



'Haus Kloppenburg' Münster, Germany (1976)

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Introduction

'Haus Kloppenburg' in Münster was founded in 1976 and was originally set up as a therapy centre by Siglind Willms, a behaviour therapist. She soon realised, that there was a lack in her work concerning the understanding and handling of emotions.

In 1973 she came across Co-Counselling and did her Fundamentals with John Heron in Germany. She understood the importance of catharsis and how it was meant to work. In 1975 she taught her first Fundamentals in Münster for 20 people.

In 1976 she made acquaintance with Johannes Risse, a catholic priest and Pastoral-psychologist. He joined the next Fundamentals in 1977, started Co-Counselling, and judged it so important for him, that they started having sessions and giving Fundamentals and Co-Counselling workshops together.

Since 1975 they ran two Fundamentals courses and two advanced Co-Counselling workshops every year. Each workshop had between 25 to 30 participants. They were mostly their clients or their colleagues. If people wanted to have psychotherapy with us, they told them, that they were expected to learn Co-Counselling, as this gives them the possibility of staying more self-reliant in a therapeutic process and bearing more responsibility for the process themselves.

The main elements of the therapy offered in the centre are 1) cognitive, behaviour therapy, 2) Pastoral-psychology and 3) Co-Counselling. Each of the therapists have their own integrative form of therapy with additional elements.

The centre operated for 20 years without meeting any other Co-Counsellors except some people from the Re-Evaluation Counselling community in Münster. In 1995 Siglind and Johannes sought contact with John Heron and since then they have met with many other CCI-Co-Counsellors from around the world.

Q1. What was your vision when you first set up your Co-Counselling project in Münster?

1. Their vision for Co-Counselling

Siglind and Johannes understand Co-Counselling as a way to handle emotions well, a way to cope with frustration and traumatic experiences, which may occur at any time and a way to reduce large amounts of collected tension due to having been unable to discharge emotions of any kind.

Co-Counselling is the only way they know, to learn how to handle emotional processes not only in therapy but everywhere in life.

Working with Co-Counselling serves also a wider, more cultural and political perspective. Co-Counselling practices can be used in other contexts, for example the acceptance of feelings and the use of free attention in daily life and in conflict situations. In Co-Counselling groups and sessions people learn to accept other people's differences and to bear the responsibility for their own problems and decisions, while proper support helps people to own their uniqueness and take responsibility for their own lives. In this way Co-Counselling supports democracy with self-reliant people with a co-operative attitude.

Co-Counselling and Cognitive- Behavioural- Therapy (CBT) go well together

Catharsis or discharge loosens emotional blockages and opens the possibility of new thinking and new behaviour. But this mostly does not automatically follow discharge or catharsis. Therefore it is important to learn strategies to change thinking and behaviour. Behaviour therapy and its sibling Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) offer good strategies that fit well with Co-Counselling.

2. Co-Counselling and Therapy complement each other nicely

As mentioned before 'Haus Kloppenburg' is a therapy-Co-Counselling centre. Siglind and Johannes see a mutually supportive influence between Co-Counselling and therapy. It is this positive mutual influence that forms the core of their approach.

How Co-Counselling supports Therapy

- **Free attention**

Through all cultures free attention is the basis of acceptance and of proper conditions for lively emotions. Thinking and behaviour are always connected with feelings. If you want to change them you must be able to cope with the emotional aspects.

- **Emotions**

Co-Counselling is the only method they know which teaches non-professionals to handle their emotional processes. It is general, simple and practical.

- **Self-reliant clients**

Co-Counselling teaches clients to be self reliant and this is reflected beneficially in the client-therapist relationship.

Closely related to this is their desire that their clients be strong enough to stand on their two feet. To give people the change to be self reliant in therapy & outside in daily life.

People could work out material that came up in therapy, in Co-Counselling sessions. Which means their therapy costs less.

- **After therapy, there is still support**

After having finished therapy clients are not completely left to their own devices, as is usually the case with 'normal' therapy. They still have access to the support system of Co-Counselling. They can have sessions and participate in Co-Counselling groups.

How Therapy supports Co-Counselling

Co-Counselling on its own is sometimes not enough for people. At some point Co-Counsellors can get stuck in their process, have a personal crisis or strongly restimulated by other Co-Counsellors. Here is where therapy can come in, helping to work out the problems and providing suggestions about how to work on them in Co-Counselling sessions or in the Co-Counselling group.

