

**PEER SUPPORT IN THE ABDUCTED CHILDREN  
FINLAND NGO – A BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION  
FOR THE GUIDEBOOK**

Kira Koltsova

Thesis, Autumn 2017

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences

Helsinki Unit

Degree Programme in Social Services -

Focus on Community and Development

Work

Bachelor of Social Services (UAS)

## ABSTRACT

Koltsova Kira. Peer Support in the Abducted Children Finland NGO – a Background Data Collection for the Guidebook. Autumn 2017, 36 pages, 4 appendices. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki Unit. Degree Programme in Social Services, Bachelor of Social Services.

This is a project oriented thesis done in collaboration with the Abducted Children Finland NGO (Kaatut Lapset). The aim of this thesis was to make a background data collection about peer support in the organization for the guidebook, which will be written during 2017 and possibly 2018 by the NGO and used to train new volunteers. The organization was established in 1997 to provide peer support, but they have not yet created own guidebook specifically for their own peer supporters.

This project started during the practical placement at the organization in autumn 2016, and continued until autumn 2017. The topics for the guidebook were chosen with the executive director and modified during data collection process. The data was gathered from four peer supporters from the NGO via semi structured individual and group interviews, which were transcribed and summarized. Other background data collection material was obtained from already existing literature about peer support and other relevant topics, such as empathy fatigue and stages of crisis. The executive director was interviewed two times during the process.

Ethical consideration was important part of this data collection, because child abduction is a sensitive topic and the clientele of the organization is quite small. The consent from the participants in the interviews had to be taken and their anonymity maintained throughout the whole project and after it was completed.

The data collection took more time that it was planned in the beginning due to personal issues. Other obstacles, such as smaller number of participants than anticipated for the interviews, were faced during the process. Nevertheless, the data gathered was enough to be evaluated in this thesis and will hopefully serve its rightful purpose in the guidebook.

Key words: peer support, peer supporter, child abduction, guidebook

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION .....	5
2 THE PURPOSE OF BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION .....	7
3 DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABDUCTION, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PEER SUPPORT.....	8
3.1 Child Abduction.....	8
3.2 Social Support and Peer Support .....	9
4 THE ABDUCTED CHILDREN FINLAND NGO .....	11
5 PEER SUPPORT IN THE ABDUCTED CHILDREN FINLAND NGO.....	13
5.1 Peer Supporters.....	13
5.2 The Clients of Peer Support .....	14
5.3 Well-being of the peer supporters and clients.....	14
5.3.1 Peer Supporters and Empathy Fatigue .....	15
5.3.2 Psychological and Physical Effects of Child Abduction on Parents ...	15
5.4 Implementation of Peer Support in the association .....	16
6 THE PROCESS OF BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION .....	18
6.1 Need for the Project.....	18
6.2 Target Group .....	19
6.3 Goals and Objectives.....	19
6.4 Data Collection .....	20
6.5 Ethical Consideration.....	21
6.6 Challenges and risks of the project.....	21
6.7 Summary of the Interviews and Literature Review .....	23
6.8 Publication .....	25
7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	26
8 CURRENT SITUATION AND CONTINUATION.....	27

REFERENCES .....	28
APPENDIX 1: Haastattelukysymykset (Questionnaire).....	32
APPENDIX 2: Suostumuslomake (Research consent) .....	34
APPENDIX 3: Vertaistuen oppaan sisältö (The contents of a guidebook) .....	35
APPENDIX 4: Project schedule .....	36

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This is a background data collection done in collaboration with the Abducted Children Finland NGO. The aim of the thesis project is to provide background information for writing a guidebook for the peer supporters in the organization in the future. The thesis aims to explain the process of executing the project, including the project plan, data gathering, evaluation of the project and its outcomes.

The Abducted Children Finland NGO Children (Kaatatut Lapset ry) is a Finnish non-governmental organization that works with the cases of international child abduction and international custody disputes since 1997 (Kaatatut Lapset ry 2016). The association uses peer support as one of their methods when working with clients. The idea of creating an own guidebook for new volunteers came from the executive director, who is responsible for the coordination of the peer supporters and clients in the organization.

Peer support is used in many third sector service providers and is seen as an effective preventative working tool in social field. The idea of peer support is to use person's experiential knowledge to provide support to others in similar situations. (Holm, Huuskonen, Jyrkämä, Karnell, Laimio, Lehtinen, Myllymaa, & Vahtivaara 2010.) Becoming a peer supporter is usually voluntary, but it does require good listening skills and ability to feel empathetic towards others (Cowie & Wallace 2000). Emotional support is not only significant for the receivers of it, but also for those providing. Especially in cases of child abduction, which is a sensitive topic as well as not so common in Finland, peer support is very important.

The idea of the project came from the executive director and my supervisor during the practical placement at the association during autumn of 2016. The NGO was planning to write a guidebook for their 20-year anniversary in 2017, but because of the limited time the gathering of background information took longer. There are already quite a few guidebooks written about peer support and used widely in social field, but each topic has specific problems and

different features that need to be addressed. The volunteers in the association need a guidebook that specifically covers the issues that come from child abduction or other related topics, so that they would be able to provide better support.

