C Thesis

Circus and Clowns: Creative approach for emotional and mental well-being

- Learning from Clowns without Borders & Circus Cirkör

Peace and Development Studies

(2FU32E)

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Abstract

The number of displaced people around the world today is unprecedented in world history, with a third of those displaced below the age of 18. These children often undergo traumatic experiences which can cause serious mental health issues before and during their flight as well as afterwards when resettling in a new country. In Sweden, they are offered psychological aid in order to better deal with these issues and hence recover. However, due to the cultural stigma attached to mental health problems, psychosocial aid is often ruled out by the child themselves. In addition, up to 30% of these unaccompanied children have been reported to suffer from PTSD, where merely speaking about one's issue can trigger a relapse of the trauma. There is therefore a shortage of pragmatic approaches to help tackle the challenges that these children face.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how creative programs such as the organisation Clowns without Borders works with unaccompanied refugees and how their methods affect the wellbeing of these children. This thesis explores the effects that laughter and playing has on a child’s well-being using a qualitative field research approach.

The research is a contribution to the field of development since it offers new grounds on how to work towards increasing the living standards of resettled displaced persons.

Keywords: Emotional well-being, mental well-being, laughter, self-esteem, Relief theory, Broaden and build theory, positive emotions
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1. Introduction

We are today witnessing an unprecedented worldwide refugee crisis with around 65 million people currently displaced around the world. Of those, 21 million are children, whereby a substantial number are unaccompanied (UNHCR, 2015). In a comprehensive study made by UNICEF reviewing Gacel Machel work concerning the effects of war on children it is highlighted that children and adolescents not only are affected by war but also targeted, sometimes as a part of a conflict strategy, commonly used by warring ethnic groups upon one another (UNICEF, 2009). Children are injured, killed, subjected to sexual violence and enslavement, forced to fight in conflicts as child soldiers and subjugated into do horrible and often violent acts against their own will. Countless children have suffered the loss of family members and constantly living in fear for their life. Others grow up in an environment where there is no access to either material needs or emotional needs, including those needs related to structures with social and cultural meaning, such as schools and holy places (UNICEF, 2009). Many children are stuck in limbo in refugee camps where they are given sufficient assistance to sustain their physical lives, but how about their psychological needs? Several studies reveal how a large number of children fleeing from war suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome due to the experiences they’ve had to go through (Fazel et al. 2012). And even though there is an increasing debate on the impact of war on children’s mental well-being, the impact of war on children's mental health is largely overlooked and there is not enough pragmatic approaches developed in order to tackle this issue (Barenbaum et. al, 2004). Hence, this is not merely a study that aims to bring understanding of children as refugees, but rather on the effect that specific psychosocial programs have on their wellbeing. Even those children who are lucky enough to find safety in a high income country, such as Sweden may still carry on those traumatic experiences which they had to endure pre-flight and during the flight, however, there is another dimension of the course of being a refugee; resettlement in a foreign country. Not speaking the language or knowing the culture or social norms can be traumatizing and stressful in itself, especially when the country they arrive in has increasing islamophobia and racism (Lustig et al. 2004). According to Louise Peacock, an effective tool
to work with children suffering from different sorts of stress related traumas is in fact, laughter and the act of playing (Peacock, 2016). She reasons that “... being deprived of play by trauma, conflict and difficult living conditions will have a negative effect on a developing child” and suggests that “playing is central in the way in which children develop” (Peacock, 2016).

The effect of laughter and humor on children’s well-being was brought into focus during the late 20th century and positive effects on the wellbeing of children with severe illnesses have been documented (Tener et al. 2010). However, there is a lack of research on the effects of laughter and the act of playing for traumatized children through a social and development perspective, rather than a medical one.

The organization Clowns without Borders (CwB) works with psychosocial relief efforts to stimulate children’s enjoyment by creating laughter through circus shows and motivation and engagement through circus workshops (Skratt.nu). Although a large proportion of their work revolves around children in refugee camps, they are also active in other sorts of social environments where children are suffering in one way or another. Many of the children that CwB work with have been refugees for years, carrying heavy burdens, experiences and memories that often haunt and traumatize them. CwB do not suggest that laughter and playing eradicates these negative experiences and memories, however, they do believe they can make people feel better by opening up creative and safe spaces that fosters laughter and playing. In doing so, new positive memories are developed which may make dealing with negative ones easier, amongst other things. Whether this is the case or not will be one of the aspects under analyzed under the microscope during this research.

2. Objective and research questions

By studying the effects of CwB’s approach, I hope to create an enhanced understanding of how creative and alternative psychosocial relief programs affect children and adolescents suffering the effects of war and by doing so broaden the general perception of how mental illness can be managed. The idea, that, “laughter heals” is a bit of a cliche, but the question
that suggest are, how and why? What implications and importance does laughter have on one’s well being, especially concerning the wellbeing of children who is left out by society, suffering from traumas and/or other negative and scarring experiences? Furthermore, how can activities and playing contribute to increased self-esteem and how are these all connected in regards to one’s well-being?

- How does playing and laughing contribute to increased well-being? Physical, mental and or emotional well-being?
  - How do increased stimuli of laughter affect one’s well-being?
  - What implications does playing have concerning well-being?
  - Does involvement in activities foster self-esteem?
  - How and why is self-esteem important for one’s well-being?

3. Analytical framework

3.1 Relevance

The number of refugees around the world is higher than ever before and a large percentage of those refugees are unaccompanied children. The impact of conflict on children has been well addressed by Machel (UNICEF, 2009). In this study she reveals the many different consequences that war have on children, many are of course based on physical aspects, but many of the problems that a conflict may cause are concerning the mental state of the child. On top of this, the resettled children and adolescents are expected to become integrated members of the society fast. This is hard because of practical reasons such as cultural differences and language barriers, but also because there is a high prevalence of traumatic-stress mental disorders (Socialstyrelsen, 2015). And even though methods to aid these children exist, two questions remain, to what extent are these actually available and are they appropriate?

It is estimated that 20-30 % of the children arriving as refugees in Sweden suffer from mental health issues (Socialstyrelsen, 2015). Furthermore, as there is an element of
stigmatization over being diagnosed with mental health issues and receiving treatment for it (Socialstyrelsen, 2015), new approaches that does not directly deal with the problem may be required. If new and more effective methods can be found and applied, this may first of all lead to an increased mental wellbeing which in turn may contribute to a faster integration process for this marginalized group in the society. And in the grand scheme of things, increased integration contributes to decreased segregation which in turn may lead to decreased polarization and misunderstanding between groups in the society.

One of the strengths of clowns and circus artist is their ability to stimulate laughter in children, even in children who has been through traumatic experiences (Peacock, 2016). The immediate impact is therefore that the children get a moment in which the past does not exist and a new positive memory. Furthermore, it is documented that when one laughs, one's serotonin levels increases, a hormone that plays a big part in one's well being (Tener et al. 2010). There are therefore inclinations that the positive impact of clowning goes beyond the immediate moment. If long term effects of laughter can be found, this may further encourage other organisations to work with similar methods when working with children with anxiety, depression or other stress related symptoms. This research paper is directed to anyone working with children concerning these issues. Furthermore, this research may also be of importance for CwB themselves as this thesis may give them insights in the effects of their organization.

3.2 Literature review

According to Machel, “Despite increasing discussion in recent years, the impact of armed conflict on children's lives and mental states has too often been minimally addressed or even unrecognized” (UNICEF, 2009). This recognises the need to address the consequences of conflict on the mental state of children. There are many ways in which children have received help concerning their anxiety, depression or other stress related symptoms, ranging from methods such as psychological counselling programs, maternal communication programs, teacher programs and engaging in recreational activities (Möhlen et al. 2005). What unites these programs is the variating effect of the programs due different factors specific to the
program, but also due to the individuality of the children as well as the issue of measurement. Hence, there is a lack of research data on the consequences of the different programs aimed at aiding children with anxiety, depression or other stress related symptoms. Therefore, this thesis does not necessarily aim to produce a complete set of data from which researchers may base other research upon, but rather serves to complement the research already committed to the field, and as well as to create a new point of view in regards to the phenomena of laughter. However, I, like other researchers before will be struggling with the same issue; getting sufficient, measurable and complete data on the effects of trauma reducing programs on children (Barenbaum et al. 2004), although, this will not discourage me when I conduct my research. There is considerably larger amount of research made internationally, concerning the topic of the impacts of conflict on children, than the research that has been made concerning the mental state of children arriving in Sweden after fleeing from war. This research will add to this data, but focus specifically on the methods used by CwB and CC, which by itself is minimally documented. Research on the impacts of conflict on children coming to Sweden will complement the one that has been made internationally.

CwB engage in socio psychological intervention in the form of circus shows and training in recreational activities. They correlate the effect of these instances with trauma reduction, especially in regards to laughter. Laughter is regarded as the biggest component in their work (skratt.nu).

There was a considerable amount of research committed to the health benefits of laughter during the 70s. The interest in the topic largely originated after man named Norman Cousins who suffered from Bechterews disease, laughed himself healthy (Dahlgren, 1997). Around that same time there was an increase in the usage of clown doctors in hospitals attending to children with illnesses, and the positive effects of their clowning were many; Improvement in mood and lowering stress levels, relief of boredom and loneliness, distraction from the illness and pain tolerance (Blerkom, 1995). According to her, laughter does not only make you feel better, but also works as a distraction, stating an example of a boy who has been severely burnt;
“He was conscious but in terrible pain with major bums over more than half his body. I went right into emergency with him. When the surgeons began cutting away dead flesh, I began telling funny stories and promising circus tickets and making scarves appear and disappear-anything to keep his mind off the agony. Pretty soon he was rolling his eyes in amazement and finally I actually got him laughing behind his medical mask. It was incredible. He was staring death in the face-and he was having fun!” (Blerkom, 1995, p. 11).

Hospital clowning is widely recognized as well functioning method to help children deal with and even heal illnesses. Their treatment is not directed towards the physical aspect of the illness but of the attitude towards it, the mentality of the child hence has an impact on the physicality. Furthermore, Golan et al. argues that clowning has an effect on anxiety reduction (Golan et al. 2009).