This backup is especially important for those people who come to Co-Counselling out of a strong personal need for help. Quite often their problems are too complicated for them to work out through Co-Counselling alone.

3. Christian inspiration in Co-Counselling

Although 'Haus Kloppenburg' is not a Christian centre, Christianity forms an important source of inspiration, especially for Johannes Risse.

It is easier to understand the written word of the Bible if you can connect it with your own experience, especially emotional experience. Many experiences in Co-Counselling, especially those of deep catharsis have a religious aspect. Reading the psalms, for instance is like having a Co-Counselling session with God's free attention. Johannes thinks of God as the "Centre of Free Attention".

Q2. What factors did you consider to be important in turning your vision into reality?

1. 'Free Attention'

With 'Free Attention' people have the inner space both to witness their own truth and what is going on around them. This enables them to acknowledge differences: differences among people but also differences between intentions and effects.

It is this free attention Siglind and Johannes felt enabled them to witness what was going on and helped them to develop the relationship between Co-Counselling and therapy, their advanced workshops, their socialisation guidelines etc.

2. Consistently requesting therapy clients to do Co-Counselling as well

About 70% of the participants in the Fundamentals come from therapy. The other 30% come from 'mouth to mouth' recommendation. They explain to their clients how Co-Counselling will support their therapy process and how therapy can support their Co-Counselling.

3. The 'Siglind & Johannes' partnership

Maria remarked on how Siglind & Johannes as a pair very much contributed to the success of the centre. Within the dimension of spiritual inspiration they represent the two extremes: Johannes represents more the institutional side of religion while Siglind represents more the free spirit side, as she is on the edge of institutional religion. This was very important for the project, as they exemplified how differences in 'Christian' inspiration and style can 'live and co-operate together in love': aims of both Co-Counselling and Christianity.

For Co-Counselling this means that they represent a togetherness with different faces that appeals to a wide spectrum of people. This supports the teaching of Co-Counselling as well, as people learn best from people who appealed to them. As Siglind and Johannes have a complementary appeal, almost everybody in a group is reached by them.

4. Supporting Socialisation

They recommend non-socialisation in the beginning of Co-Counselling groups. Meeting each other for activities other than Co-Counselling brings the differences between people much more to the forefront and that often means conflicts. New Co-Counsellors are often not able to solve these conflicts and this leads to the break down of Co-Counselling groups. Another reason for recommending non socialisation is that people develop expectations from the very open, emotional situation in workshops or Co-Counselling groups: expectations concerning love, acceptance, harmony etc., which are mostly disappointed.

If groups do Co-Counselling for a longer time and get to know each other very well, they may then much more easily move into socialisation at the level they want.

Hugging

In the beginning hugging was part of their teaching, but they decided that it was not helpful for the Co-Counselling process. A lot of hugging evokes a lot of expectations, especially erotic and sexual longings and this gets in the way of concentrated regular Co-Counselling.

Advanced course 'Open Communication'

'Haus Kloppenburg' runs a workshop on a regular base called 'Open Communication'. In this they teach the principles of good communication based on the work of Watzlawick and others. Other aims of the course are: expressing yourself freely, learning to listen, to handle conflict, to trust another person, to give feedback and to develop self evaluation.

Q3. Which aspects of the Fundamentals course in Münster support new

Co-Counsellors to settle in to Co-Counselling?

“Ah, that is a good human experience, I want more of that” experience of the Fundamentals.

The challenge is to facilitate a Fundamentals course in such a way, that its participants want to learn to recreate the experiences they have of their own accord. Crucial aspects of the Fundamentals to achieve this are:

1. ‘Free attention’

The experience that you can be present for both yourself and for somebody else without having to perform, just being...

2. ‘Sharing’

Witnessing sessions in the group, sharing feelings and emotions in rounds and the sharing that happens within sessions create together that special sense of ‘shared common experience’ and sense of belonging, so typical on Fundamentals courses. This in turn creates an experience of being among people with who you can really be yourself without keeping up appearances.

The 5 day long Fundamentals (including catharsis, action planning and working with thoughts) seems to be more effective in achieving this “Ah, that is a good human experience, I want more of that” experience than the short 2 day course, which includes only catharsis.

Q4. What is available to new Co-Counsellors in Münster that might support them to settle in to Co-Counselling?