As a professional in social field, learning about peer support and why it is effective can be useful in the working life, since many organizations use it as a tool. Writing a guidebook requires thorough research and understanding of the topic, which is why gathering information is essential and important part of the process. During the project the data was collected from already existing materials as well as from the peer supporters in the organization via semi structured interviews (see Appendix 1). This thesis will later be used by the association to create the guidebook for the peer supporters of Abducted Children Finland NGO.

## 2 THE PURPOSE OF BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION

The Abducted Children Finland NGO has used peer support from the very beginning of its establishment in 1997, but has yet to make an own guidebook. The volunteers in the organization have a general training about mental support and other related topics, but nothing that relates specifically to their issues, such as child abduction, international custody disputes or alienation. The aim of this data collection was to find out those unique needs of peer supporters, who will receive training and guidebook made for them. Another purpose was to chart the need of exactly what type of information do the new volunteers need before becoming peer supporters.

There is a lot of expertise inside of the organization and many of the members are acting as peer supporters. Having an own guidebook would bring more reliability to the work of peer supporters, because it would be based on written knowledge and collected data. Another reason for gathering data and creating a guidebook is to raise awareness about the association and the peer support that they provide. (Räisänen 2016.)

Peer support is widely used in many organizations, but as Holm et al. (2010) describe, the motives are different and there are also some specific features in the work depending on the client group. The concept is the same, it is based on experiential knowledge of the peer supporter, who is there to listen and support others, but the issues that need attention vary. Therefore, an own guidebook for peer supporters in the association would be valuable and a profound background data collection for it is needed (Räisänen 2016).

### 3 DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABDUCTION, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PEER SUPPORT

In this chapter the key words of this project are defined and explained. It is important to understand the key terms and make them clear for the reader, because definitions of different words may vary across literature. This chapter defines child abduction and peer support.

#### 3.1 Child Abduction

The definition of the Abducted Children Finland NGO on child abduction is based on the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, It aims to secure the return of a child and to ensure the rights of a custody, but this applies only to Contracting States. (Hague Conference on Private International Law) This convention was concluded in 1980, because international parental rights disputes are occurring more frequently, and the process is supposedly facilitated when the countries have a common agreement on the topic, even though that is not always the case (Castellano 2014).

According to Missing Children Europe (2015), parental abduction means that: "Child is taken to or kept in a country other than that of his/her normal residence by one parent against the will of other." This concerns all children under the age of 16. It also includes situations where a child is not returned after the visitation schedule has expired. (Ahlqvist, Isaksson, Tikkanen & Turtola 2015, 201-202.)

The organization works only with parental child abduction cases. Especially international custody disputes have become more complex over the past years, meaning that the need for support has risen and the processes might take a long period of time. (Kaatut Lapset ry 2003.) In cases where a parent is the

only custodian, he or she has the right to travel with a child without the consent of another (Räisänen 2017).

Reasons behind the child abduction are many. In some cases, a parent takes the child on purpose to punish the other parent, whilst in other cases abduction is used to reconcile or force interaction with the other. There might also be the fear of losing custody rights or visitation rights that pushes parents to execute the act, and on rare occasions this is done to protect the child from possible abuse or neglect. (StopFamilyAbductionsNow.org n.d.)

### 3.2 Social Support and Peer Support

Social relationships have positive effect on the health and well-being of a person, when there is social support. There are three theoretical perspectives according to Cohen, Underwood and Gottlieb (2000) on social support, from which the stress and coping perspective is the most influential one. In this type of support a person receives supportive actions, such as giving reassurance, from the others. Social support is considered to enhance the coping performance and to improve health by reducing the effects of stressful life events.

There are different ways of providing social support and peer support is one of them. Peer support can be emotional, informational, and/or belonging support. The first one refers to the supporter listening to a person and expressing comfort and care. Informational support is when someone gives guidance and advice, whilst through shared social activities a person gets a sense of social belonging. (Uchino 2004.)

Peer support is based on experiential knowledge sharing and is considered a preventative working method in social field (Anttonen 2013). It is one form of voluntary work that is widely used in many third sector organizations. The basic idea is that one of our needs is to feel that we belong somewhere and creating new social relations, which are important for our well-being. Support from

another person helps in life management and empowers to take control of own life. (Mykkänen-Hänninen & Kääriäinen 2009.)

In practice, using peer support as a method varies depending on the resources of the provider and the needs of the supported persons. There are for instance meetings, which can be held either one-on-one with the supporter, or as a group. These meetings are done face-to-face, but giving peer support is also possible via internet or phone. (Holm et al. 2010.)

The role of a peer supporter requires some preparation and work. Participation in training prepares the supporter mentally and gives tools to work with other people. Other responsibilities of a peer supporter are to communicate with the person as well as other peer supporters, initiating the contact, establishing a relationship, sending and receiving phone calls or texts, and supporting the other person to work through the hard times. (Rebeiro Gruhl, LaCarte & Calixte 2016.)

Peer support has been studied before and it has been proven to increase the social well-being of people. It aims to empower and make people believe in their own abilities (Holm et al. 2010). There seems to be benefits for the volunteers as well and according to previous studies some of the motives to become a peer support person are: the want to help, social relations and connections, the want to do something, learning something new about yourself, feeling useful (Holm et al. 2010, 20). Another study suggests that volunteers do not only want to feel like they are doing a meaningful job, but it also creates a feeling of community (Greener 2016).

Sometimes peer support is not successful. Some people can find it difficult to open up and share personal information. It depends a lot on the individuals whether the peer supporter and the client will get along and bond or not, even if they share similar experiences. (Shilling, Bailey, Logan & Morris 2015.)