Laughter is also known to decrease stress levels (Dahlgren, 1997), but to what extent can laughter be used to relieve people with trauma, anxiety and depression outside hospitals? Most of the research done on the effects of clowning is committed to the hospital environment. How about children suffering traumas derived from conflict experiences? It is only during the last decades that scholars have engaged themselves to study the psychological benefits of laughter (Dahlgren, 1997). Although there is research on the topic (Möhlen et al., 2005), a gap in knowledge on the effects of specifically laughter and playing on children that has been exposed to traumatic experiences and children suffering from anxiety, depression or other stress related symptoms still remains (Tener et al. 2010).

Other research will be used as an anchor as it deals with the exact mental state conditions, such as PTSD, which many children are reported to suffer from post conflict (Fazel et al. 2012).

Furthermore, as the subjects of study in this research will be children living in homes for asylum seekers, understanding some of the current problems which they may be dealing with is also imperative, such as dealing with troubles of learning the language, integration and culture shock, as well as traumatic and stress related syndromes (Socialstyrelsen, 2015).
The only study that has been found concerning an assessment of Clowns Without Borders is done by Peacock has been of great value concerning her professional insights in the way that CwB works and the effect of their programs (Peacock, 2016). Since her study is concerning CwB in general, there is no risk of repetition since this thesis regards children in Sweden in particular. It is known that laughter has a positive effect on the immune system and many argues that laughter may increase the production of serotonin in the brain, which is closely linked to one's level of happiness, however, Peacock also claims that there are insufficient empirical evidence to prove that laughter raise serotonin levels (Peacock, 2009).

On of the main functions of CwB is to aid in suffer alleviation, “Clowns without Borders offers laughter to relieve the suffering of all persons, especially children, who live in areas of crisis including refugee camps, conflict zones and territories in situations of emergency. We bring levity, contemporary clown/circus oriented performances and workshops into communities so that they can celebrate together and forget for a moment the tensions that darken their daily lives” (http://www.clownwithoutborders.org/about-us/). CwB are sometimes criticized about their work since it according to some only offers temporary stress alleviation. However, in their international work they regularly cooperate with local actors involved in circus arts and also engage children in workshops aimed at giving training in these artforms (Peacock, 2016). Hence, they engage with children directly in play activities. Child's Play has been assessed by different scholars and was initially discussed in the middle of the 19th century based on an evolutionary biological perspective establishing the reasons behind why we play (Jensen, 2013, p27).

### 3.3 Definitions

In order to eradicate any misconceptions and misunderstandings about the meaning of well-being, some different perspectives of the condition will be provided. According to Dodge et al, defining wellbeing has been quite problematic, partly because there are several instances of well-being. The World Health Organisation defines quality of life accordingly:
An individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship (World Health Organization, 1997)

As we can see, there are many different variables concerning one’s quality of life or wellbeing and to understand how they interconnect is quite difficult which is remarked by the WTO themselves: “It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and their relationship”. Because of the many different internal/external sources that may influence one’s well being, this thesis will settle with some of the basic but still complex concepts of wellbeing. The following will be examined, compared and put into context; physical, mental, emotional well-being and subjective well-being.

3.3.1 Physical well-being
Positive well-being or health used to be defined as merely “absence of disease”. The concepts revolving well-being today is quite complicated. However, the American Foundation of Nurse Anaesthetics defines specifically physical well-being in the following way; “The lifestyle behaviour choices you make to ensure health, avoid preventable diseases and conditions, and live in a balanced state of body, mind and spirit.” (Aana, 2017). Hence, being in a negative physical state has consequences on one's mind, which concerns one's mental well-being. Mental well-being can then be assumed to be directly correlated by one's physical well-being, and vice-versa (Aana, 2017).

3.3.2 Mental well-being
The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental or psychological being as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the
normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a
collection to her or his community.” (WHO, 2014). This definition concerns whether an
individual is in a stable mental condition which in turn enables the individual to be a proactive
member of society. However, mental health also concerns an individual’s ability to think
logically and rationally about matters which revolves the individual’s life, which can be life
events and challenges. When in a positive state of mental well-being, an individual make life
decisions based on rationality which results in actions taken which promotes positive physical
health (Aana, 2017).

3.3.3 Emotional well-being

Emotional well-being is not characterized by the absence of emotions, rather by the
individual's ability to grasp the value of those emotions experienced in order to engage
oneself in positive directions regarding that person's life. People are ongoingly facing
challenges to one’s emotional well-being which can stem from basically anything that may
cause stress or self-doubt. And instead of focusing on those particular negative elements in
life, one should identify, focus and build upon one’s strengths in order to achieve emotional
well-being. If so, the benefits by doing so may contribute to raised self-confidence, physical
health, change capable and stable mental health. At the core of our emotional well-being lies
self esteem, put simply, how you feel about yourself and your behaviour. A person that is
emotionally healthy; manage stress, has a empathy for others, has positive concept of oneself,
and can behave in a way that is pleasing to that individual’s needs (Belongto, accessed,
27/06/2017)

3.3.4 Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is a term which is often witnessed within the field of psychology,
however, it is largely linked with emotional well-being as it concerns an individual’s one
perception of how he/she feels, which aligns this concept of well being with emotional
well-being since emotional well-being concerns how an individual feel about herself and her
behaviour (Snyder, 2001; 63). The term emotional well-being will be used instead of subjective well-being because measurement difficulties will appear concerning collecting data from the focus group directly, see ethical considerations chapter (4.4). However, emotions can be seen and felt and can therefore be subject to ontological investigation, and hence a more appropriate term concerning the premises of this thesis. Furthermore, an individual may regard himself to be in a fine physical health even though he or she isn’t. However, this intrapersonal lie may bring stability to that individual's mental state since a realization that he or she is in a terrible physical state might cause mental disturbance and cognitive dissonance. Although, justifying lying to yourself in order to continue business as usual is hard. It brings peace and serenity short term, but have even worse consequences for the individual in the long term. Hence this sort of confrontation with the truth is a necessary one, in order to change one’s bad habits and truly take a step towards balance and overall well-being. Our subjective view of our well-being hence has an impact on our well-being since we internally are the creators of our realities, sometimes regardless of whether it is true or not. Subjective well-being then regards how a person feel about him/herself.

3.4 The well-being nexus

One’s well-being as we know adhere to many different aspects of life, but for simplicity, those aspects shall revolve around mental, physical and emotional health whereas all are fluidly interconnected. The subjective well being regards the actual experienced well being, which is what is attempted to be figured out. How one regards his or her well-being relates to all three notions of wellbeing. Ethical issues regarding retrieving data from the focus group directly has made measuring the experienced well being of the adolescents more difficult. However, based on Robin Dunbar’s Theory of Mind; as beings capable of feeling empathy and hence understanding how others feel, the information retrieved from the interviews express a secondary view of the subjective well-being of the adolescents (Dunbar, 1998). How the interconnection between the different prospects of well-being fit together may be difficult to grasp which is why the well-being nexus was formed. (See model 1)
Relation 1: Mental-Physical well-being

When in a positive state of mental well-being one is able to more fruitfully realise his or her own potential, which manifests in one’s daily activities and what one focus one. It is well known that exercising increases one’s well-being and if one want to realize one’s potential, focusing one’s physical well-being through physical activity contributes to raised potential. Furthermore, physical activity itself make us more prone to sleep well and feel better in general. Some specifics lies in how exercise increase blood flow, release neurotrophic proteins which stimulates the growth of new neurons. Physical activity then sets the body and mind in balance which contributes to providing the mind with the best conditions to achieve to his or her best abilities (Bergland, 2014).

Relation 2: Physical- Emotional well-being

Physical activity also has an effect on one’s emotional well-being in regards to how exercise help produce endorphins which can create a euphoric sensation as well as to reduce stress (Martin, 2002). Depression and stress are often interlinked, hence, if one part can be affected, so will the other. With this consideration in mind, physical health increase one’s emotional
well-being. Furthermore, when in a stable emotional state one is better at focusing and build upon one’s strengths and those strengths are not seldom connected to a physical activity which again, has positive health benefits.

Relation 3: Emotional-Mental well-being
Let us once again consider the individual who suffered the heartbreaking loss of a family member. What this individual might be experiencing is anger, sadness, hopelessness and loneliness, which are emotions or rather, negative emotions. The sudden loss adhere most of all to one’s emotional well-being but will spill over one’s ability to think and act rationally as the emotions has taken over. A person’s ability to be rational, productive and contribute to the society lies in one’s mental state of being which often tends to get corrupted by feelings. Suppose that the same person was able to distance himself from emotions by reacting rationally to the situation. The deceased was an old man who’ve lived a life full of love and joy and in his late ages suffered from a stroke and lost perception of himself and his surroundings. With this information taken into consideration, one might accept the fate of the deceased through rational thinking that the deceased was actually content to die. Hence, a rational viewpoint might shield you from experiencing emotions that might be hard to deal with. Furthermore, if a person has bad self-esteem one can imagine that the individual will think poorly of his or her ability in doing things, for example painting. Even though the paintings are incredible, due to the negative subjective view of his or her work, the person will not view them to be incredible. If this person receives a lot of appreciation for what he or she does then that person might start to gain self-esteem through the received positive emotions which can cause a shift in thinking from irrational to rational whereas the individual starts to appreciate and works proactively to proceed with what he or she is good at. Emotional well-being is after all connected to being able to feel good about yourself and what you is doing and also, to build upon those realized strengths in a rational way.
The clarification of how the different concepts of well-being relate to each other is meant to make understand of how interlinked they are. However, this does not legitimize the usage of a singular term, on the contrary, it justifies the separation of them due to the complex relation presented in the well-being nexus. Hence the different concepts of well-being will be used separately but in relation to one another. The separation is further justified because the results/discussion/understanding of well-being will be different depending on different program initiatives, experienced outcome and applied theories. It should be mentioned that, if increased well-being is visible in any of the mentioned categories, one can assume that a positive change will also occur in the others. This change however, may or may not be visible and again, does not justify blending the different concepts of well-being into one singular unit.

Now that the phenomena of well-being has been explained and how different categories of well-being interlink we aim to look into some relevant theories. The function of the theories soon the be presented is to make understand how the approaches under scope in this thesis impacts young person’s physical, mental, emotional and subjective well-being.

