

Loving the gentle kind: Ubuntu-based Community Wellness Focusing Empowerment

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Ubuntu is a concept which can bolster the empowerment of communities and Community Wellness Focusing people in action. People with ubuntu are warm, generous, open and available to others, affirming others and willing to be vulnerable. Focusers can ask: how does ubuntu correspond to, and differ from, the Community Wellness Focusing approach?

The essence of the panafrikan philosophy of ubuntu speaks of interconnectedness: “My humanity is bound up in yours. I am because we are.” To speak in South African Xhosa language: “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu: I am person through other persons”. At the heart of the concept and practise of ubuntu is the value of inclusivity and reciprocity in relationships: Mutual respect, mutual caring, mutual sharing and a shared commitment to the ongoing work of harmonious living. The human self is constituted not by the individual sphere of competence but by relations. Ubuntu people speak of themselves in terms of the Kanton credo as “I participate therefore I am”.

“Ubuntu calls for cohabitation, which is not only about living with others harmoniously but also about accommodating the concerns of others, and genuinely seeking to understand before proceeding to persuade them ...Most often than not the word has been dichotomized along the lines of there is >me< and there is >you<. >You< are in that body over there, which is very different from mine. ... From a consciousness of separation the paradigm is >you are on your own<. >I've got mine. Get your own<. Ubuntu is a philosophy that comes in to renegotiate this caveat and to establish psychological, emotional and cultural platforms of convergence rather than divergence, of similitude rather than differentiation” (Emmanuel Mote-Ndasah, Duala, pastor of the of the Anglican Church of Cameroon, personal manuscript 2014).

The ethical and spiritual foundation of ubuntu offers high chances of development for those working in the field of Community Wellness. Sensitive listening to gain understanding as opposed to a reply, interpersonal responsibility, and solidarity come first in the process of ubuntu based interrelating.

The opening and closing of a Focusing learning unit are good opportunities to practise Ubuntu Focusing UBF. To abide by the ubuntu spirit is to ask e.g. “How does the whole of it show what is missing here?”. The missing “something” is the (... ..) to complete or to go further as group. What any participant is going to bring in to the whole of it is an expression of this missing “something” and therefore beyond validation. It is an expression of the wholeness (unity) though it is unique (diversity). It is free from any value as part of the heritage of human equality: We all come from the same source in life.

The practise of ubuntu attitude in Community Wellness Focusing allows Focusing trainers to be sensitive to the participants through the natural resources of ubuntu: The desire to share and help each other, a longing for coherent relationships, and an eagerness to find happiness for other than the individual self. Focusing trainers can facilitate the “we here” of any community group by adapting Focusing instructions to the natural expression of ubuntu between group members. This works very well when Focusing trainers sense towards the atmospheres emerging within the community group with which they are working.

Atmospheres are expansive holistic expressions of phenomena. They are non-existent, vague and spread into what we call environment or “arroundness”. Atmospheres and moods referring to personally felt “being-in-situation” (Gendlin: “how-are-youness”/Befindlichkeit) are unseparated experiencing. According to the German philosopher Fuchs, people sense a special atmosphere

in a room, participate in this atmosphere, and at the same time are tuned in to this atmosphere from the inside.

If Focusing trainers are in tune to their sense of atmospheres, their Focusing instructions match with the personal moods of their participants and the ubuntu spirit unfolding within the community group. A strong feeling of “we-here-in-situation” can emerge, carrying further the process of empowerment of all participants.

Proposals for ubuntu based Focusing/Community Wellness Focusing questions:

- How does the environment (“aroundness”, atmosphere) feel for your body?
- How does your body want to participate here?
- What does it need for you to feel connected here?
- What of the whole wants to occur now?
- What is missing here to complete?
- What does the whole need to be contributed by you?
- How does your neighbour's body want to be supported by you so he/she can contribute his/hers?
- What makes a difference to fulfillment now?

Focusing Service Tübingen prefers to use the term “Community Wellbeing” to respect the processing that takes place in the group of the Focusing Oriented Ubuntu Relation FOUR project that runs in Tübingen since 2015. Four is focused on practising Ubuntu Focusing UBF in order to activate human resilience of volunteers working in refugee aid teams and in church communities. The spiritual base for the monthly FOUR group meetings are the prayers of Desmond and Mpho Tutu (“Made for Goodness. And why this makes all the difference”, 2012). Whereas in a general Focusing workshop each participant takes home his/her own symbol of resource and resilience, participants of FOUR happen to go home with empty hands but their fellow

participants carry home two or three symbols they got from the group for greater neediness.

FOUR and Ubuntu Focusing UBF is a work in progress. Questions and ideas are welcome. Please send to focuisng-service@email.de.

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