#### 4 THE ABDUCTED CHILDREN FINLAND NGO

The Abducted Children Finland NGO (Kaatatut Lapset ry) is a Finnish non-governmental organization founded in 1997. The association works with the cases related to international child abduction and custody disputes in the country. It is a member organization of Ensi- ja turvakotien liitto (The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters), Yhden Vanhemman Perheiden – liitto, and Kansalaisareena (Citizen Forum) and it works in international cooperation with Missing Children Europe. (Kaatatut Lapset n.d.) The association has been funded by RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association) since 2003 (Kaatatut Lapset ry 2003). However from 2017, RAY became a part of bigger company and the main funder changed to Veikkaus Oy (Finnish gaming company) (Setlementti n.d). Other sponsors are Opintokeskus Sivis (Sivis Study Centre) and the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Tampere. The organization works nationwide, but the main office called Toivon Talo is located in Helsinki.

The founder of the association is Heidi Uotila, who has experienced child abduction herself. She was motivated to help other parents in similar situation, so peer support was the main tool to use in the Abducted Children Finland NGO from the very beginning. The aim of the organization is to support and give practical advice for those who need it. (Rikama n.d.)

The table below shows statistics from the year 2015 on child abductions, both done to Finland and from Finland. It is important to notice that not all countries have signed the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which would help to deal with the cases via Ministry of Justice if both states are in the contract. When a child is abducted to the country outside of Convention, the process is done according to the legislation of the concerned state. Especially in cases where a child, parent or both parents are citizens of the country, the chances of returning the child to the other parent are limited. (Kaatatut Lapset ry n.d.)

TABLE 1. Child Abductions in 2015

	"Old" cases	New cases	Process has ended
WHERE		2015	2015
Australia*		3	3
Brazil*	1	1	1
Egypt		1	1
Spain*	2	4	4
Irak	1		
Iran		1	
Mexico*		2	
France*		1	1
Sweden*		5	1
Sudan	2		1
Thailand*		1	1
Tunisia	1		
Unknown	1		
Turkey*	1		
Russia	3		1
Russia*		2	1
Estonia*		3	1
USA*		2	2
<b>From Finland</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>To Finland</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total amount</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>abducted children in 2015</b>
<b>31.12.2015</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>in process</b>	
* the country has signed the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction			
Russia joined in 2013			
The abductor was either a mother or a father			
References: statistics from Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs			

(Kaatut Lapset n.d)

## 5 PEER SUPPORT IN THE ABDUCTED CHILDREN FINLAND NGO

The organization has five set values, which guide their peer support work. Raising and maintaining hope about the future is the first one, which is directly linked to the work of peer supporters. The aim is to empower a person and guide them through the situation by giving tools to cope with the stress and see a brighter future.

The second value is about the rights of a child for safe childhood, bringing up the best interests of a child, maintaining the child's trust in adults and caring for a child. Peer supporters must always remember that in every situation they should think about what is best for the child, also explaining this to the parent.

Confidentiality is the third value, which includes the contactor trusting in the secrecy being kept about the situation, and being respected for the decisions they make. Fourth value concerns communality, meaning that no one is left alone. All the clients are heard and if it is required, they can be directed to other organizations and authorities if the issues are outside of the area of expertise of the association.

Parity and equity come as the last but not the least values for the association. Respecting diversity, non-discrimination, sanctity of human dignity of the client and transparency on the activities must be executed by all the members in the organization. (Kaapatut Lapset ry 2014.)

### 5.1 Peer Supporters

In the Abducted Children Finland NGO the peer supporters are volunteers, who have an experience of child abduction or related issues. Peer support is organized individually for each person. The decisions about connecting the client and peer supporter are made by the executive director, who also

supervises all the activities. The contact occurs mostly via phone calls or texting, but meetings face-to-face are also possible. Sometimes there might be cases when peer supporter attends legal proceedings or meetings with the child with the client. (Räisänen 2016.)

The main role of the peer supporters in the association is to listen, hear and support based on their own experiences. Peer supporters are not required to know everything about child abduction, international custody disputes, preventing child abductions, alienation cases or other bigger issues, because they are experts by experience. In these situations, the clients can be directed to the main office Toivon Talo of the organization. (Kaapatut Lapset ry 2014.)

## 5.2 The Clients of Peer Support

The clients are mostly parents, whose children have been abducted or are at risk of being abducted. They might have also issues with alienation, international child custody disputes or other problems related to child abduction. The organization's duty is to provide peer support person for them, presumably someone with similar experience who can listen and share their knowledge.

## 5.3 Well-being of the peer supporters and clients

Child abduction is a stressful event, which can have severe psychological and physical effects on a parent. Knowing the stages of crisis and effects of them will hopefully help peer supporters to understand the situation better and handle it in a sensitive manner, meaning that the supporters have an important role in supporting the client. However, own wellbeing is always a priority and peer supporters must be aware for instance of the risks of empathy fatigue and how to prevent or treat it.

### 5.3.1 Peer Supporters and Empathy Fatigue

Peer supporters must take care of their own well-being, because listening to the stories of the people they are supporting might open old wounds and bring unpleasant memories of their own situations in the past. Especially when similar experiences are repeated time after time, the peer supporter's mental, emotional, social, physical and spiritual well-being is on the line and exhaustion can occur. This type of burnout is called empathy fatigue. (Stebnicki 2008.)

