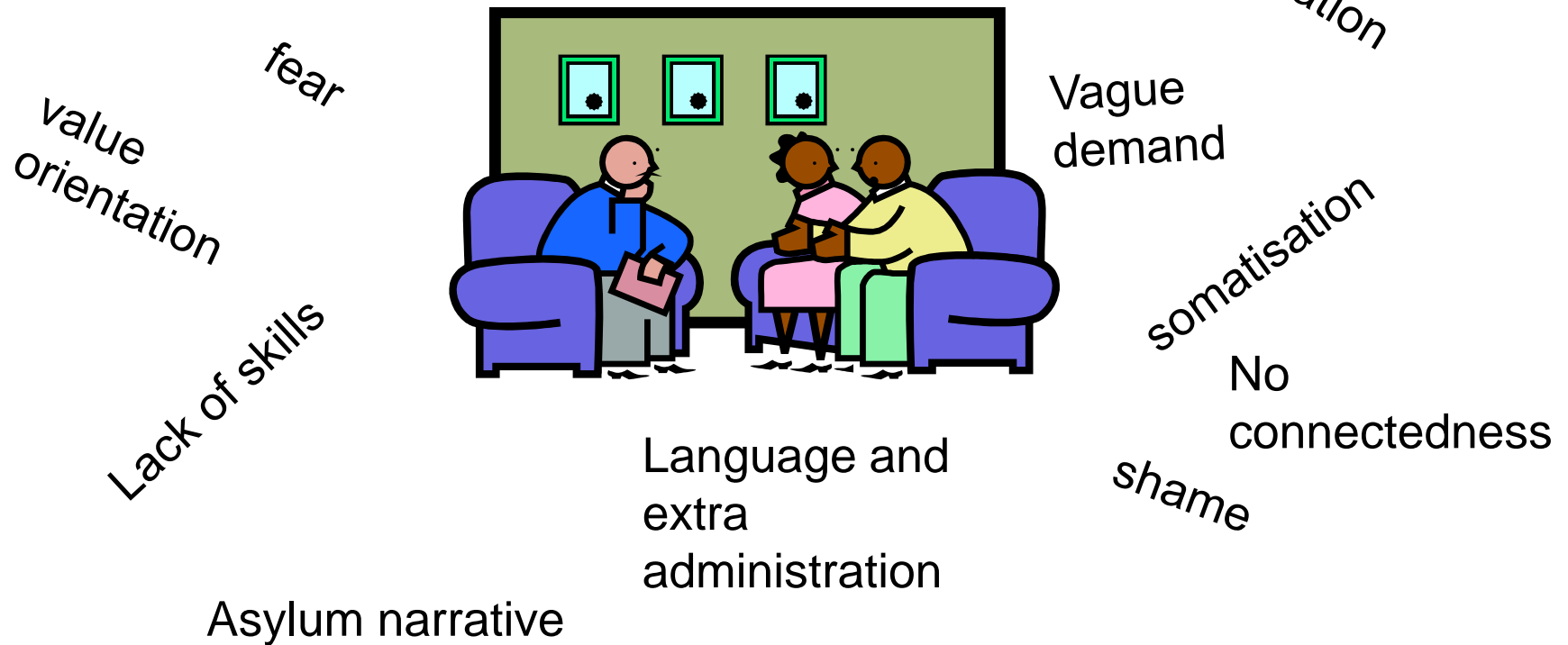
- Refugee & migrant children and their families
- Professionals

With:

- Field offices throughout the different regions
- Team of child psychologists, therapists and psychiatrists with different therapeutic background with emphasis on trauma, migration and culture-sensitivity
- Support team, and close collaboration with interpreters

# Obstacles

- **Absence of colour:** obstacles on both sides



# Introduction

- Core Activities

- Diagnosis, treatment and/or referral
- Tailor-made training
- Supervision and intervision
- Helpdesk
- Research



# Introduction

- Objectives
  - Improve equal access to qualitative health care
  - Improve effectiveness of mental health care facilities
- Underlying ideas
  - Social exclusion and poverty as major causes of mental health problems
  - Social exclusion and poverty as impediment to find the “right” help
  - Importance of culture in the definition of mental health and mental illness
  - Limitation of professionalization
  - Solutions are more enduring because embedded in the natural environment (and not dependent on professionals)

