



## Capacitar Letter from Germany

*Aachen Cathedral, Western Germany*

May, 2019

Dear Friends,

Special greetings to you from Aachen, Germany where we just completed the first 4-module Multicultural Wellness training with 36 men and women graduating. Aachen is a beautiful historic city bordering Belgium and the Netherlands that dates back to the 800s and the times of Charlemagne.

Capacitar started in Germany only 10 months ago and already there are trainings in both Western and Eastern, Germany with dates projected over the next couple of years to also include Southern Germany. The first seeds of Capacitar were planted two years ago by Sr. Ingrid Janish who has worked for many years in both Rwanda and DR Congo. While on a solidarity tour sponsored by Missio in different areas of Germany, Ingrid led several Capacitar workshops. People were very interested to learn more, so Anke Reermann of Missio and the Diocese of Aachen contacted our Capacitar office to set up training dates. Even before that, the Emergency Kit of Best Practices was translated into German by Gabriella Schuetz-Lembach and Michaela Frank, who had participated in a London training in 2010 (having learned about Capacitar in South Africa!) and at that time they had wanted to start Capacitar in Aachen. So eight years later the dream has become a reality.

One of the reasons why Capacitar has been so enthusiastically embraced by people in Germany is because of the influx of refugees in many communities. Since 2015, more than one million migrants, many of them from war zones in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, have come to Germany because of Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to open German borders. Germany is now the top European destination for people fleeing



*Capacitar Aachen Group, May 2019*



conflict, repression and violence in the Middle East, Asia and Africa. According to one report regarding Germany's Syrian Integration Project: "More than 700,000 Syrians are dispersed among Germany's 82 million inhabitants, many of whom migrated after the Syrian uprisings began in 2011. The German government has developed different systems to integrate its refugee population, with involvement by federal, state, city, and local governments, civil society, and the refugees themselves. Germany's vocational school system has worked to train and integrate refugees into the country's workforce, a need due to a nationwide labor shortage. And numerous volunteer and nonprofit organizations started initiatives to help the integration process." At the same time there has been more recently a backlash of anti-immigration groups who claim that refugees are a burden on Germany's welfare system and economy. There has been increased deportation of some immigrants, including those from "safe countries of origin", as well as a drop in the number of asylum applications.

### Capacitar Germany's Growth

According to Dr. Norbert Frieters, professor of Social Work at Catholic University of Aachen, one of the fields of study currently significant at universities is social work, since the job market offers many opportunities for work with refugees and asylum seekers.

Capacitar Germany Coordinator Anke Reermann reflected: "In life, crisis often gives us the ability to grow in wisdom showing us new ways. Having the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 brought out the welcoming heart of the German people. But the



*Prof. Dr. Norbert Frieters, Pat Cane and Capacitar Germany Coordinator Anke Reermann*



*Tai Chi with group in Eastern Germany, Zwochau*



*Capacitar Multicultural Wellness Training in Zwochau, Eastern Germany with participants from many areas*



*Raad Ahmed and members of the KORU team from Luxembourg*

crisis also called us to consider new ways of treatment for the traumatized. So Capacitar came to our country, brought to us by a woman who works with Capacitar in the DR Congo. And now our Capacitar seed is growing in Germany!”

Since July 2018, over 70 men and women have participated in the 4-module trainings in Eastern and Western Germany and over one hundred participants have come to other Capacitar’s workshops offered in Aachen and Münster. The Eastern Germany training has been sponsored by the dioceses of Erfurt, Magdeburg

Hamburg and Dresden. Training participants come from a variety of backgrounds and many work with refugees and asylum seekers in nonprofits, parishes and community centers. Some of the participants are social work students working on their BA or MA degrees. In the Aachen group, four of the participants come from Luxembourg where they work as a multicultural team at KORU, a center focused on refugee outreach. One member of the team is Raad Ahmed, a refugee from Iraq who has brought Capacitar to Arab immigrants living in Luxembourg. Raad described how the Arab men at first were skeptical, but they noticed that Raad’s game of table tennis had greatly improved. Raad told the men that it was because of the Capacitar exercises—Breathwork, Fingerholds and Tapping. So all the men wanted to learn Capacitar, not only to improve their table tennis but also to heal their traumatic memories as refugees! Several Aachen participants work in other countries with Missio, Misereor or Caritas, so they will also be bringing Capacitar to countries in Africa and Latin America. In the Zwochau group, an older couple in their mid-80s decided to take the training to learn skills to do volunteer work in their community. One Zwochau participant is a Catholic priest with a large parish in Leipzig. After our module 2 study of the Labyrinth, Fr. Michael decided he wanted to build a labyrinth in the garden near his church that will be open to the community. Many older people living in Eastern Germany still deal with traumatic memories from their history of living under years of oppression.

## **Trauma Conference**

Besides the trainings, Germany also hosted a trauma conference funded by the Diocese of Aachen and sponsored by the Social Work Department of the Catholic University of Aachen, in collaboration with Missio and Capacitar International. The focus of the conference was to share new approaches to trauma healing beyond traditional methods of psychotherapy. People engaged in the field of trauma work from various sectors and professions shared their outcomes. Presenters offered workshops in different methods: Capacitar’s popular education approach to trauma; therapists working with sand and play therapy for children; a woman from the Philippines working with survivors of trafficking and sexual abuse; persons working at a psychosocial center PSZ; and a woman who has worked with Medica Mondiale in countries of violence to empower people. Keynotes were given by Capacitar focused on body literacy and trauma healing; by a GIZ program funder work-



*Open Space dynamic to share visions for future trauma work*



*Dr. Norbert Frieters leading Pal Dan Gum at the Trauma Conference*



ing with trauma and its impact on development programs; and a theologian from Wurzburg who dealt with the spiritual dimension of traumatic experience. The 140 conference participants included many university students, as well as people of different professions—lay pastoral workers, psychologists and social workers. The 2-day event ended with the dynamic of Open Space to share visions for the future of trauma response field work. The conference itself was a big step to research new ways of trauma healing that are more culturally appropriate for refugees living in Germany who represent many diverse cultures.

In evaluating the outcomes of the conference, Dr. Frieters said: “The trauma conference was an important contribution to further developing the conceptional discourse in the field of trauma work in Germany. The national and international contributions were at a very high level and offered much inspiration for the practice. The workshops opened up numerous concrete ideas for the implementation of trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive work beyond classical psychotherapy. Hence the trauma conference responded to the growing demand for simple and low-threshold approaches to trauma work and trauma education in Germany.”

### Reflection on Capacitar in Germany

As part of our last module of training in Aachen, participants were asked to present a creative expression reflecting on their own growth and change during the year and what was significant to them. There were many wonderful moments of sharing songs, dances, poems and art. One of the most moving expressions was the work of Joana Spanier who in her remarkable painting showed the impact of Capacitar in Germany and in the larger world.

As a woman holds the symbol of Capacitar lovingly in her hands, the bombs and guns and negative forces destroying our environment and our world are slowly transformed into love and compassion and what gives life to us all. As Capacitar walks with the people of Germany in the coming years, may we be dedicated to being a source of healing, renewal and transformation.

With peace and solidarity,

*Pat Cane*

Capacitar Founder/Director

*Anke Reermann*

Capacitar Germany Coordinator



*Joana Spanier rt. presenting her creative expression*



*Capacitar circle dance at the graduation in Aachen*



*Capacitar transforming the wounds of Germany and of our world—Art by Joana Spanier*