The association is responsible for preventing and healing empathy fatigue of its peer supporters. The supporters are advised to explore their own boundaries with the clients and take care of their own health, but the association also supports them by organizing empowering weekends. These are the weekends where supporters can socialize with each other, reflect on their own experiences, and get support from each other. (Räisänen 2016.)

### 5.3.2 Psychological and Physical Effects of Child Abduction on Parents

Those parents who have had their child abducted experience many different feelings and go through many stages before the crisis is over. According to the theory mentioned in a thesis by Iivonen and Keskinen (2013), Johan Cullberg has constructed a model, where the stages of traumatic crisis are: 1. shock stage, 2. reaction stage, 3. coping stage, and 4. orientation towards the future (REFLECTD.CO 2014).

The parent goes through many emotions during the stages. In a research by Iivonen & Keskinen (2013) they found out that during the shock period parents feel disbelief, but are still able to make rational decisions. The will to do anything to get their children back is very strong and motivates to search for more information, contact authorities and find ways to bring them back.

The physical pain comes in reaction stage, when the shock is gone and the parent starts to understand what has happened. The coping stage is time for

isolation and there can be difficulties in concentrating. The last stage, orientation towards the future, happens when the parent accepts the situation. There is also difference between those parents who get their child back and those who do not. If a child is returned, the parents can start a new life, whilst those whose children are still missing the last stage can continue for the rest of their lives. (Iivonen & Keskinen 2013.)

#### 5.4 Implementation of Peer Support in the association

The volunteers are most of the time people, who have received support themselves from the organization before. When their situation becomes steady, the executive director evaluates it and the well-being of a person before contacting them to see whether they would be interested in becoming a peer supporter.

Peer supporters receive at least one training organized by the Finnish Red Cross called Mental health support course, which has also an advanced course. This training contains information about what tools to use with people who are in crisis, what emotions, feeling and reactions crisis situations raise in other people and in yourself, and how to cope with sudden and unexpected crisis situations in own life (Punainen Risti n.d).

It is the responsibility of the executive director to coordinate between peer supporters and clients by connecting them and choosing suitable pairs. In some cases, the supporter and client share the same country where a child has been abducted, in other situations the chemistry between the two might be the determinant.

In practice, both parties are contacted first by the executive director. The client is asked whether he or she would like to have a support person, and the peer support person is assessed in their current situation and asked whether they would like to support this particular client with such a case. If both agree, they

share contacts and the client is free to choose if they want to use the opportunity of support or not.

The clients receive once a year a questionnaire, where they are asked whether their needs have been met. The well-being and coping of the peer supporters is also checked upon regularly. It is possible to quit supporting for some time if own life situation becomes too difficult to handle. (Räsänen 2016.)

## 6 THE PROCESS OF BACKGROUND DATA COLLECTION

The project took place between the autumn of 2016 and autumn of 2017 (see Appendix 4). It started during my practical placement at the Abducted Children Finland NGO, where the idea came from the executive director. She told about their intention of writing a guidebook for the new peer supporters in the association, and my role was to make a background data collection of information that could be useful in the guidebook. The project included planning the guidebook contents, data gathering from literature and four interviews with peer supporters from the association, transcribing the interviews, and summarizing the data and matching it with the contents of a guidebook (see Appendix 3). There was no budget, because the association provided the needed space and materials for the interviews, and literature was found using the NGO's own materials at the office, academic databases and Diak library.

### 6.1 Need for the Project

According to Marks (2012), the purpose of a project is to bring benefit or purpose through a product or a service produced. The projects can be divided to serve either a business or social purpose, the former of which is mostly done for the profit whilst the latter aims to bring enjoyment. This project serves a social purpose, because the data collected will be used for a further and better education of new volunteers in the association.

One of the main functions of the organization is to provide peer support. It is a universal concept, which can be applied in many contexts and client groups, but all of them have certain specific characteristics that help the peer supporters to act their role. Even though the association has been using peer support since the beginning and provided volunteers with some training, they do not yet have their own guidebook and training specifically made for own peer supporters.

There are certain aspects that need to be considered when supporting people with child abduction cases, which might have variety of problems including international custody disputes and alienation. This background data collection project will try to provide information about the needs of this group of people and the results will be used in the peer support guidebook.

## 6.2 Target Group

The target group of this project is the Abducted Children Finland NGO, who will use the background data material to write the guidebook. Another target group are the volunteers, who will receive the guidebook to support their process of becoming peer supporters.

## 6.3 Goals and Objectives

Projects generally have some sort of goal that they are trying to achieve and objectives, which are smaller steps leading to the end result (Heagney 2011). Definition of a goal starts with definition of a problem, which in this case is the lack of an own guidebook in the Abducted Children Finland NGO. After the goal is clear, it is possible to start planning the process for achieving it.

When measuring objectives, an acronym SMART can be used to remember what needs to be assessed. This acronym stands for the words: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time limited (Heagney 2011). The objectives might not always be met, and this has to be taken into account in the risk analysis. For this project the objectives can be seen in the schedule (see Appendix 4), which includes the interviews, transcribing them, literature search, evaluation of the data, meetings with the executive director and the time by which each task has been completed.

