

‘Linking the breaks’: containing the psychotherapists responding to the 2008 Xenophobic Crisis

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Abstract

In this paper, the seven co-authors describe and reflect on the experience, over a 3–4 month period from June to September 2008, of offering volunteer mental health services on a regular basis to refugees at various sites in response to the xenophobic crisis in Cape Town. In particular, the authors focus on how a group of about twenty therapist volunteers felt about the work, how they thought about and communicated those feelings to each other, and the way of working that emerged over this period. The notion of a relationship between this form of linking up with each other, via both email and meetings, and the therapist volunteers’ capacity to continue to provide a particular therapeutic service during a humanitarian disaster of this magnitude are explored.