3.5 Theory

The mentioned research concerning laughter and it’s connectivity to well-being can be visualized as a theoretical backbone, always in the background (Tener et al. 2010). However, the most important theory of laughter will be the Relief theory. However the incongruity theory will also be assessed (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

The belief that laughter therapy has a positive effect on people with PTSD will work as a solidifying aspect in regards to the notion that laughing contributes to stress relief and also as a distraction tool which has the functions of steering away the focus from the negative towards the positive (Blerkom, 1995).

Another dimension to examine is concerning creative psychosocial aid programs such as the one’s conducted by CwB does not only include stimulation of laughter, but also stimulates acts of playing as well (Skratt.nu). The impact and importance of the act of playing on the development of the child has been researched by many different scholars and its
various effects are widely discussed (Jensen, 2013). How one’s emotional well-being can be steered from the negative realm to the positive will be looked into when assessing the Broaden-and-Build theory. However, we can therefore deduce that it is important for children to play, many children with anxiety and/or depression do not play or laugh anymore, especially in this case because of conflict related traumas (Peacock, 2016).

The Broaden-and-Build theory will be of help when assessing whether it is important for children to find intrapersonal affections that may lead to well being and satisfaction in the individual (Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011). This is a middle-range theory as it according to Bryman, is in focus of empirical enquiry and because it aims to explain a limited social phenomena (Bryman, 2016, p.19). The theory concerns how positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and love leads to a spectrum of different positive impacts on one’s emotional well-being. This tool will become handy as there are elements in the methods used by CwB that aims to stimulate joy and interest in the individuals they work with.

3.5.1 Broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions
This well recognized theory is based on a wide range of randomized tests (Fredrickson, 2004: 1369-1373). The theory arguments that positive emotions allows people to “broaden people's momentary thought action repertoires”, which leads to the person being able to “widen the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind (Fredrickson, 2004:1369). What Fredrickson means is that positive emotions are productive in its nature and that they themselves lead to an array of positive aspects of subjective emotional well-being:

Joy, for instance, creates a urge to play, push the limits and be creative; urges evident not only in social and physical behaviour, but also in intellectual and artistic behaviour. Interest, a phenomenologically distinct positive emotion, creates the urge to explore, take in new information and experience, and expand the self in process. Contentment, a third distinct positive emotion creates the urge to sit back and savour current life circumstances, and integrate these circumstances inte new views of self and of the world. Love-viewed as an amalgam of distinct positive emotions (e.g. Joy, interest and contentment) experienced within contexts of safe, close relationships-creates recurring cycles of urges to play with,
explore and savour the our loved ones. These various thought-action tendencies-to play, to explore, or to savour and integrate-each represents ways that positive emotions broaden habitual modes of thinking or acting”. (Fredrickson, 2004: 1369).

She goes further in her argument by claiming that what she calls personal resources that has been acquired during the time of the positive emotions are long lasting. She does not claim that the feeling of joy is necessarily long lasting, but that the person, during the activity of play acquired resources which can not be taken away and that these resources can be used in later moments and in different emotional states. People never cease to learn, and we do so in every moment of our lives even though we might not be aware of it, this is something that Fredrickson cements with her statement that “Through experiences of positive emotions, then, people transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals” (Fredrickson, 2004: 1369).

3.5.2 Theories of laughter
Laughter is not a method used by clowns without borders, however it is the expected outcome of their humorous methods, and what laughter itself contributes to is of importance to acknowledge. According to Wilkins and Eisenbraun, we laugh because for different reasons and they mention three different theories of laughter, the superiority incongruity theory and relief theory. Superiority theory claims that we laugh in order to minimize another person so that the person laughing becomes superior of the one laughed at (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 352). This theory may apply to many scenarios, however, not in the one CwB operates and is therefore not relevant. Incongruity theory regards laughter as stimulated by an act which we do not expect and breaks the learnt patterns of what is correct (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 352). Clowns are masters of stimulating this kind of laughter. The third theory of laughter is the relief theory, which also will be suitable when analyzing the effects of CwB. Relief theory views laughter as a release of energy (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 351). When one is suffering from traumas, a large amount of negative emotions or energy has been built up in the person (Socialstyrelsen, 2015), which when one applies the Relief theory
could be released through laughter. According to George A. Bonanno (2004), laughter and positive emotions have the possibility to aid in the coping of trauma and loss through due to their ability to unhinge negative emotions, which correlates with the stated effects of the relief theory (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 351).

Laughter is known to have a contagious effect on people, when many people in the same room is laughing, the rest often join in automatically even though they might not know the origin of the laughter. When people laugh together they become connected through their unified response to the stimuli which contributes to an increased sense of belonging in the group. Furthermore, when one is relaxed in the group one feels more comfortable to express themselves as they wish with less prospects of judgement upon oneself. Hence, the stimulation of laughter has a positive spillover effect, much like the Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions.

4. Methodology chapter

4.1 Methodology

This research has been conducted as a field study with a qualitative research approach combining two different research methods, interviews and observations. There are several ways in which to conduct research, however, when it comes to field studies, the qualitative research approach is arguably the most suitable, building on the argument given to us by John W. Creswell which states that a research problem which seeks to problematize a phenomena or concept in order to create understanding is best achieved by using a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014:110).

The study will be designed in line with Creswell’s notion of a case study, since it aims to create an in-depth understanding of the impacts of the methods used by CwB during a one week program on a specific focus group, unaccompanied adolescents living in HVB homes (Hem för vård och boende) in Sweden (Creswell, 2014; 14). The collection of data will spring from a project implemented by CwB and Circus Cirkör in which they do circus shows and
have circus workshops for a week. The data collection derived from the field is dominated by interviews, however, observations were also held in order to increase the validity of the interviews. The interviews were held in a semi-structured manner as this allowed the interviews to go into discussions so that the information presented would be suitable for the purpose of the thesis (Bryman, 2016, p. 10). In order to enhance the reader's understanding of how this worked in practice, see Appendix 1 where a transcript of an interview is presented. The interviews were mainly held in Swedish as this was the initial language used between the actors involved, hence, it was the most obvious language to be used during the interviews since it was the most comfortable language for the participants. In order to assess the effectiveness of these approaches, the workers at the HVB homes will be interviewed since they are in contact with the children on a daily basis and can recognize whether the children’s state of mind has changed over the duration of the project. It would of course be useful to be able to interview the children themselves, however, due to restrictions of interviewing children in Sweden without a permit, this will not be possible (CODEX, 2016). Furthermore, interviewing the HVB workers is favourable for two other reasons. First, the answers that would have been provided by the child would have arguably been providing with insufficient data since a child wouldn’t not have wanted to share his inner feelings with a complete stranger. Secondly, if answers in regards to their mental health would in fact have been provided, an ethical dilemma occurs since talking about one’s trauma can cause more harm than good since it may remind the person of the trauma and once again cause them pain. To complement these data collection strategies, another research method will be used in the form of observations as this will give insights in how the methods used by CwB immediately affects the children in the form of laughter and enjoyment. The role of the observer in this case was solely as an observer and did not include any form of participation (Creswell, 2014: 191).

As this study concerns whether the methods used by CwB have an effect on the children, one approach could have been to assess the subjective well being of the children from their perspective. For example, self administered questionnaires could have been used, with suitable ethical oversight. However, CwB and Cirkus Cirkör deemed it inappropriate
since the function of their project, to bring joy, could have been corrupted by bringing in an actor who intends to study their well-being. The function of what they do was in this case to bring a moment of relaxation, joy and happiness to the kids which inclines being in the moment and not reflecting on what causes you pain. Since the purpose of the self administered questionnaires is to reflect, which indeed might stir up negative emotions, the perceptibility of positive emotions received by the circus is likely to have declined. Hence, whether the methods used by CwB has an impact on the unaccompanied asylum seeking children’s well being will solely be assessed through the interviews of the HVB workers and observations.

Furthermore, this research could arguably be performed using deductive reasoning, i.e. playing and laughing is fun, to have fun is important for our well being, then, playing and laughing increases our well being. This deduction may be correct, however, it disregards any interference from other variables that might contribute to the increase in the children’s wellbeing. As the specific program conducted by CwB will have alternative elements such as learning new activities, the motivational and stimulative aspect of learning new things is disregarded. In order to broaden our view of the cause and effect of CwB, this research will be done using abductive reasoning since it allows a wider range of causalities to appear. Also, it provides a better platform to draw conclusions based on different data collection methods. The aim is to evaluate the methods used by CwB and what impacts they may have on children’s well-being drawing the results and conclusions from theories of play, laughter and motivation and analyzing the empirical data and previous research based on these theories (Bryman, 2016, p.21).

4.2 Method

The aim of the research is to pinpoint not only the overall impact of the methods used by CwB, but more specifically to indicate behavioural changes in the adolescents and analyze these based on the theories mentioned. Hence, the preconception of the effect fullness of the program implemented by CwB lies in the theories concerning, laughter, play, humour and stimulation. In order to enhance the understanding of the relation between the methods used
by CwB and its impact on children and adolescents, interviews were held with three HVB workers, two circus artists and one program director. The interviews were held three days after the program of CwB and Circus Cirkör was finished in order for the workers that had been involved during the performances and workshops could gather their thoughts as well as to be given the possibility to detect any lasting effects of the project. The interviews took roughly 30 minutes each and we’re recorded with the consent of the interviewed. The main focus of the interviews with the HVB workers were on the general well being of the adolescents, their response to the CwB and CC project and their subjective perceived thoughts that the project had on the adolescents. The interviews with the CwB staff mostly concerned what they perceived the importance of their work to be and what impact it has based personal experiences.

The non participatory observations took place on two occasions, the first one (Observation 1) occurred in Växjö during a circus performance and circus workshop with roughly 60 younger children aging between 4-10. The second one (Observation 2) occurred in Helsingborg in an indoor gymnastics hall with the adolescents from the homes which the interviewed HVB workers works at. The reason for having observations on the two different occasions was to investigate whether the methods used by CwB got the same response and impact based on age difference. However, the second observation was more fruitful for validation purpose, since the researchers observations were made based on the same occasion as the data collected from the interviews with the HVB workers.