Going through the acronym SMART, the objectives of the data collection were specific, because it was quite clear from the beginning how the materials would be gathered, where it would be done and what was the purpose of each method. The interviews, literature search, transcribing the interviews, evaluating data and meetings with the executive director were possible to measure after the completion of each task and see whether they were executed according to plan. A time frame had to be set for each task, so they would be completed on time and it would be possible to proceed to the next one. Certain objectives were not reached as planned, which will be discussed later in chapter 6.6 Challenges and risks of the project, but with the risk assessment they were still considered attainable and realistic.

#### 6.4 Data Collection

The first acquisition of information came from books and the materials from the organization itself, whilst the second step was conducting interviews with peer supporters. The already existing materials included books and documents at the office and other information could be found from the internet and local libraries.

For the interviews the executive director contacted six possible volunteers via email and phone calls, and asked whether they would be interested in participating. In the end there were four participants in total, each of whom was informed about the study and how it will be conducted, and asked to read and sign the agreement letter (see Appendix 2).

The semi structured interviews were in Finnish and held during autumn of 2016 and winter of 2017. Two of them were individual and one group interview, which were recorded by the permission of the interviewees (Appendix 2). One of the meetings was held at the office Toivon Talo, and the rest in the location of empowering weekend. All of the interviews took from thirty minutes to around one hour to complete. The recordings were transcribed during spring and

summer of 2017, and later analysed in autumn of 2017 to see what information could be used for the guidebook.

The questions in the questionnaire (Appendix 1) were divided according to different themes: basic information, training, acting as a peer supporter, experiences in being a peer supporter, tips and recommendations, and the role of the organization. In summary, the interviewees were asked about the training they have received to support their role as peer supporters, what do they do in practice, their own positive and negative experiences in peer supporting and has it affected their views on their own cases, what recommendations they could give for the new volunteers, and how has the organization been involved in peer support activity.

## 6.5 Ethical Consideration

The topic of child abduction is very sensitive, and the association is quite small in amount of its members and clients. From the very beginning of a project it had to be planned, what information from the participants could be used and how to protect their identities. Each interviewee had to sign a research consent (see Appendix 2), which informed them about the background of a project, their right to withdraw from it at any moment for any reason, and the interview being heard only by the interviewee and later destroyed after the project was done.

## 6.6 Challenges and risks of the project

Risk management is part of the project process, which has to be done in order to get a realistic picture of the success of a project. Risk assessment helps to prevent possible obstacles and challenges that may affect the result. The risks

that must be evaluated are the timing of the project, any budget, quality of the work and performance. (Marks 2012.)

The challenges that were faced during this project include finding the right materials for the data collection, success of interviews in terms of the number participants as well as the information acquired from the interviewees, executing all tasks according to the plan, the smooth cooperation with the association and writing a coherent thesis about the topic. Finding the appropriate materials was one of the most important parts of the project, because it had to be done in cooperation with the executive director of an organization and the data had to be relevant with the topics chosen for the guidebook.

As for the schedule of a project (see Appendix 4), the original plan was to have everything ready by spring 2017, when the guidebook would also be already written. The Abducted Children Finland NGO had their 20<sup>th</sup> year anniversary this year 2017, and the publication of the guidebook was meant to be done 25.5. on a National Missing Children's Day. Due to personal issues and limited time, the process of data collection was not ready in time, so writing of a guidebook could not be started either.

Another change in a plan was made concerning the interviews and interviewees. The executive director contacted six peer supporters, of whom four agreed to do the interview. Also plan for individual interviews was executed only with two of the volunteers, whilst one interview was done with two peer supporters. The results were actually better from the group interview, because the interviewees brought different ideas to the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), which gave more thoughts for the other participant.

The cooperation with the executive director of the association worked quite well during the whole process. She was open to communication and ideas, and supported with giving constructive feedback on the process and the project despite the challenges that were faced. The communication did suffer during the times of a break on the project during summer 2017, but was reconstructed again in the beginning of autumn 2017.

## 6.7 Summary of the Interviews and Literature Review

The contents of the guidebook (see Appendix 3) were talked through with the executive director before planning the structure of the interviews (see Appendix 1) and searching for literature. At the moment, during this thesis project, the plan for the guidebook includes some basic information about the association, definition of peer support, and the policy of the association. Topics related to peer supporter and their role would describe the practical aspect of how it happens and how to support, also the own wellbeing of the peer supporters in the volunteer work. Information about different stages of crisis of a parent and when to seek for professional help are also included, because the peer supporters should understand what the parent is feeling and what tools they can use to support, but at the same time remember that they are not professionals. The role of the association and how they support their own volunteers would be in the last chapters of the guidebook. In the next paragraphs the results of the interviews are reviewed.

All the current peer supporters had themselves received support from the association and wanted to share their knowledge as well. The number of clients for each peer supporter differ; sometimes there can be even four at the same time, but the ideal would be two. The crises change over time, sometimes they are active and sometimes they are quiet. From the literature, a thesis written by Iivonen & Keskinen (2013) describes the stages of crisis and what are the needs of that person during different period.

The only training the volunteers in the association have at the moment is Mental support course by the Finnish Red Cross, which all participants found informative and useful. Some of the things that rose about the courses were how important it actually is for peer supporters themselves to be active in their role and ask about the situation of the supported person. Many times, a person in crisis is not able to do anything. Another notice about the course was that it enabled the participants to talk with each other as well about their experiences and learn from them.

