

It is impressive that more than 100 persons in this country working a full-time job find the time to also help the suicide prevention cause by leading workshops in first-aid suicide intervention skills training (ASIST). Some of them do this year after year. We have asked one of them:

What motivates you to continue as a Vivat trainer?

Hanna Guro Brekke's response

The answer that immediately struck me when asked this question is the positive experience I am left with every time I have completed a Vivat workshop, says Hanna Guro Brekke. After two intense and busy days, and when I actually am quite tired, then I feel: Yes, this is good, it works! Instead of feeling drained of energy, the encounter with committed and eager workshop participants has given me renewed inspiration to continue as a trainer. In my regular job as a psychiatric nurse I meet people with all sorts of mental difficulties, and my working days are busy and challenging. It takes time and effort to sit down after my working hours to prepare for a new workshop, but my experience is that it is worth it.

What is so unique about Vivat's workshops for suicide intervention skills training?

I am trained as a psychiatric nurse and group therapist, and have participated in several courses examining suicide issues. Some of them have given me useful knowledge, and the focus has often been on treatment of patients at the risk of suicide. Vivat is a first-aid workshop, focusing on discovering and assessing risks, and being able to intervene in cases where the risk of suicide is imminent. Some of our workshop participants, such as psychiatric professionals, have extensive experience of treating persons at risk of suicide. In the same way that health personnel need to stay updated on first aid for physical injuries and accidents, a workshop in first-aid for suicide risk is useful.

The development unit at the department of psychiatry in Vestfold county (health enterprise) organizes Vivat workshops every year, where they invite health personnel from the primary and specialized health care services and

employees in schools, the police, child welfare services, the church and NGOs. Since all of these organizations have access to the same knowledge and expertise, and the workshop also becomes a meeting-place where future cooperation can be encouraged and promoted. Here in Vestfold county, "Kirkens SOS" (Church crisis line) has offered the Vivat workshop to all new volunteers. These are people with different jobs, backgrounds and experiences.

I have found that the workshop is enhanced by having interdisciplinary groups in attendance, the ideal being a mixture of professional and voluntary helpers. The number of workshop participants must not be too high, as much of the instruction is given in small groups. The workshop encourages all participants to contribute actively with their experiences and knowledge, and aims to raise the awareness of participants of the resources they have at their disposal in the local neighbourhood. Thus the workshop is not the same each, which ensures that it is never boring to lead a Vivat workshop. I feel that I always learn something new and that it is an exciting challenge to lead the workshop each and every time.

The workshop has a number of elements that emphasize raising awareness of one's own emotions and attitudes to the topic, presenting knowledge and not to forget training specific intervention skills. We always aim to use various teaching methods, and the challenges participants encounter have a natural progression. Feedback from workshop participants tells us that the combination of theory and practical training using role play gives them confidence and prepares them to help persons at risk of suicide. The training they receive in the intervention model ensures that this is not just a

The Vivat education programme

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theoretical model, but rather a tool they can use in their day-to-day jobs. This feedback is an important inspiration for me as a trainer.

How does Vivat help trainers? How is the follow up?

Even if the most important motivation for continuing as a trainer is the joy of doing something I see the effect of, the follow-up from Vivat is also important. It starts during the training for trainers themselves, which is one very intense week. Here I met skilled, committed and inspiring trainers. We are also invited to national trainer conferences, previously an annual event, but now held every second year. The management at Vivat is not top heavy, with a manager and secretary both based in Tromsø. The various health regions have part-time coaches, and we are offered regional day meetings once or twice annually. I have appreciated both the national and the regional meetings. I particularly appreciate meeting other trainers as we can inspire and learn from each other. I am also reminded that I am a small cog in a large and important machine, and I am proud to be part of this. Much of the contact with Vivat is by e-mail, and we submit trainer reports and participant feedback forms. Vivat is focused on quality assurance of the workshops, and this gives me confidence in my work as a trainer.



Hanna Guro Brekke has been a Vivat trainer since 2001 and has headed Vivat workshops for professionals in the primary and specialized health care services and for volunteers. She is employed by "Psykiatrien i Vestfold" (the Department of Psychiatry in Vestfold county).