In order to more efficiently perceive the impact that circus had on the children and adolescents some guiding questions were crafted beforehand. These were: How was the ambience before the performance? How do the they react and behave during the show? How do they react and behave during the circus workshop? How was the ambience after the performance and circus workshop? Is there any perceivable difference in the mood after compared to before?

Notes were taken directly on the computer in order to more swiftly describe what was happening.
4.3 Validity

The most attractive data was derived from the HVB workers since they reflected the changes in behaviour and well being in the adolescents. However, in order to strengthen the understanding of the relationship between essentially circus and well-being, the subjective perspectives and experiences of the circus artists and CwB representatives were also considered. This is of interest because it would show if the perceived effect of CwB goes in line with the perceived result based on the HVB workers which follows the process of triangulation and validation (Creswell, 2014: 201). Observations were held for this reason as well which were held on two occasions. The first was held in Växjö with smaller children aging between 4-10 in a gymnastics hall where everyone was welcome. The second observation took place at one of the HVB homes during the CwB implemented projects in order to see the direct effects of the project and also to be able to triangulate the observations to the interviews. Furthermore, secondary sources such as those mentioned in the literature review chapter as well as the theories mentioned further validates any correlations found based on the primary sources of data collection.

4.4 Ethical considerations

This research topic may be sensitive as I interpret the mental well being of children, and by analyzing the results I gain, I may make presumptions that will not be true, however, as I intend to objectively interpret and analyze data collected the solely based on previous research and the theories mentioned, I hope to minimize this risk. Any subjective thoughts are reserved for the discussion chapter.

As I am well connected with some of those working with CwB, finding negative data may be harder for me to provide and explain as I do not want to talk badly about their operation, this is also a matter of concern as it risks my research to become more subjective. Furthermore, if the research I conduct will be used for future purposes by CwB or other organisations, they base my conclusions on the assumptions that I am correct in the research that I conduct. Therefore, I must be careful in giving policy recommendations as it might be
hard for me to get strong and quantifiable data based on the research to come. Hence, I can protect myself by merely claiming that the findings are derived from this specific setting and my conclusions are based on those only, I cannot dare to make assumptions about the effectiveness of the methods used by CwB in settings in which I have no knowledge about.

4.5 Limitations and delimitations
At the initial stage of the process of selecting research topic, I intended to study the mere effect that laughter has on children’s well being. However, this proved to be difficult as one can not safely conclude that it is specifically the laughter that makes the children feel better, which made me shift to the focus of the methods used by CwB in general. Even though this shift in focus will make the study more feasible, it needs to be stated that it in fact will be quite difficult to assess whether the methods used by CwB actually are appropriate tools for children with PTSD and other stress related syndromes. For starters, I will not be able to diagnose them, all I can do is follow along over the duration of the week and observe any changes in behavior, mood and state of mind. Especially since the duration of time that I will be able to collect data will only be over a week. However, this study may, even if it doesn't prove anything, be a source of guidance for other researchers to build upon. Furthermore, as I cannot conduct interviews with the children, this is a clear limitation. Further practical limitations is regarding to the language since some of the children may not as of yet master the Swedish language which may make obtaining information more difficult.

5. Findings and Analysis
The reasoning in the findings chapter is presented in so that the results from the interviews and observations is connected to the theories and the well-being nexus. In this way, all components strengthens and contribute to each other, which goes in line with abductive reasoning. The data was derived from interviews with circus artist perception of their work as well as the vision and perspective presented by a coordinator at CwB, these will reveal the point of view from within CwB and what their knowledge is on the impacts of cirkus on
children. Furthermore, in order to assess the impact that CwB has on children’s well-being, data was collected from the perspective of the HVB staff. Furthermore, the observations made during two occasions is involved in order to strengthen the validity of the findings. This is important in order not to solely base the findings on the subjective perspectives of the HVB workers and the people involved in CwB.

5.1 The perceived well-being of the adolescents

The literature review on the subject of the mental health of refugees (Chapter 3.1) showed several factors which cause stress and depression for an unaccompanied child. This initial segment of the findings chapter aim to reveal whether this also applies to this target group. As you will see, there are indeed stress factors and indicators of depression revealed. The interviews showed that there are apparent moments of stress, some of which revolves around the application for the permanent residency.

“... some of them have not received their permanent residency and are still waiting on the decision so some of them are worried that they won’t be allowed to stay.” (HVB1)

“... they are waiting for an interview at the immigration office and they worry about that.” (HVB2)

The adolescents expresses worry over the application and permanent residency because if they are not granted permanent residency, they will have to go back to their countries, many still stricken by war and the negative consequences that follows. Which is a reasonable aspect causing concern and stress. Even though the adolescents are not always open with their traumas, one can make a scientific assumption that they have been through a lot, based on previous research shown in the literature review (3.1).

“... they carry on a lot from their experiences as refugees and from their home countries…” (HVB3)
Another issue derived from the interviews is that many of the adolescents doesn’t feel like they can openly share their state of minds and what is bothering them, at least not to the HVB workers at these particular housings.

“There is always something and it is hard to know since they don’t always open up to the staff. Sometimes you know what is going in the adolescents and why he is feeling the way he does, sometimes you don’t, since they sometimes tell us, sometimes no” (HVB1).

Based on statistics from Socialstyrelsen, roughly 30% of the unaccompanied asylum seeking children are suffering from PTSD and illnesses similar to PTSD (Socialstyrelsen, 2015), although, a problem arise concerning how to assess whether a child or adolescent is suffering from PTSD or not, since it can be hard to recognize if you don’t know what to look for (PTSD Alliance, 2017). Furthermore, due to the ongoing stigma around mental illness not only within the Muslim community but within the adolescent himself, they might be more eager to try to keep any signs of stress, depression or trauma to themselves (Ciftci, 2012). According to a HVB worker, many of the adolescents often tend to stay in their rooms for long periods of time.

“You can see that they spend a lot of time in their beds and that they have things which tears on them and cause them pain. They have periods when they don’t feel good and they want to be alone for a week because of it” (HVB1)

The worker does not claim to know what the adolescent are doing in there, they might be watching their phone, reading or praying, but it seems quite clear that the adolescent might just want to be left alone. Separation from others and seclusion are often considered symptoms of a individual who is suffering from depression (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015).

Emotional well-being does not mean not having any emotions at all, however, when one is depressed, showing positive emotions might be hard since the focus is in the negative
aspects of life. The negative emotions which the person is feeling are suppressed in public, because a person seldom want to lose face and also because of the stigma on mental health (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015), this stigma might be more prominent in muslim communities, this however does not make it otherwise in western countries. As a result, some adolescent retains to his quarters where he by himself ponders about his physical, mental and emotional state, an activity which sometimes makes things worse. If focusing on one’s strengths is good for a person's emotional well-being, we can then assume that focusing on one's weaknesses is the opposite.

Continuing, a HVB workers describes a scenario in how the adolescents doesn’t always share their feelings with the workers:

“I imagine that you’re living at a housing and there are 9-11 staff that works here and everybody ask “What’s going on with you today, why are you upset?” The first time they may say that “Well I am tired and also worried for my parents”, and then another and a third ask the same thing and at last the adolescent may reply “I'M FINE OKAY!”, it becomes too much.” (HVB1).

The adolescents doesn’t always express their negative emotions to the workers, however, the interviews showed that there are apparent moments of stress for these adolescents. For example concerning an instance which was brought to the table during a conversation with a colleague which revealed a more serious situation relating to mental health issues. She shared the history of a boy who was shot in the foot in Libya, then spent three days on a rubber boat crossing the Mediterranean sea where there was a constant risk of the boat getting punctured during a flip-over (which happened on two occasions). He then came to Sweden through Europe and only then was he taken to a hospital for his gunshot injured foot, which had an infection that was so far gone that they had to amputate it. This physical limitation is something that he will have to carry with him, one can only hope that the same does not go for the trauma that came with the incident. He has been diagnosed with PTSD.
Another HVB worker during an interview explained how one of the adolescents are having suicidal thoughts and that he has even on occasions acted out on it.

“On of the adolescents are in contact with the child psychiatric unit because he has suicidal thoughts and also tried to commit suicide” (HVB1)

It is clear that some of the adolescents is facing challenges to their emotional well-being. These challenges can stem from any instance that is causing feelings of stress or anxiety which in its self may corrupt our self-perception to the degree that an individual do not want to live anymore. The Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions argues that positive emotions make room for future positive emotions, however, the same relation applies to negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2004; 1372). And where positive emotions are productive, the opposite can be said about negative emotions.

Building on the Well-being Nexus (3.4), the issue here does not only lie in the fact that they are feeling depressed or stressed due to their experiences, but also on what consequences it has such as having troubles in school and in social life. Based on the definition of mental well-being; “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” (WHO, 2014), we can see a correlation in how the adolescents negative experiences has inflicted a negative emotional state which in turn has corrupted their subjective perception, which in turn makes it less motivating for them to engage in activities in life which is important for them, hence, rational decisionmaking is lessened due to emotional unbalance. Their emotional state has hence affected their mental state. A further example of this lies in one of the responses of the HVB workers:

“Those who do not have any physical activities are also more prone to have bad habits, are bored and sleeps away the days when they should be in school. So there is a pattern, adolescents that do not have any activities are more prone
to boredom and probably spend more time thinking negative thoughts” (HVB1)

The lack of physical activity also seems to be a component contributing to negative well-being especially in regards to mental health, which goes in line with the interrelations of well-being presented in the Well-being Nexus.

5.2 Activation, stimulation and positive self-esteem

To understand how positive emotions function and how to disrupt the vicious circle of negative emotions is a core function to this thesis, however difficult a task it may be. Self-esteem and self-confidence are the pillars of emotional health and according to the Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions, these also have long lasting attributes (Fredrickson, 2004, 1371). Achieving something increases one’s self-esteem, and hence improves your emotional well being which subsequently is aiding you in a positive self perception, i.e subjective well-being (Fredrickson, 2004, 1373). When one feel good about oneself, there is a higher inclination to engage oneself in life challenges. However, this is a catch 22 moment as one needs confidence to enter the challenge but can only get confidence in entering and succeeding the challenge. Although the programs initiated by CwB and CC had a spillover effect in regards to the catch 22 moment thanks to the disarming circus artists who in a simple way engage the adolescents in activities through the workshops and encourage them to try the activities.