A good support person as described by the interviewees needs different skills, but being empathetic and able to listen were mentioned as the most important ones. Also being your own person and not pretending anything else, because another person can sense easily if the other one is not being fully honest.

Another thing that was emphasized was having some boundaries when it comes to support and contact, this concerning both parties. The peer supporters must set times when they are available, because they also have their own lives to take care of. For instance, calls at night or during work can be left unanswered, although the caller will be contacted as soon as possible. The second challenge for peer supporters is to find the balance in how much they can guide and help the other person. They cannot give straight answers or tell to do anything, but they can listen and give suggestions.

A thesis by Iivonen and Keskinen (2013) "Kansainvälinen lapsikaappaus kriisikokemuksena ja siitä selviytyminen vanhemman näkökulmasta" (International child abduction as a crisis experience and emerging from it from the point of view of a parent) is a good source to use in describing what do the parents go through when their child is abducted by another parent. Though a critical approach towards this source must be taken, because it is a bachelor thesis and there is no guarantee that the information is all correct. However, considering that there is not much research done on the topic of child abduction in Finland, this material provides relevant information for the guidebook.

This thesis contains the stages of crisis, the psychological and physical effects of each, and information about what to take into consideration when a person is at a certain phase. The peer supporters should learn about the stages of crisis, because understanding the reasons behind a certain behaviour gives power to be realistic in the situation and knowledge about how to handle it. This information could help also the new volunteers to think about their situation from a different perspective and manage it better, so when helping the clients the own experience would not interfere with the given support.

A guidebook written by Holm et al (2010) "Vertaistoiminta kannattaa" (Peer support is worthwhile) about peer support for Kansalaisareena gives a good overview about the work that the peer supporters do and why it is important.

There are descriptions of different tools, which can be used when working with clients and the results of good peer support. This guidebook could be used as a theoretical background for the guidebook of the association.

The third literature source that would be valuable to use for the guidebook is a book by Ahlqvist et al (2015) "Jäähyväiset jasmiinipuulle – vanhempien kertomuksia lapsikaappauksesta" (Goodbye to the jasmine – stories from parents about child abduction). It has real stories written by the parents and peer supporters about the cases that they have had and situations they have been in related to child abduction. This source could be used to include a story in the guidebook to give some practical example about a situation, and how having a peer supporter beside made it more bearable. At the end of the book there are chapters, which describe child abduction, how to prevent it, and what does support mean in the association. This type of information could be included in the first chapters of a guidebook, so the readers would immediately envision the whole picture of the role of peer supporters.

## 6.8 Publication

This thesis will be published in Autumn 2017 according to Diak guidelines on Theseus.com. It will also be added as a literature source on the webpage of Abducted Children Finland NGO, where it will be available to the public. The association will as well have a printed version in their office.

## 7 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the process of this project, I learned many valuable lessons. I had some experience in project management from practical placements, but this process was entirely my responsibility, although some of the instructions did come from the association I worked in cooperation with.

Planning is an essential part of any project. Without a proper plan, it is impossible to evaluate the potential success and outcomes of the project. The risks are also something that need to be taken into consideration, so they can be minimized or completely prevented. During this project I had to make changes in the plan and react to situations, which I had not predicted beforehand. This has shown me that there can be many obstacles in the way, and not every project is as successful as it is hoped to be.

Since the project was done with a working life partner, it was important to stay in contact with them and inform about the process, and get constructive feedback from their point of view. I believe this has improved my communication skills and made me more courageous to bring up my own ideas and knowledge. The support and understanding from the association has played a big role in this development.

Interviewing people was not a new experience to me, but I had to be more precise with the questions and the information that I had to obtain from the interviewees than before. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, so making them clear and limiting the time would be something to think about the next time.

Writing this thesis has been one of the most difficult part of the project, because so much information had to be evaluated and demonstrated in a coherent way. I believe that the writing process will be useful in the professional field, because the workers must write reports and other documents about their work to make it transparent for the public and funders, depending on the working place. From my own experience in the field during placements, project management and writing skills are very much needed and appreciated.

## 8 CURRENT SITUATION AND CONTINUATION

The project started at the end of Autumn of 2016, and some improvements have already been done for the peer support activity since then. The interviewees had completed the second training of mental support course, which was not seen as useful as the first one. Another project is under development, which is about creating a safe online forum for the peer supporters and other members of the association. This would be done in collaboration with other organizations, some of whom already have experience with such forums that are working well. (Räisänen 2017.)

There is a new service provided to the clients, which is a family friend visitor. It has started during this year of 2017, and there will be some training for it from the next year of 2018. So far, the service has been given a warm welcome and the clients have given positive feedback about it. This has been beneficial also for the peer supporters, because the family friend visitor is also facilitating the life of a client. (Räisänen 2017.)

The writing of a guidebook has already begun this year during the publication of this thesis. The aim is to have the guidebook ready by this year of 2017, but there is a possibility that the publication will be done in to beginning of next year 2018. Feedback from the Abducted Children Finland NGO about this project has been very supportive, so hopefully this background data collection has served the purpose of bringing relevant materials for the guidebook and more visibility and appreciation to the work of peer supporters in the organization.