During the Fundamentals and therapy sessions people are encouraged to participate in the Centre’s workshops and the ongoing Co-Counselling groups. These are announced on the centre’s notice board. The centre offers very cheap rooms for groups and one-to-one sessions. There is a ‘Looking for a partner?’ section on the Centre’s Notice Board. Some people seem to use this option, but most one-to-one sessions seem to happen at the centre. Few people seem to have sessions at home.

1. Ongoing Co-Counselling groups

There are ongoing Co-Counselling groups organised by Co-Counsellors themselves. There are also fortnightly Co-Counselling groups at the Centre facilitated by people who want to become Co-Counselling teachers, who teach elements of the Fundamentals. The group sessions are about two and half hours and have 8-12 participants. These ongoing groups provide a long term support space in which Co-Counsellors can work on their stuff, practice their skills and learn healthier ways of socialising in a Co-Counselling way.

2. Advanced Co-Counselling workshops

1. learning to change thoughts and behaviours

by role playing, direction holding and training assertive behaviours

2. childhood experiences workshop

going through old experiences and overcoming old traumatic stuff

3. art workshop

here Co-Counselling is used as a starting point to discover creativity, working with colour, clay and wood instruments

4. 'Open Communication' Workshop (see page. 8)

Although this is not a Co-Counselling workshop, people are encouraged to participate in it, because here Co-Counsellors learn communication skills that in turn will benefit the ongoing Co-Counselling groups they participate in.

Rooms for sessions at 'Haus Kloppenburg'

If people cannot have sessions at home, they can book a room for sessions in 'Haus Kloppenburg' or they can join ongoing Co-Counselling groups that have their sessions at the centre as well.

Q5. What other things have been tried to help new Co-Counsellors settle in?

Monthly 'Open Co-Counselling Days'

In Münster the 'Münster Co-Counselling Initiative' organises monthly 'Open Co-Counselling Days' as a first step to creating a local network that is not dependent on 'Haus Kloppenburg'.

Q6. Is there anything else that you think is relevant?

1. Dealing with people who don't really pick up Co-Counselling during the Fundamentals

Sometimes it occurs that people attending the Fundamentals don't really pick up the gist of Co-Counselling. In the centre's opinion vetting at the end of the Fundamentals is not on. It creates an atmosphere of inequality. Therefore there is no other alternative than to leave those people in peace. When they join an ongoing Co-Counselling group, let the group cope with them in the hope that they will pick it up later.

When a group finds it difficult to deal with this, Siglind or Johannes have a talk with that person. Sometimes when the person is a client, the issue is raised in the therapy session. Sometimes this works, sometimes not.

2. Conflicts

Though the conflict resolution model is available for conflicts, people don't often use it. When Co-Counsellors have a conflict within a group that can't be resolved, they tend to leave that group and join another one. There are enough groups available. Occasionally people leave Co-Counselling

because of a conflict.

When therapy clients are involved in Co-Counselling conflicts, they are invited to work on it in therapy.

3. People try Co-Counselling out of a need for help rather than a wish for personal growth

This has several consequences. For people who try out Co-Counselling out of a need for help, Co-Counselling is often not sufficient to meet their needs. Generally they need additional therapy.

Teachers who are only trained in Co-Counselling as a tool for personal growth are not equipped to meet the needs of people who come to Co-Counselling for help.

Such teachers will have difficulty finding people whose motivation is based solely on a wish for personal growth.

4. Continuity in the organisation

The continuity of Co-Counselling in Münster is based on two factors.

First there are the two 'continuity' people with the commitment to make Co-Counselling work. Siglind Willms and later Johannes Risse have worked together for almost twenty five years. They form the axis and inspiration from which many Co-Counsellors have benefited. The question of continuity remains however. Who will take over the commitment to continuity after them?

Secondly, there is the central Co-Counselling venue 'Haus Kloppenburg'. Everybody knows that if you want to pick up Co-Counselling(again), you can contact the centre.

5. Peership in the Co-Counselling organisation

Finally Siglind & Johannes feel very strongly about peership in Co-Counselling. They really don't want to see things in Co-Counselling organised in the Harvey Jackins style of Re-evaluation Counselling.

They have noticed as well that people start to feel on an equal footing with Co-Counselling teachers when they have Co-Counselling sessions with them. Therefore they see this as good practice in Fundamentals.