“They laughed and had a lot of fun and realized that they could juggle with three balls and balance plates on sticks and they were very proud of the circus activities that they were able to do and this was a big thing for them. One of the adolescents who doesn’t have that good self-esteem noticed that he were actually able to learn and do some of the tricks made him completely crazy full of joy.” (HVB1)
When the adolescents were given the possibility to try new things and then managed to do it, it brought them feelings of proudness which has an impact on self-esteem. These positive emotions will further nourish the person when faced with a new challenge. In this sense, CwB and CC unhinged the catch 22 moment concerning confidence and self-esteem through the workshops, at least over the duration of the project.

A HVB worker expresses the utter importance for the adolescents to realize that they could achieve things due to the high expectations that the Swedish society has on these adolescents.

“I think that it is really important for these adolescents to realize that they are able to succeed in challenges and do things they thought that they couldn’t, and this is good for their development. The society has fairly high expectations on these adolescents and they are maybe not so used to having so high expectations upon them. When the came to Sweden they are expected to learn the language fast, finish high school, even though they might not have attended school before, get a job and get integrated, these are high expectations which can be very stressful. I think that when they are able to do these things that make them happy also help them think that there is a possibility for them to make it in reality. And that, is really important!” (HVB3)

According the staff involved with CwB and CC as well as the workers at the HVB homes, exceeding your expectations of your abilities is something important for one’s self-esteem because it makes you believe that you can do things in life that you thought were not possible. Which in the end strengthens you and may even build hope. This is seemingly especially important for the adolescents at the HVB homes since they are facing big challenges from both the outside world as well as from within themselves. Although learning how to juggle or walk on a line may be self fulfilling and build self-confidence, the skills learnt, practically will not help them with progressing in their professional life. Also, it is questionable if the self-confidence gained from learning how to juggle compares to i.e, completing a life task.
such as getting the highest grade on your physics exam. However, what creates a sense of pride is an entirely subjective matter.

When one improves one's abilities in a field this often motivating and inspires the person to continue the practice. Furthermore, when one is feeling motivated one is in a positive state of well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 72). Firstly, in regards to mental well being since when one is motivated one become more productive and more likely to be a contributing member of society. And also because experiencing positive states of being or positive emotions broadens a person's ability to cope and see opportunities, make plans and set goals for the future (Fredrickson, 2004, 1373). Motivation is important also regarding emotional well-being, as being motivated means directing focusing on an instance that is appealing to you. Having intrapersonal affections is important as it implies that you are building on your strengths which contributes to increased emotional well-being (Belongto, accessed, 27/06/2017).

“And we noticed that the ones that managed the tightrope were very happy about doing so. They had manage a thing which they though were not possible. They really had to concentrate hard and that was really important for them.” (HVB3)

Experiencing positive emotions is important for everyone, more so for those who are trapped in a negative emotional cycle. An HVB worker explain how an adolescent who is suffering from mental illness enjoyed the circus workshop.

“Even the adolescent that I mentioned had been to the Child Psychiatric Unit last Friday, it is one of the children that has been in contact with them because he has tried to commit suicide, even he partook in the circus and thought it was really funny and laughed a lot when he tried the different circus activities. He was there for two days and though it was a lot of fun and laughed a lot and was impressed about what he was able to do.” (HVB1)
Based on a study by Wilburn and Smith, stress and low self-esteem are often connected to suicidal thoughts, especially for adolescents (Wilkins & Smith, 2005). Which makes these self-esteem building activities so important as it plays a role in combatting mental illness related to suicides.

According to Fredrickson, “If negative emotions narrow the momentary thought-action repertoire, and positive emotions broaden this same repertoire, then positive emotions ought to function as efficient antidotes for the lingering effects of negative emotions” (Fredrickson, 2004; 1371). The thought action repertoire means that there is a action based response to a thought, hence, a positive though cause a positive action. In this sense, positive emotions function as an antidote for existing effects of negative emotions which means that positive emotions may undo negative emotions, which builds psychological resilience towards negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2004; 1371-1372). Hence, according to this argument, the positive emotions that the suicidal adolescent experienced during the circus workshop is a process in which he builds resilience against negative emotions.

Experiencing positive emotions builds psychological resilience and building self-esteem is important for one’s well-being, and so is laughing, which according to the Relief theory has implications for stress reduction (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 351). CwB and CC are organisations which operates through playing and stimulation of laughter, and through playing and laughter they aim to increase the wellbeing of the people they engage with.

5.3 Laughing matters

According to the HVB workers there was a clear positive response to the circus show and workshops as it engaged the children in activity and stimulated laughter:

“They laughed and had a lot of fun…” (HVB1)

“They we’re really happy, laughed and thought it was amusing. It got the children out of them” (HVB2)
“...there was a lot of laughter and playing around…” (HVB3)

Which is the main concern based on the interview with staff from CwB.

“That is where we come in and change the pattern of ordinary life for these children where we hope to encourage and stimulate laughter and playing.” (CWB3)

The project initiated by CwB and CC lived up to the hoped expectations. The program director at CwB explains how laughing contributes to a release of energy and that this can be helpful when dealing with stress.

“Laughter releases a bunch of energies in the body that needs to come out, and that by itself can be trauma reducing, on that i have no scientific grounds but we know that this is the case based on personal experiences how good you feel from laughing really strongly for a while.” (CWB3)

Her response directly correlates with the stated effects of the Relief Theory. Even though she does not claim to have any scientific evidence of the importance of laughter in regards to trauma reduction, the previously laid out research chapter (3.1) shows that there is in fact scientific data which shows a causality between laughter and enhanced ability to deal with traumas.

Furthermore, she states that laughter in her experience has a positive impact on one’s well-being because when one laughs, energies are released which is a relief according to her. The validity of the Relief theory is further acknowledged through the response of a HVB workers who says:

“I have experience and also heard from other staff that the adolescents are more relaxed after the circus week and that they laugh more and seem more generally happy, so the effect has lasted.” (HVB3)
Their experience of the impact of CwB and CC is that the adolescents at the HVB homes are more relaxed and even happier than before. Laughter then, as a positive emotion seems as an appropriate measure for stress release.

According to the Wilkins and Eisenbraun, negative states of health are often related to stress and further claim that laughter can be a proper countermeasure to limit the stress symptoms. The relief theory states that people engage in laughter since they experience that a release of stress is reduced by the exercise. This relief might revolve around a cognitive release from a physical tension or a release of anxiety (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 351). Based on the responses given by the HVB workers, the adolescents laughed a lot and did indeed show signs of relief post the circus.

According to Fredrickson (2004) and the Broaden and Build theory “Through experiences of positive emotions, then, people transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals” (Fredrickson, 2004, 1369). This connotes that the positive emotions experienced stretches across the very moment when they are experienced and are contributory to a spectrum of positive aspects revolving an individual's life. Which is solidified based on the answers given by the HVB workers who claims that the adolescents felt more relaxed after and were happier than usual even days after.

The Relief Theory of laughter was not the only applicable or noticeable theory of laughter. The Incongruity Theory can also be validated based on the following observation:

One artist tries to pick up a suitcase but couldn’t lift it up because it was too heavy, a girl comes after and and easily picks it up, the man tries again after and tries really hard this time and lift it so hard that it flies up and hits his face. All the children are laughing hard (Observation from Researcher).

The children did not expect this turn of events and laughed as a reaction to it. The Incongruity Theory solely mentions the reason why we laugh at things, however other studies
have shown that the mere activity of laughing has positive health benefits (Martin, 2002)(Blerkom, 1995)(Golan et al, 2009). The Incongruity Theory in this sense is connected to the Relief Theory as any stimuli of laughter causes a release of energy i.e. stress, which goes in accordance to the Relief theory (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009; 351).

Laughter then, as a stress reducing mechanism has a positive impact on one’s emotional well-being. Furthermore, according to Rod Martin, “A considerable body of research indicates that stressful life experiences can have adverse effects on various aspects of health, including suppression of the immune system and increased risk of infectious disease and heart disease” (Martin, 2002). Which indicates that laughter as a stress reducing mechanism does not only contribute to a more satisfactory emotional state but also contributes to prospects of a increased physical health. Other aspect of laughter concerning its effect on physical health concerns how the exercise of laughter contributes to the relaxation of the muscles, aids in respiration and blood circulation, increase the amount of pain-killing endorphins in the brain and decrease the level of hormones related to stress (Martin, 2002; 216-217). Laughter then, have positive impacts on emotional and physical well-being which based on the Well-being nexus has implications for one’s mental well-being as the stated physical effects of laughter sets the body and mind in balance which allows the mind to achieve and work to the best his or her abilities (Bergland, 2014). Furthermore, a reduction of anxiety allows a person to view things more rationally as anxiety is connected to low self-esteem and self doubt which often are irrationally conditioned. A person’s ability to think rationally has to do with a person’s mental health (Aana, 2017). If laughter affects the three dimensions of well-being, one can assume that an individual’s sense of subjective well-being also is increased.

Laughter is also an activity which enables one’s full attention to that singular activity and therefore opens up an environment which is experienced in present time.

5.4 Distraction from reality

Being in a depressed, deprived or in a stressed state often feels as a vicious circle, and one that is hard to escape (Soong, 2017). Although, interviews showed that during the circus
performance and workshop, the adolescents were not focusing on negative aspects of life and hence, during that time escaped that vicious circle. The CwB project coordinator explains her view of the importance of their work in this way;

“The most important aspect of our work is that we go with circus artists to areas around the world where children are in need of a break and get the possibility to laugh and are offered access to play and the most essential is that we become a break in their daily lives. Their daily lives are often spent thinking and acting on behalf of survival and other things than playing and laughing are prioritized. That is where we come in and change the pattern of ordinary life for these children where we hope to encourage and stimulate laughter and playing.” (CWB3)

One of the circus artists interviewed shares a story when she was in Burma where she explains the transforming power of laughter:

“To meet children that is suffering from diseases and in a place which has so much suffering is always at start hard. But when we start clowning, it is as if everything change and like everyone becomes normal humans again, no matter their disease and it makes it easier for the people to cope with what they are going through. To remind them that there is not only suffering but also happiness and laughter, it reminds them that joy still exist.” (CWB2)

The staff of CwB express the importance for children to get disconnected from the reality of things, and that this is important for everyone but especially when one has been through traumatic experiences or is in a stressed state of being, such as the adolescents living at the HVB homes.