## REFERENCES

- Ahlqvist, Agneta; Isaksson, Paavo; Tikkanen, Anna-Maija & Turtola, Tanja 2015. Jäähyväiset jasmiinipuille – vanhempien kertomuksia lapsikaappauksesta. *Kansainvälinen lapsikaappaus* p. 201-202. Kaapatut Lapset ry. PlusPrint Oy, Ulvila.
- Anttonen, Hannamari 2013. VERTAISTUKEA RYHMÄSTÄ – Vertaisohjaajan opas. Opinnäytetyö, Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu, Pieksämäki. Accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2016  
[https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/57322/Anttonen\\_Hannamari.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/57322/Anttonen_Hannamari.pdf?sequence=1)
- Castellano, Kim 2014. International parental child abduction and the problem with the Hague Convention. Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2017  
<https://library.law.yale.edu/news/international-parental-child-abduction-and-problem-hague-convention>
- Cohen, Sheldon; Underwood, Lynn G. & Gottlieb, Benjamin H. 2000. *Social Support Measurement and Intervention: A Guide for Health and Social Scientists*. Oxford University Press. Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. Available on EBRARY
- Cowie, Helen & Wallace, Patti 2000. *Peer Support in Action: From Bystanding to Standing By*. SAGE Publications. Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017. Available on Ebook Central.
- Greener, Mark 2016. Peer support: more than tea and sympathy. *Practical Diabetes* 33 (5), 176-177. Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2017. Available on EBSCOhost
- Hague Conference on Private International Law n.d. 28: Convention of 25 October 1980 on the Civil Aspect of International Child Abduction. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2017  
<https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/full-text/?cid=24>

Heagney, Joseph 2011. Fundamentals of Project Management. AMACOM.

Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2017. Available on Ebook Central

Holm, Jaana; Huuskonen, Päivi; Jyrkämä, Oili; Karnell, Sonja; Laimio, Anne; Lehtinen, Ilona; Myllymaa, Tapio & Vahtivaara, Julia-Maarie 2010.

Vertaistoiminta kannattaa. Asumispalvelusäätiö ASPA, SOLVER palvelut Oy, Kansalaisareena. Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2016.

[http://www.kansalaisareena.fi/Vertaistoiminta\\_kannattaa.pdf](http://www.kansalaisareena.fi/Vertaistoiminta_kannattaa.pdf)

livonen, Jenni & Keskinen, Piia 2013. Kansainvälinen lapsikaappaus

kriisikokemuksena ja siitä selviytyminen vanhemman näkökulmasta.

Otaniemi. Laurea- ammattikorkeakoulu. Accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2016

<https://ensijaturvakotienliitto-fi->

[bin.directo.fi/@Bin/1ed5f9609970af00d7796f242ecc3669/1477304568/application/pdf/4321731/Opinnaytetyo\\_livonen\\_%20Keskinen\\_2013.pdf](https://ensijaturvakotienliitto-fi-bin.directo.fi/@Bin/1ed5f9609970af00d7796f242ecc3669/1477304568/application/pdf/4321731/Opinnaytetyo_livonen_%20Keskinen_2013.pdf)

Kaapatut Lapset ry n.d. Tietoa. Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.

<https://ensijaturvakotienliitto.fi/kaapatutlapset/tietoa/#lapsikaappaustilastoja>

Kaapatut Lapset ry 2016. Toimintasuunnitelma vuodelle 2017. Archive of

Kaapatut Lapset ry Accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2016.

Kaapatut Lapset ry 2003. Toimintakertomus vuodelta 2003. Archive of Kaapatut

Lapset ry. Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2016.

Kaapatut Lapset ry 2014. Toimintalinja. Yhteydenottajien ja perheiden

kohtaamiseen. Archive of Kaapatut Lapset ry. Accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2016

Marks, Tony 2012. 20:20 Project management. Kogan Page. Accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup>

of October 2017. Available on Ebook Central

Missing Children Europe 2015. Figures and trends 2015. From hotlines for

missing children and cross-border family mediators. Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2016.

<http://missingchildreneurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/Annual%20and%20Data%20reports/Missing%20Children%20Europe%20figures%20and%20trends%202015.pdf>

- Mykkänen-Hänninen, Riitta & Kääriäinen, Aino 2009. Vertaisuus ja vertaistuki eroauttamisessa. Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto/Neuvo-projekti, Hakapaino Oy, Helsinki.
- Punainen Risti n.d. Henkisen tuen peruskurssi. Accessed on 8th of October.  
Available at  
[https://www.redcross.fi/tapahtumahaku?f\[0\]=field\\_subjects%3A2694](https://www.redcross.fi/tapahtumahaku?f[0]=field_subjects%3A2694)
- Rikama, Anne n.d. Suuren riidan pieni uhri. Valitut palat. Archive of Kaapatut Lapset ry. Accessed on 3<sup>th</sup> of November 2016
- Rebeiro Gruhl, Karen L.; LaCarte, Sara & Calixte, Shana 2016. Authentic peer support work: challenges and opportunities for an evolving occupation. *Journal of Mental Health* 25 (1), 78-86. Accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.  
Available on EBSCOhost
- REFLECTED.CO 2014. A stage model of how our mind and body respond to traumatic stress. Accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2016.  
<http://reflectd.co/2014/04/12/a-stage-model-of-trauma/>
- Räisänen, Tarja 2016. The executive director, Kaapatut Lapset ry. Helsinki.  
Interview 25.10.2016
- Räisänen, Tarja 2017. The executive director, Kaapatut Lapset ry. Helsinki.  
Interview 14.9.2017.
- Setlementti n.d. Sosiaali- ja terveysjärjestöjen avustuskeskus STEA. Accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2017.  
<https://www.setlementti.fi/kehittaminenjavaikuttavuus/rahoituspankki/sosiaali-ja-terveysjarjestojen-a/>
- Shilling, V.; Bailey, S.; Logan, S. & Morris, C. 2015. Peer support for parents of disabled children part 2: how organizational process factors influenced shared experience in a one-to-one service, a qualitative study. *Child: Care, Health & Development* 41 (4) 537-546. Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2016. Available on EBSCOhost