# Methodology (1)

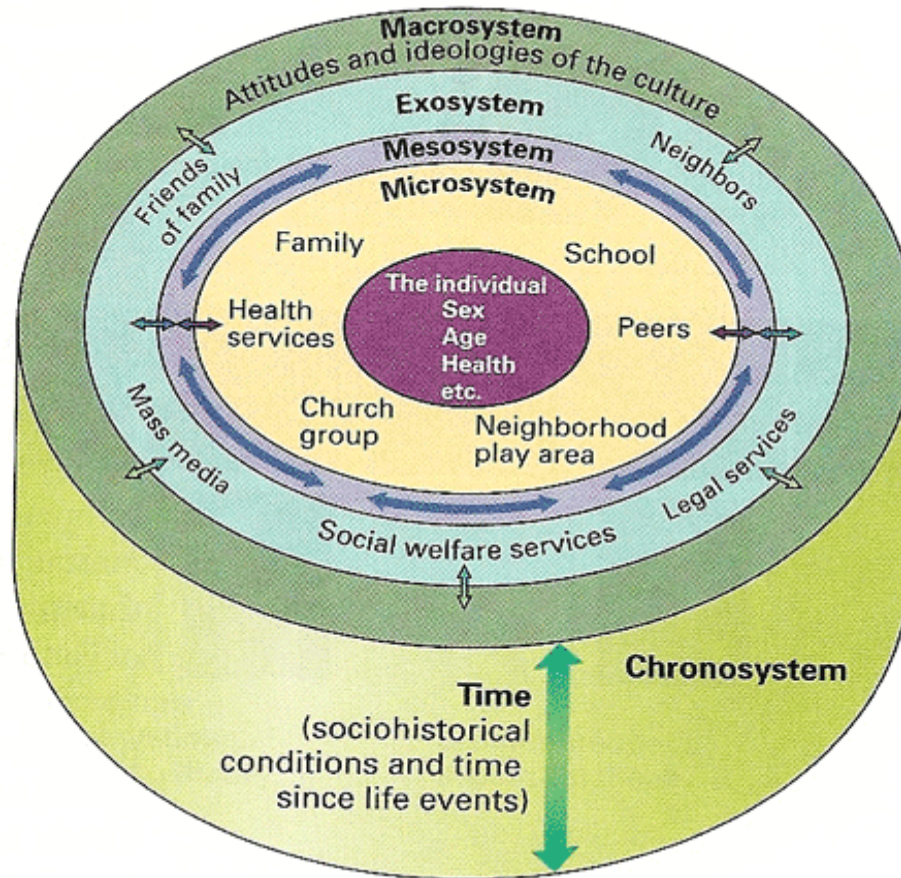
- Twofold: community based & ethnopsychiatric interventions

## 1) The community based interventions

- Mobilise the natural resources in the environment of the child in order to cure the problem, focusing on the strengths of the person/community rather than the weaknesses (resilience)
- **PACCT: Psychiatry Assisting the Cultural diverse community in Creating healing Ties**

# Methodology (1)

- PACCT cfr. Bronfenbrenner (1979) Ecological perspective on development





# Methodology (1)

- Community based interventions: PACCT
  - Stigmatisation: change location
  - No own demand: concerned professional is our client
  - No connectedness: strengthening alliances
  - Value orientation: cultural pluralism
  - Skills: cultural dialogue
  - Language: cultural mediators / interpreters
  - Fear: not-knowing position
  - Asylum narrative : working on resilience, on the present problems/symptoms

# Methodology (1)

- In practice
  - Meet in alternative/familiar consultation area
  - With interpreter, ICM or ethnopsychologist
  - Start an active process to
    - Define needs, problems and strengths
    - Formulate joint solutions, strategies to cope with defined difficulties
    - Mobilise existing associations, resources
    - Map existing community structures, restoring ancient, creating new, actively involving

# Methodology (1)

- In practice
  - Starting an active process whereby
    - A feeling of community is created
    - Both frameworks of reference are made more explicit, are explored and may exist side by side in the greatest respect
- Key ingredients
  - Contextualized perspective: ecological point of view
  - Empowerment: equal partners
  - Cultural pluralism: narratives
  - Cultural congruent: location and informal sources

# Methodology (2)

## 2) Etnopsychiatric intervention

- At the hospital or on location
- In their mother tongue
- Working with etnopsychologist therapist

=> with the skills to work with different explanatory models, frameworks, cultural representations and theoretical orientations on:

- ✓ What is mental health and mental illness and traditional healing practices
- ✓ Exploring, making explicit and being aware of each others frames of reference

- What do we achieve clinically?
  - Create alliances
  - Create involvement on both sides
  - Put a stop to social isolation
  - Break out of a negative spiral
  - Create a network
  - Create cultural sensitivity on both sides
  - Detect psychiatric disorders
  - Pave the way to mental health and other services
  - .....

- What do we achieve more generally?
  - Mobilise existing resources
  - Make existing resources more cultural sensitive
  - ...

*“It takes a community to help a child”*



# An example:

- Aim : tackling cognitive, behavioural and emotional problems of children with migrant backgrounds
- Helpdesk with school
- Community based consultation: Invitation of (extended) family system and representatives of the school system to create an alliance and a working relationship
  - Creating a common feeling of responsibility for the wellbeing of the child
  - Joint definition of the problem by the different parties
  - Shared objectives and responsibility
  - Defining strategies, clarification of each others role in the strategies, taking into account resources in the environment
  - Micro encounter + meso alliance
- Etnopsychological consultation
- Support of professionals
- Follow-up
- Referral



# Case

- School calls on helpdesk with concerns about the behavioural and emotional wellbeing of an Afghan girl (13 yrs)
- Girl talks about hearing voices, father just arrived after 1,5 yrs of separation
- Girl is afraid to talk out of fear that father would find out about her distress/ will the welfare services take me away?
- Support school: acknowledge the difficulties, explore what has been done
- Solentra at school: child explains being in between, having no friends at school, and being lonely, in the past seen by psy for symptoms of trauma due to bullying

# Case

- Two weeks later: School wants to contact center against child abuse but calls Solentra since the girl has not been to school for a week
- School has never met parents (meso alliance?) , social worker describes father as distant, no real contact
- Solentra advises: what would you do in other cases? Contact CLb to visit house for absence without medical letter
- Solentra meets parents at their house: explore the meaning of migration, fatherhood, his loss in status, expectations from school (language and social contacts) ... Father agrees to see the girl at school
- Solentra, school and parents build an alliance, the meso alliance
- Solentra at school: girl makes friends, talks about in between and the relation with parents