“I noticed that in that moment when they got to try out the circus tricks that they were there in the present moment and their thoughts were not somewhere else about something negative. So one noticed that there was a lot of laughter, playing and that is what I liked about the show that there was no pressure or stress, just
pure play, and they really need this. They got distracted from everyday life”
(HVB1)

When one is laughing or is engaged in an activity one is fully connected to that present moment. Being in the moment inclines that there are no thoughts about the past or the future, which as we’ve seen can be a source of stress for these adolescents (5.1). Hence, when engaged in the moment through playing or laughing negative emotions are suppressed in favour of joy, laughter, creativity and relaxation.

“Yes absolutely, they dropped the mask and became more present, and these activities sort of demands that you’re concentrated and hence completely in the present. Plus that it is joyful and challenging” (HVB2)

The acknowledgement that the adolescents, during their time with CwB and CC was distracted from their ordinary lives and thoughts is repeatedly expressed.

“ This takes focus from their ordinary lives. This is important because they carry heavy thoughts and burdens from their experiences as refugees and from their home countries. Many times they sit and think alone in their rooms about how the family is so there are a lot of emotions so that they can to use their brain for something else and focus on something different was good for them, they felt it and so did we. (HVB3)

Getting distracted from their ordinary lives seems to be important for them, based on the HVB workers perspective. Being in the moment makes you relax and it can be correlated to meditation, a phenomena that is practiced due to its effect on the human mind and body (Astin, 1997). When you’re totally focused on something in particular, this can be considered meditation, although active meditation in particular (Medical Dictionary, accessed: 2017-08-15). Meditation is known to have plentiful positive health benefits as it according to Astin helps reduce psychological symptoms such as anxiety and stress and enacts a sense of
control of accepting life situations (Astin, 1997). Because of meditation's effect and ability to help cope with mental issues, such as stress, anxiety and depression it provides as a proper technique to increase emotional as well as mental wellbeing (Aana, 2017). The workshop’s in which the adolescents were engaged allowed them to focus on one singular situation, allowing other thoughts to fade to the background.

“One of the adolescents that has turned 18 is quite serious and only speaks about serious things, there is no joking with him. But he actually wanted to partake. He is one of the guys that aren’t Afghan, so he is a little bit outside the group but he wanted to partake and he tough it was very fun and relaxing.” (HVB1)

Based on the answers provided so far we can conclude that based on the HVB workers perception, the adolescents enjoyed the presence of CwB and CC and that it made them feel more engaged in the present time and relaxed.

Furthermore, during one of the non-participatory observations committed by the researcher this was found:

There are about 15 adolescents present at the preparations for the circus work shop and it seems as though non want to be the first one to try any of the activities by the way they look at eachother and make fun of how silly it appears. But when one of the artists start doing tricks with the diabolo and another starts to juggle the look and mindset seems to change in the adolescents and one approaches them, then another and after a few moments everyone wants to try the activities. Any thoughts of it being silly has flown out of the windom and everyone seems totally engaged in what they’re doing (Observation from Researcher).

In this sense, the adolescents are given the possibility to escape reality for awhile, express themselves freely, play and laugh and for that time nothing else matters. A well experienced circus artist who has been involved with CwB for more than 10 years describes his experience with the children as:
“When you laugh, you’re right there in the moment, it is like meditation. It is not possible to laugh and being somewhere else or laugh and think about something negative. You can think when you laugh but you think forward and associate to positive things and even if you laugh in the moment because of something that has happened you still laugh, and are reminded that you are here and now”. (CWB1)

To have moments in life where stressful thoughts and emotions are suppressed is important for these adolescents well-being, especially since the range of stress related issues is shown to be rather high (5.1). Circus has been shown to have a positive impact on this through distraction and stimulation. However, the continued impact of circus is probably limited as circus might not be an activity that they will continue to exercise.

These workshops were on other occasions experienced with other people, where local swedish people and asylum seeking adolescents were engaged with each other.

5.5 CwB’s experiences of their methods as tools integration

When one person yawns so does, on occasions, the other. The same goes for laughter, it is contagious. Therein lies a conception of laughter as socially contingent. Hypothesise that two completely different persons are laughing at the same thing. Do they not unite in that moment? Even though they do not necessarily laugh for the same reason. One of the circus artists is a strong advocate of circus as a way to break barriers between people and hence bring people together:

“Cirkus is traditionally a folk art and it bring people together no matter the differences between people and it is important to create moments of just not thinking about you problems of what is happening in your life and it doesn't matter if you are a refugee or not, everybody needs a break from life. It brings people together and it is a break from your daily stressful thoughts…” (CWB2)

“To meet people as equals through laughter and playing,” (CWB2)
She argues that laughter and playing is something that everybody does and therefore is something deeply human and provides us with positive emotions (unless the case of superiority laughter is prominent) (3.5.2). However, this form of laughter and playing is not under evaluation in this thesis.

One of the artists share how he experienced the integrational effects of circus in a smaller community in the northern part of Sweden:

“We were in the north of Umeå and were with the same children at a housing for an entire week and many of them became really good at circus since we practiced every day so the last show we decided to invite the local village for a performance and try out workshop which the children held and they were very generous with what they had learned. It had a sort of intergenerational value that was fantastic.” (CWB1)

The program director tells a similar story:

“On the following monday the artists had a final performance for the whole village and out of the 100 that lived there, 60-80 showed up to the performance at the HVB home. They played their show and there was a young boy that was in the show and was borrowing Trevors private diablo och had practiced the whole weekend because he was completely sold in it, so much that he didn’t want to return it. After the performance the children from the HVB homes held the circus workshops and helped the children from the village and it was incredible to see the children from the HVB homes grow and get to show and teach and to be the one that can. This has integrational value.” (CWB3)

The acts of playing and laughing are often free from prejudice and hence open up spaces where people can solely be people together and unite in the activity. Being a unaccompanied refugee is Sweden is often characterized by segregation deriving from a lack of linguistic
skills, different culture and a sometimes not understanding or even spiteful host country culture. Laughing in this sense can unite people no matter culture, background or appearance.

Any activity which promotes integration and unification can be considered positive in regards to the lives of those involved in a integrational process as they may feel more welcome in the society and may be offered capabilities to be a more contributing member of society. WHO definition of mental health includes the following segment “...can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” (WHO, 2014).

An aspect of well-being that has not been discussed is social well-being. Engaging in activities together is a social interaction which builds bonds and to have access to social interaction is key to one’s social well-being (Berkman et al, 2000; 849). However, some adolescents often retain to their rooms and shut off communication to the outside world.

“You can see that they spend a lot of time in their beds and that they have things which tears on them and cause them pain. They have periods when they don’t feel good and they want to be alone for a week because of it” (HVB1)

Even though this might feel good for that individual in that certain moment, it is counterproductive concerning building ties with other people and hence to strengthen one’s social well-being. Engaging in conversations and small talk may be difficult when in a anxious or depressed state which makes activities such an appropriate approach as it doesn’t require any actual conversation but nevertheless opens them up for social interaction. This was made apparent during the observations of the circus workshops as well as through the interview’s with staff of CwB.

“One of the adolescents that has turned 18 is quite serious and only speaks about serious things, there is no joking with him. But he actually wanted to partake. He is one of the guys that aren’t Afghan, so he is a little bit outside the group but he wanted to partake and he tough it was very fun and relaxing.” (HVB1)
Furthermore, cultural differences differentiates these adolescents with the rest of the Swedish population which makes interaction harder. It is a barrier such as the one that the depressed is experienced with other adolescents. Although, a barrier that was overcome through the common experience circus as a non-language driven activity in which they came together through laughter and joy, which are universal feelings. Social interaction between local swedes and the adolescents applying for permanent residency is imperative in order for integration to occur.

Building on an argument presented by Berkman et al, “Thus, through opportunities for engagement, social networks define and reinforce meaningful social roles including parental, familial, occupational, and community roles, which in turn, provides a sense of value, belonging, and attachment” (Berkman et al, 2000; 849). Circushoppet, as a project which at times engage adolescents and children with a refugee background in social situations provides them with a possibility to feel more welcome, and thus may invite a sense of belonging and attachment.

6. Discussion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the various effects that the project “Cirkushoppet” implemented by Clowns without Borders and Circus Cirkör had on adolescents looking for permanent residency here in Sweden. The interviews and observations provided me with a lot of usable information that was put in relation to the Broaden and Build theory of positive emotions as well as the Relief theory in regards to laughter. These theories strengthened the already positive results of the project as it connected the lived positive experiences to the notions of well-being. What was learned was that laughter has the capability to provide a stress-free environment and according to the Relief theory, even reduce stress. Being able to achieve the goal of an activity provided the adolescents with an increased sense of self-esteem as well as it allows the person to fully focus on that activity which can be considered active meditation, which also has health benefits. The Well-being nexus has been a helpful tool in order to try to explain how our well-being is influenced in
different and sometimes unexpected ways. And even though the HVB staff through their personal ties with the adolescents, according to the Theory of Mind, can experience the emotions felt by the adolescents through their empathic capabilities, the question of how the adolescents themselves actually feel after Cirkushoppet remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the outcome of the project as shown in the Findings chapter (5) can be regarded as nothing else but positive and one might assume that if the duration of the project was longer, the impact itself might have been larger.

The Broaden and Build theory provides us with the theoretical ground that positive emotions felt in the moment has implications for future emotional states which has been argued for in the findings chapter. Even though there were signs of long term effects of the experienced positive emotions, these should be considered scientifically insufficient. If there was an opportunity to follow up long term effects of Cirkushoppet, the stated long term effects of experiencing positive emotions might have exceeded the theoretical nature of the Broaden and Build theory.

As these adolescents often feel like they cannot talk about their issues, psychological aid can be deemed sometimes inappropriate also due to the high number of asylum seekers who has PTSD. Hence, creative programs such as this one focusing on positive psychology could be considered more effective, pragmatic ways in order to help the adolescents deal with their issues, indirectly through the experience of positive emotions.