Stebnicki, Mark A. 2008. Empathy Fatigue: Healing the Mind, Body, and Spirit of Professional Counselors. Accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2017. Available on EBRARY

StopFamilyAbductionsNow.org n.d. Accessed on 3<sup>rd</sup> of November.  
<http://www.stopfamilyabductionsnow.org/parents.html?referrer=https://www.google.fi/>

Uchino, Bert N. 2004. Social Support and Physical Health: Understanding the Health Consequences of Relationships. Yale University Press. Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. Available on EBRARY

## APPENDIX 1: Haastattelukysymykset (Questionnaire)

Ikä:                      Sukupuoli:

1. Kauanko olet toiminut vertaistukihenkilönä?
2. Miten sinusta tuli vertaistukihenkilö?
3. Oletko itse saanut vertaistukea?

### **Koulutus**

4. Oletko osallistunut koulutukseen? Jos vastaus on myöntävä niin missä ja millaista koulutusta olet saanut? Jos et ole, miksi ja millaista toivoisit?
5. Mitä mieltä olet koulutuksesta?

### **Vertaistukijana toimiminen**

6. Kuinka monelle ihmiselle olet ollut vertaistukihenkilönä?
7. Millä tavalla olet yhteydessä ja tuet vertaista? Soittoja, tapaamisia, sähköposti, muu
8. Kuinka usein yhteydenotto tapahtuu? Kuka ottaa yhteyttä?

### **Omat kokemukset vertaistukijana olemisesta**

9. Onko tullut haasteita vastaan vertaistukihenkilönä olemisessa? Minkälaisia? Henkilökohtaisia haasteita, tuettavaan liittyviä
10. Millaisia tunteita on noussut esille tukisuhteissa? Miten käsittelet ne?
11. Onko tukihenkilönä oleminen auttanut käsittelemään omaa tilannettasi?
12. Mitä vertaistukijana toimiminen on antanut sinulle? Ystäviä jne.
13. Millainen on hyvä tukihenkilö?
14. Omat vahvuudet sekä heikkoudet vertaistukijana. Onko mitään mitä haluaisit kehittää itsessä?

### **Vinkkejä ja ehdotuksia**

15. Millaisia vinkkejä antaisit vertaiseksi haluavalle?

16. Mitä vertaistuen oppaassa olisi tärkeä kertoa Kaapatut Lapset ry:n vertaisena toimimisesta?

### **Yhdistyksen toiminta**

17. Miten Kaapatut Lapset ry on mukana vertaistukitoiminnassa? Onko toivomuksia yhdistyksen osalta?

## APPENDIX 2: Suostumuslomake (Research consent)

Haastattelun tekijä: Kira Koltsova, sosionomiopiskelija, Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu

Haastattelun tarkoitus: Opinnäytetyö, Vertaistuen opas

Yhteistyössä: Kaapatut Lapset ry

Olen saanut tarvittavat tiedot tutkimuksesta ja olen tietoinen oikeudestani keskeyttää tutkimukseen osallistumisen ja kieltää tietojeni käyttämisen milloin tahansa.

Minulle on kerrottu että antamani haastattelun kuulee vain haastattelun tekijä, eikä henkilökohtaisia tietoja tulla luovuttamaan muille. Kaikki itseäni koskeva aineisto hävitetään tutkimuksen valmistuttua.

Annan suostumukseni käyttää antamiani tietoja opinnäytetyössä sekä Vertaistuen oppaan tekemisessä.

Annan suostumuksen nauhoittaa haastatteluni

En anna suostumusta nauhoittaa haastatteluni

Aika ja paikka \_\_\_\_\_

Allekirjoitus \_\_\_\_\_

Nimenselvennys \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDIX 3: Vertaistuen oppaan sisältö (The contents of a guidebook)

Esipuhe/Johdanto

Kaapatut Lapset ry

Yhdistyksen arvot

Vertaistuki

Vertaistuen määritelmä/Mitä on vertaistuki

Toimintalinja → Yhdistyksen säännöt: vaitiolovelvollisuus, kaikki tulevat kuulluksi

Yhteydenpito

Miten tukea

Oma hyvinvointi

Kriisin vaiheet / tunnista kriisin vaiheet/oireet → henkisen tuen peruskurssi

Milloin hakea ammattiapua

Yhteistyö vanhemmuuteen: sovittelu yhteistyö

Lapsen kaksikulttuurisen identiteetin tukeminen

Vertaisen rooli → toimintalinja

Mitä yhdistys antaa

Yhdistyksen tuki vertaistukijoille

Käytännön asiat: vertaistukija odottaa pari päivää, jos vertainen ottaa yhteyttä, sitten itse kyselee ja ilmoittaa olevansa käytössä

## APPENDIX 4: Project schedule

