

## **Self-care and creative support in times of crisis**

### **Mike Haroutioun Ayvazian**

When the triple punch of economic crisis, covid-19 and the Beirut blast happened in my country, I found myself dealing with a totally different beast when it came to the regular psycho-social support sessions I used to provide in my sessions. What became evident was that I could not continue doing ‘therapy’ sessions when the participants were just trying to hang on and survive in the very harsh conditions we were facing.

How can we heal from issues that we were still facing; how can we get over circumstances that are still happening and shaping our country...?

I found myself instinctively gravitating towards a certain kind of exercises/activities that would allow participants to actually better navigate the situation and better take care of themselves.

Working with refugees and victims of the blast (whenever not in lockdown) and with front-liners (online and in the field) I developed a series of sessions that we called ‘self-care and creative support’. Self-care and creative support sessions are about (re-)learning how to take care of oneself; about exploring our own resources: what do I already have in my life and that I can use to sustain myself mentally (and physically)?

Using solely fun and positive interactions, mixing humor and creativity, I was able to engage participants in artistic activities that allowed them to keep sane, keep motivated and resource themselves in a sustainable way. The activities used mixed mediums (art making, moving, acting, writing etc.) and were honed throughout numerous sessions given all over the country (and then again in Syria and Armenia); all in all, to more than 2,000 beneficiaries.

I would love to get the chance to show, hands on, some of these activities and how to implement the sessions from start to finish (warm-ups, build up, activities and discussions), and spread the knowledge acquired.

## Biography

**Mike Haroutioun Ayvazian** completed his BA and Masters in Theatre Studies and decided to take his inclinations towards social work with vulnerable populations a step further and studied expressive arts therapy (and social change) psychodrama, clay field therapy and dance movement therapy all around Europe and the Mediterranean.

He has co-founded two NGOs in Lebanon, HeLeM, (1999) - the first LGBTQIA+ NGO in the middle east, where he has also provided art/drama therapy sessions and staged plays with LGBTQIA+ beneficiaries - and Astharté (2016), an NGO that provides art therapies, trainings, coaching and community art to beneficiaries in Lebanon, Syria and Armenia. He also co-founded 'For the Art' therapy centre in 2020, where he has been providing free art therapies for victims of the Beirut blast and beyond.

He has also been teaching acting and cultural subjects in schools (between 2001 and 2023) and private universities since 2015.

## Recent publications and conference presentations

Role play and distancing; at the practices of arts therapy in times of crisis. Colloquium in Saint Esprit Kaslik University in May 2023