If the program has a direct effect on integration is hard to say. However, it can arguably be said to have indirect effect as the adolescents and children were in a social situation alongside local swedish people where they played and laughed together. The consequences of such a thing is that previous preconceptions about refugees might have been lifted which has contributed to a attitude change. If this has a direct impact on the adolescents and children who met the swedish locals is again, hard to say. However, change takes long time and needs to occur everywhere, in the minds of everyone. If a longterm project like this one was initiated one can argue for the strengthened ties between those involved in the project.
When individuals are in a state of positive emotional, mental and physical health it allows them to a higher degree be contributing member of the society. Broadly speaking, CwB and CC contribute to the development of a country because they have an impact on increased well-being of individuals which in the end contributes to a society. Organisations such as these then play an important role not only for the personal development and well-being of an individual but to the well-being of society as well.

7. Conclusion

Based on the answers given in the interviews, theories and knowledge about well-being, findings has been shown that there are elements in the program initiated by CwB and CC which increase the well-being of those who were engaged in the project. There were three major positive outcomes; (1) Increased self-esteem, (2) Stress reduction through the stimulation of laughter and (3) Experiences which allowed the adolescents to focus about something different. The bottom line is, Circushoppet which was implemented by Clowns without Borders and Cirkus Cirkör, had a positive impact on the adolescents they engaged with and serves a good approach in order to increase well-being which is especially important concerning unaccompanied refugees that are experiencing mental illness.

8. Proposals for future research in the field

I hope that this thesis can serve as a base for future research within the field and if there are any lessons to be learned it is that a research project such as this one requires a longer period of time as well as the ability to directly assess the subjective well-being of the beneficiaries, for example through the Well-being Index or other well-being related questionnaires. This would allow the research to go into more detail in regards of the effect that creative programs has on children and adolescents regarding the correlation between laughter and self-esteem and increased well-being.
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10. Appendix

10.1 List over completed interviews

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<td>Female</td>
<td>Helsingborg</td>
<td>May 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HVB2</td>
<td>Supervisor at HVB home</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Helsingborg</td>
<td>May 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Supervisor at HVB home</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Helsingborg</td>
<td>May 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Artist at CwB</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Växjö</td>
<td>May 3rd</td>
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<tr>
<td>CwB2</td>
<td>Clown at CwB</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Växjö</td>
<td>May 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CwB3</td>
<td>Coordinator at CwB</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Växjö</td>
<td>May 9th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.2 Interview guides

10.2.1 Interview guide: HVB workers

1. Vad tyckte ungdomarna om Cirkushoppet?
2. Hur mår ungdomarna generellt?
3. Hur är gruppdynamiken bland killarna, va det någon skillnad under cirkushoppet och efter?
5. Andra intrtryck och. Känslor som du tyckte förmedlades av killarna?
6. Tyckte de att det va roligt, provade de på de olika aktiviteterna?
7. Kan du berätta om några händelser som stack ut från mängden från förra vecka?
8. Är de mer aktiva, glada, uttrycksfulla efter Cirkushoppet enligt dig? (Om hen jobbat under helgen?)
9. Efter att CwB och Cirkus Cirkör har varit på plats, känner du någon skillnad i deras välmående, exempel?

10.2.2 Interview guide: Circus artists
1. Hur känner du att cirkushoppet togs emot av ungdornarna på boendet?
2. Vad anser du är vikten med arbetet ni utför?
3. Varför är det viktigt att just ensamkommande bemöts av CuG?
4. Kan du berätta om några exempel där effekten av det ni gör har känts av speciellt mycket?
5. I din erfarenhet, vad har ökad möjlighet till lek för konsekvens på barn och unga?
6. Hur ser du på skratt som medel för trauma reducering och stresshantering?
7. Humor kan användas som skyddsmechanism mot hot mot ens psykologiska välmående, hur ser du på detta och hur knytar ni som organisation an till detta?
8. Märker/märkte du någon skillnad på barnen före/efters CuG föreställningar osv?
9. Finns det långvariga effekter av det arbetet ni gör? Vad tror du att barnen tar med sig efter?

10.2.3 Interview guide: CwB coordinator
1. Vad anser du är vikten af det arbete ni utför?
2. Just nu arbetar ni med Cirkushoppet med ensamkommande barn på flykt på HVB hem, varför är det viktigt för dem att bemötas av er?
3. De får ju också prova på cirkus under fördjupning veckorna, hur tänker du om lekens betydelse för barns välmående?

4. Hur ser du på skratt som medel för trauma reducering och stresshantering?

5. Kan du berätta om något specifikt exempel där du har känt av effekten av det ni gör?

6. Humor kan användas som skyddsmekanism från hot mot ens psykologiska välmående, hur ser du på detta?

10.3 Interview sample: CwB coordinator (Swedish)

R: Researcher  I: Interviewee

R: Vad anser du är vikten av CuGs arbete?
I: Jag anser att det viktigaste i vårt arbete är att vi öker med artister till områden i världen där barn behöver få en paus och få möjlighet att skratta och få tillgång till lek och det viktiga är att vi kommer som en paus i deras vardag hos barn som annars lever i situationer där dem har mycket annat att tänka på och andra saker som prioriteras än just leket och skrattet och då kommer vi in som en frigörande del där vi hoppas att vi ska kunna främja eller locka till skratt och lek. Dessutom så arbetar vi ju enligt konventionen för barns rättigheter där det näms just att det är viktigt att barn har tillgång till en trygg miljö där de kan leka, något som inte alltid finns men som vi bidrar med.

R: Just nu arbetar ni med Cirkushoppen med ensamkommande barn på flykt på HVB hem, varför är det viktigt för dem att bemötas av er?

I: Situationen för ungdomar på flykt i Sverige är ganska påfrestande och många av dem unga har varit med omskika mycket saker innan de har kommit hit och har erfarenheter om själva flykten och situationen i sitt hemland och när de kommer har de tagit sig igenom hela europa helt själva och lever i Sverige med en ovisshet om framtiden och de vet inte vad som kommer hända och de vet inte hur deras familjer mår och lever under väldigt psykisk ohälsa och vi ser det som att det är viktigt för dem att vi kommer in och ger dem en paus i det vi ger dem en möjlighet till en stund att tänka på någonting annat och förhoppningsvis en känsla av välmående som kan bidra till att man har någonting annat att tänka på men också att man kan återkomma till det minnet vid senare tillfället.

R: De får ju också prova på cirkus under fördjupning veckorna, hur tänker du om lekens betydelse för barns välmående?

I: Vi har ju inga vetenskapliga belägg för att det är viktigt för barn att leka, men det kan vi ju alla stå bakom att det är viktigt för barn, eller för alla att leka och det handlar om barns utveckling och att man måste bra av att skratta finns det forskning på att det är väldigt viktigt att man får skratta och ibland när man inte har skrattat på länge så kan man behöva öva på att skratta så blir det successivt lättare att skratta och däri må bättre. Skrattet har ju liksom fysiska funktioner, välmående funktioner som gör att man måste bättre.

Det är ju både om att man ska får tänka på någonting annat en stund men också att man har känslan av att man klarar av någonting. Den cirkus som vi lär så är det ju väldigt mycket nya saker för barnen och ungdomarna att lära sig och det är väldigt spännande grejer som man lätt kan ta till sig och som
inte behövs något språk för att förstå och som de flesta kan prova på och i och med att man får prova någonting som man kan klara av. Att prova på någonting och som man sen klarar av gör någonting med människors själlyftöroende och det stärker barn, unga likväld som vuxna, det är jätteviktigt.

Liksom, att man provade att gå på linan och sen att den personen klarade mig utan att hålla i mig så kände man en enorm tillfredsställelse och en “sh*t jag kan känsla”, och det är jätteviktigt. Så det gör vi men också att vi busar och skrattar och att man får gör tokiga saker. Rummet där vi är allting tillåtet och det är så avväpnande också just circus och clowner att man får tillåtelse att göra saker som man annars tycker är pinsamt.

R: Hur ser du på skratt som medel för trauma reducering och stresshantering?
I: Vi vet ju att skratt är livsviktigt och att man behöver skratta för att må bra. Skrattet frigör ju massor energier i kroppen som behöver komma ut och det i sig kan ju vara traumavägande sen har jag inga vetenskapliga belägg för att det är så men vi vet att det är så från personliga erfarenheter hur bra man mår av att ha fått skratta riktigt ordentligt ett tag. Jag har ju också läst den här boken som jag har tipsat dig om som handlar om skrattets inverkan där hon tar upp väldigt många exempel på folk som har varit väljut-djuka och har haft skratterapi och har mått mycket bättre av det. Så jag tror verkligen att skratt kan vara ett verktyg för trauma reducering t.ex. när man har varit med om någonting som har varit fruktansvärt eller jobbigt och behöver komma vidare från det, då tror jag att skrattet kan vara en väldigt stor del i det.

R: Kan du berätta om något specifikt exempel där du har känt av effekten av det ni gör?
I: Just i Cirkushoppen så var vi och gjorde fördjupningsvecka på ett HVB hem i sverige och i Hallns, det stället finns inte längre det är därför jag säger det. Det var ett asylboende för människor som precis hade kommit till sverige och de hade ifö bott på det här boendet ganska länge och det låg ute på landet mitt ute på vischan och det var en gammal militärbyggnad och det var ett extremt tråkigt ställe och inte så mycket interaktion med det övriga samhället utöver en liten by som låg i närheten, så de var väldigt ensamma där. Jag tror att det bodde ungefär 400-500 personer där och vi va där och hade fördjupningsvecka med en massa barn och det var så fantastiskt att se hur mycket de lärde sig under veckan och hur de växte så på fredagen fick de visa för de befolkningen där vad de hade lärt sig och jag va där och såg också hur stolta de va när de fick visa vad de hade lärt sig. Föreståndaren som va där berättade också att de tyckte att det var fantastiskt och att de inte hade sett dem så glada på väldigt länge. Det var också en pappa som kom fram och pratade med en av artisterna efteråt och verkligen tackade för att han hade fått sett sitt barn så himla glad den här veckan. Måndagen efter hade artisterna en sista show för hela bygden och av de 100 som bodde där så hade 60-80 dykt upp till den här föreställningen på den här föreställningen på asylboendet. De spelade sin show sen va det en ung kille som fick va med i showen och hade fått låna Trevors private Diabolo och hade övat under hela helgen för att han hade blivit helt frälst i den här och ville inte lämna tillbaka den på fredagen så han fick låna den över helgen och sen tog Trevor in honom i ett av numret i showen. Efteråt hade barnen på asylboendet visat barnen från bygden vad de hade lärt sig och det var som en workshop men att det var barnen själva som höll i workshopsen och det va så himla fantastiskt och att se dem växa i det och få visa hur man gör och lära vidare och få vara den som kan. Det har ju ett integrationsvärde också. Barnen går säkert i samma skola men och vi har upplevt att det har varit ganska separerat när vi har kommit till skolor. Det är väldigt viktigt att känna att man kan mötas genom någonting, så jag tror att cirkus är ett väldigt bra integrationsverktyg som vi också har sett i
många andra projekt som vi har arbetat med men det har inget som vi hade räknat med och något som bara blev.

