

## Capacitar Report September 2013

I used some of the Capacitar protocols with four different groups during the basic training. Firstly, I used the exercises based on Tai Chi with a group of people I work with on a regular basis for Dance/Meditation. Secondly, I used the same set of exercises with a group at a Day Care Centre for elderly people. Thirdly, I did full sessions with groups of VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) learners in an Adult Education Centre. And finally, I worked with an urban based Community Group comprised of long term unemployed, lone parents, youth at risk/early school leavers, older people, ethnic minorities and people on low incomes.

To return to the third group, the VTOS learners, the aim of the VTOS Programme is to help the learners become more employable at the end of the two year programme. The programme includes an academic and practical dimension and an opportunity to develop IT skills. There is also a Life Management dimension built into the course where the learners learn a number of skills and practices which help them manage their lives during the course and it is hoped that these practices will stand to them for the rest of their lives. The life management skills included assertiveness training, time management, coping with stress, meditation etc. I introduced the groups to some of the Capacitar protocols on a number of occasions during and after the basic training.

Regarding the fourth group i.e., the urban based Community Group, the aim of the group is to counter disadvantage, exclusion and marginalization within the community and lead to a restoration of dignity and partnership and networking with other agencies who work towards social inclusion and improving quality of life of those living in the same part of the town. This community group is part of Clare Local Development Company, a new organization responsible for the delivery of a range of rural and enterprise development, social inclusion, community development and environmental initiatives in Co Clare.

I had had previous experience with this Community Group before introducing Capacitar practices. For three months, I had taught the group basic Irish with a view to their being able to help their children in Primary Schools with their Irish homework. This had been challenging because concentrating for even the shortest period of time was extremely difficult for many in the group. And also, as learners, they were at different levels. Some, from Africa, had never heard a word of Irish while others had received their primary education in Ireland, where Irish was a compulsory subject for all of them.

I knew they were due to take some health related modules so I talked to the coordinator about Capacitar. Having spoken to the group about Capacitar and explained what was involved, they agreed to take part. I was pleased that Capacitar was something that they were choosing rather than something being imposed on them.

I used the exercises based on Tai Chi. It became obvious early on that I needed to do some input on breathing so we spent some time practicing abdominal breathing. The

image I gave was that of a newly born baby because from the moment of birth one can see that babies are expert at abdominal breathing. On the completion of the Tai Chi exercises, the group worked in pairs, sharing what they remembered and which exercises worked for them. The feedback was very positive. Many said they felt more relaxed, that they had been tired and now felt more energetic and that tension had moved especially from the shoulders. They were very aware of bones “cracking” in the ankles and tension between the shoulder blades.

I also used the Finger Holds. This protocol seemed to have a profound affect on the group and brought them into a very deep place of quiet. The Finger Holds were followed by The Holds. It was clear from the sharing afterwards, that some of the group got relief from anxiety and emotional and physical pain

Following on this, I did the Pal Dan Gum Exercises. They particularly enjoyed Opening the Bow, Punching with Fists and the Lion’s Roar. We concluded with the Acupressure Points. With hindsight, I think I tried to give too much information during this exercise and it would have been better to give less information because we were running out of time and I was too anxious to cover everything.

I saw huge changes in this group during the Capacitar sessions. They calmed down and became still in a way I didn’t dream was possible. If I was more experienced, I would have chosen other exercises that would have lent themselves to the group becoming even more relaxed. The challenge of getting people to listen to each other was still very real and perhaps it would have been better not to introduce feedback to the full group at such an early stage.

The feedback from the two sessions was very positive and I felt grateful to be able to introduce this group to some aspects of Capacitar.

During the Advanced Training last year, I extended the use of Capacitar practices to groups of migrant women through Doras Luimní in Limerick City. Doras Luimní aims to promote and uphold the human rights and well being of migrants through personal advocacy, integration, development and collaborative advocacy campaigns at the local and national level. I have been very aware of the language difficulties with the group so I have been careful to select the protocols that didn’t need too much explanation. I have also been aware of the stress levels in these women who have had to leave their homes and homeland and have been careful to try and include protocols that will reduce their stress levels. They have all been keen to say how that they found the Finger Holds the most helpful. And that was what they found easiest to practice between sessions.

On the whole, I am comfortable with introducing people to the various Capacitar protocols. However, I am not sure if I need to do more explanation or less on each protocol and look forward to feedback during the tutor training.

I am fortunate to live near a Life Balance Centre in the Burren in Co Clare. I am often asked to do an input on the various courses there so it is through this Centre that I hope to introduce more and more people to Capacitar. I also hope that through co-working with Maura Egan who lives in the west of the County, further expansion may take place.