

Orphaned Teenagers in Iran

by Delbar Niroushak

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An orphanage is usually full of children and teenagers that have nothing in common except one thing: a deep desire to be supported and loved for what they are. They believe that nobody can truly understand them. Almost all of them think they have been left alone because they have done something wrong, and some of them cannot forgive themselves for this. Some also feel guilty and angry for not being loved, some are still deeply afraid of loss, and others have given up their faith that someone will ever take care of them.

I have to admit as an Enneagram One, this project – working with teenage orphans – was extremely challenging for me. There were many intense emotions involved – both mine and theirs – that felt overwhelming to me. Normally, I am very self-contained and self-controlled, rarely letting my emotions interfere with my composure. At beginning of the project, I also had difficulty connecting with the teenagers, due to a combination of their distrust, my reserve, and our age difference. However, using the Enneagram with them allowed me to enter their inner worlds and to eventually assure them that it's okay – although not desirable and not their fault – to be left alone, but it's not okay to feel unsafe.

I started teaching them the three Centers of Intelligence and allowing them to feel emotionally safe and to speak from their hearts about what they thought was missing from their lives. Because I knew this topic might create uncertainty in many of them, I continued deepening their understanding of the Head, Heart, and Body Centers rather than teaching them immediately about the nine Enneagram styles. They began to recognize their different needs and to experience their emotions. They understood that all of them wanted to be loved, but for different reasons. As a sign of progress, there was less and less resistance to exploring these issues after a few sessions, which we took as a signal that they were feeling safe. At the beginning, this work was sad for them and me, but it was very empowering at the same time.

When I then taught them the Enneagram, I had different games and tools for different age groups to help them recognize their styles. In all age groups, I used drawing pictures to teach them the nine styles, and it was so much fun. The style Two and Four teenagers had the most difficulty accepting what was missing in their lives and within their families. The style Seven girl was enjoying herself so much, but she ran to me suddenly and started to cry effusively. Although this shocked me, it became clear that although she was deeply fearful of being sad, she began to realize that it's okay to cry and that her laughter would not disappear. It seemed that for the style Five teenager, everything was okay as it was; there was no tears and no fear, but there was definitely some anger. Although the other children wanted to get close to him, he always kept his boundaries. Perhaps he was the only one in the orphanage who was enjoying his loneliness, but it was clear that he wanted to be loved. Over the time we worked together, he learned how to resolve this conflict.

The most challenging child was our style Eight. Very angry and quite abusive to other children, he didn't know what he was seeking; he only knew that he needed to be strong at all times if he wanted to survive. Eventually, he understood what was causing him to behave this way and started to let go of his fear. Through this work, all of them learned to forgive, but not forget their needs. They also learned how to allow new families to enter their beautiful worlds. Their knowledge of the Enneagram helped them communicate effectively with their foster parents and to understand and respect the nine different points of view. We got closer every session and even laughed with joy when it came time to pick their new families. Last but not least, they learned to *love* and to *support* themselves, no matter who was or was not around.

For every project that I do, whether it is community service or in a corporation, there is always an important message for me. This project made me realize that sometimes I need to let go of my standards – a sense of how things are supposed to be – if I truly want to be me and to accept what is as it is, just as these teenagers learned.