När vi kommer till ett HVB hem så är det ganska ofta så att ungdomarna når ganska däligt och har isolerat sig och många känner att det inte orkar vara med även fast vi på förhand har meddelat att vi erbjuder detta så känner man att jag orkar inte delta när de egentligen skulle behöva det, men vi pressar ingen. Det fina är att ichomed att vi är där hos dem så kan de sa vad det är och bli lite nyfikna och våga sig dit ändå eller om det är några som bara avvaktar i början och efter ett tag går och hämtar någonting och börjar i ett hörn med det. Det är många som har sagt att de inte har hört ungdomarna skratta på det här sättet på váldigt länge. En av mina artister träffade jag igår som sade att de hade varit på ett ställe i fredags och när de skulle sätta igång så va det i en lokal som va en liten bit ifrån hemåt och då död det bara up 2-3 stycken så det var ju váldigt många som va kvar på hemmet. Så då bestämde de att då ta oss till hemmet istället så då hade de åkt dit och hälsat på alla och bestämte sig för att vara i vardagsrummet istället och då va det ju en del ungdomar som verkligen inte nådde bra och stannat i sitt rum, men då hade artистerna lagt små spår av jongleringsbollar, och inte verkligen inte pushat på för mycket utan respekterat deras space men ändå på nått sätt locka till att vara med och det hade slutat i att nästan alla hade varit med och det hade varit jättefint trots den lilla ytan och 2 m i takhöjd och gått på linan ute i trädgården och det hade varit jättefint och jätteroligt att höra.

R: Humor kan användas som skyddsmechanism från hot mot ens psykologiska välmående, hur ser du på detta?

I: När jag tänker på humor så tänker jag på att det har något med verbalitet att göra och det är inte humor som vi jobbar med men sen vet jag inte hur våra artister tänker. Men vi ger utan ord en upplevelse av humor som stimulerar skratt. Skratt glädje och lek bidrar till att man kan hantera svåra erfarenheter eller trauman det håller jag med om och det är inga konstigheter i det.

R: Det finns en teori inom skratt som heter Relief teori som säger att när man skrattar då frigör en massa en energi, hur ser du på det?

I: Ja så är det verkligen. Man behöver skratta för att få utlopp för sin känsla för att må bra. Det är livsviktigt!

10.3.1 Interview sample: CwB Coordinator (Translated to English)

R: Researcher I: Interviewee

R: What is the importance of the work that CwB conducts?

I: The most important in our work is that we go with circus artists to areas around the world where children are in need of a break and get the possibility to laugh and are offered access to play and the most essential is that we become a break in their daily lives. Their daily lives are often spent on thinking and acting on behalf of survival and other things than playing and laughing are prioritized. That is where we come in and change the pattern of ordinary life for these children where we hope to encourage and stimulate laughter and playing. Furthermore, we work according to the Convention of Children's Rights as it clearly mentions the importance of children having access to a safe
environment where they can play, something that does not always exist in their lives but that we provide.

R: Right now you're working with the project "Circushoppet" with unaccompanied refugee children as target group. Why is it especially important for them to play and laugh?

I: The situation for these adolescents currently under the status refugees in Sweden is quite challenging and many of them has been through a lot before they came here and has negative experiences from the actual flight and from the situation in their home-country. Also, they have gotten themselves all the way through Europe before they come to Sweden where they live in ignorance of the future, they do not know what is going to happen, if they are allowed to stay, how their families are. Many suffer from psychological illness. That is why we deem it important for these children to get a break from all these negative things and offer them the possibility for a moment think about something else, feel well which in turn can contribute to having something else to think about. They are given a positive memory to which they can return whenever they want.

R: They also get the possibility to try different circus activities during a whole week, how do you think concerning the correlation between playing and well-being?

I: We don't have any scientific proof for that it is important for children to laugh, but I think everyone can confirm that it is indeed important for children, or for everyone for that matter to play, and that it concerns the child's ability to develop and feel good. And that you feel good by laughing is something known to science. It is very important that you get to laugh and sometimes when you haven't laughed in a long time then you might have to practice laughter again so it successively become easier to laugh and hence feel better. Laughter has physical implications, regarding one's well-being which makes one feel better.

I: It is the combination of getting space to think of something else for a moment but also that you're experiencing the feeling that you can accomplish something. The circus that we are teaching include a lot of exciting and new things for the children and adolescents. These activities are often easy and exciting and activities that most people can grasp. It is also easier because you do now need any language skills to understand and most of the children have the ability to at least try. To try something that you then accomplish strengthens children, young as well as adults and this is crucial. For example that you tried walking on the line and then manage to walk the whole way without help creates such a strong satisfaction and a "YES I CAN DO IT FEELING", this is really important. We focus on this, but we also goof around and laugh with the children and encourage freedom of goofiness. The room we create allow everything and this is very disarming. Circus and clowns often has this impact and teach the children that it is okay to do things that otherwise would be embarrassing.

R: How do you look at laughter as a tool for trauma reduction and stress management?

I: We know that laughing is crucial and that you need to laugh in order to feel good. Laughter releases a bunch of energies in the body that needs to come out, and that by itself can be trauma reducing, on that I have no scientific grounds but we know that this is the case based on personal experiences how good you feel from laughing really strongly for a while. I have also read that book which I recommended to you about laughter's effect where the author brings up many examples of people that has been very sick and become better through laughter therapy. So I really think that laughter can be a
method for trauma reduction. For example when you've experienced something horrible and need to move on from that, that is a time when i think laughter can play a major role.

R: Can you talk about something specifically nice when you felt the impact of what CwB and CC does?
I: Specifically concerning Circushoppet. We spent a week at a HVB home in Sweden in Hallnäs, that place no longer exist and that is why i can mention the place. It was at a home for asylum seekers for people who had just arrived to sweden and well, they've actually lived there for quite some time but it was out on the country in the middle of nowhere and it was an old military facility. So it was a really boring place and there was not much interaction with the rest of the society out there apart from a small village nearby, so they were very lonely out there. I think around 400-500 people lived there and we were there and had a circus week with a lot of children and it was amazing to see how much they learned during one week and how they on the friday got the possibility to show the population of the village what they had learned. The manager who was there also explained how amazing it was and that they hadn't seen them this happy in a long time. There was a dad who approached and talked with one of the artists afterwards and sincerely thanked him for having seen his child being so very happy this week.

On the following Monday the artists had a final performance for the whole village and out of the 100 that lived there, 60-80 showed up to the performance at the HVB home. They played their show and there was a young boy that was in the show and was borrowing Trevor's private diablo och had practiced the whole weekend because he was completely sold in it, so much that he didn't want to return it. After the performance the children from the HVB homes held the circus workshops and helped the children from the village and it was incredible to see the children from the HVB homes grow and get to show and teach and to be the one that can. This has integrational value. The children probably goes to the same school but that it is usually quite segregated when we go to schools. It is very important that you can meet in an activity like this. So i think that circus is a very good tool for integration and we have also seen this in other projects that we have been working with, but this was extra fun since it wasn't anything that we counted on.

When we come to a HVB home it is quite usual that the adolescents feel quite bad emotionally and have isolated themselves and may feel that they don't have the energy to partake even though we have let them know that we will be there. They don't have the energy to be there even though they might really need it, but we do not pressure anyone. The beauty of it is that when we are there they start to see what it is that we are doing and become curious and after a while dare to come over or if there is someone who is hesitant in the beginning and later just takes something small to try out with and then head back to the corner. Many have said that they haven't heard the adolescents laugh in this way in a long time. One of the artists i met yesterday told me that they were at a place last Friday and when they were about to start in a building that was a bit further from the adolescents home only 2-3 showed up so a lot of them stayed at home. That created the decision to go to their home and do the show in their living room instead. at that time many of the adolescents did not feel well and stayed in their rooms but then some of the artists put small trails of juggling balls to guide them to the show, without pushing to much and being respectful of their space. Somehow this made some of the adolescents to join and it resulted in that almost everybody at the home had joined and it was really nice despite the small area and 2 m in roof height. They walked on the line outside in the garden and they had a really nice time and this was really nice for me to hear.
R: Humor can be used as a protective mechanism from things that threaten our psychological well-being, what is your opinion concerning this?
I: When i think about humor i think that it has something to do with verbality, and that is not the kind of humor that we work with, but i don't know how our artist think about that. But we give, without words, a humoristic experience which stimulates laughter. Laughter, joy and ply contributes to one's ability to deal with tough experiences or traumas so i agree in this and it is not strange to me."
D: Det finns en teori inom skratt som heter Relief teori som säger att när man skrattar då frigör en massa en energi, hur ser du på det?
R: There is a theory within laughter that is called Relief Theory which proclaims that when you laugh, a lot of energy is released from the body, what is your view of this?
I: Yes i really agree. It is necessary to laugh and to exert your emotions in order to feel good. It is crucial!

10.4 Observation guide

How is the ambience before the performance?

How do the they react and behave during the show?

How do they react and behave during the circus workshop?

How is the ambience after the performance and circus workshop?

Is there any perceivable difference in the mood and behavior after the performance and circus workshop compared to before?

Other observations?