

*Participant interviews Foundation for Active Nonviolence:
Joana Detoni, Brazil/Slovakia, participant in the international training in 2016 (in
the UK)*

March 2020



What ignited your interest in joining the training?

At that time I saw a lot of violent situations in the world, the beginning of the refugee crisis for example and war and conflict. I remember thinking maybe violence will further escalate. And I wanted to expand my skills with young people, to prepare myself when refugees would come to my community for example. The training pointed at getting skills for daily life and also applied to youth work. In my everyday life, what I saw was how people are not aware of how we are violent in our communication. I saw the training had conflict resolution and communication, so I thought: that's perfect. It would be good for me.

What is your most precious memory of the training?

During the training I had my birthday. No-one knew about it, but then in the evening people had made a heart and everyone wrote messages and we had a nice celebration. In that moment I felt really welcome and really loved. I didn't expect anything. It was the first time I spend my birthday in a training course and it was really nice.

The other memory is the activity when we made a walk in the woods. We got some questions, we had to exchange ideas, experiences and had the chance to talk to each other. It was at the beginning. We got out of the context of the training room and the place we were walking was beautiful, even if it was wet. I don't remember exactly what we talked about, but it was interesting to get to know some people and what was important for them and how their work connected to the training. I was surprised about some people. For example, one girl was a nurse, but also liked motor bikes and then came to this training about nonviolence. Completely disconnected things, but she had so many things to say! When you find out more about people's lives and you discover more about the person than the obvious that connects you to that moment and place – you know, that we are youth workers interested in conflict resolution and peace – it really humanises the youth worker, the activist. You see this completeness. It was enriching for me.

What were the most important things you learned?

In terms of something that I could easily apply, it was Nonviolent Communication, or in a broader sense Conflict Transformation: trying to find out what the point of conflict is, reformulating the needs and addressing them. I also found it very interesting to hear from other people what they do and how. It was a very remarkable group. I still remember many people, what they do and how talking to them touched me because I saw new possibilities how things can be done. Working for things in which you believe. It certainly gave me a lot. It was a group that had a lot to share. They were working in various fields in a way connected to peace, it had a lot of potential. Many people had a similar approach to the topic, or even to life. So they way they worked and looked at things, I could adopt. And this is the kind of learning that you don't plan, but they touch the participants too. It can be really beneficial.

And what really caught my attention and was very important for me to learn was nonviolent activism – ways to engage in social change based on civil disobedience or other methods. This ignited in me something that I knew I always wanted to do, but because of circumstances I hadn't. It

touched me to hear how other people do this, and that it is a real thing. The principles, what makes it work. For example, groups that might occupy a property in the name of a cause to make a point. Or groups that are even able to make use of the land and defend themselves without violence, like the Landless Movement in Brazil, the country where I grew up. I also remember that Marcus –one of the trainers– shared that he once broke into a nuclear sight and was even able to enter an airplane. But he, and other activists doing such actions, willingly let himself get arrested. Otherwise it would be considered an act of terrorism. I didn't know how it works, so learning more helped me to form an image about how it is something I can participate in. It's a little seed inside of me and I'm sure in the future it is something I will do.

How have you been practising or applying something you learned at the training?

What I could apply was communicating in a conflict situation: I was able to not get myself involved in the conflict, meaning I didn't perpetrate it or let it expand, but tried to stop and communicated in a way that the needs were clearly stated and a solution could be found with which everybody is satisfied. I became more aware of the power of words. I went through the break up of my marriage last year and despite the frustration, anger and resentment, **I kept my focus on clarifying my needs and feelings instead of creating an endless loop of conflict.** By stating the needs, you can find win-win situations that meet the needs usually. This is something that really changed. I can say that this was the most immediate result.

Now I am more aware of how violence can appear in communication, I really pay attention to the words I chose and the way of expressing myself. I don't say anymore: “you did this”, but say: “I feel like this when you did that”. In this way the other person doesn't feel attacked and you don't activate resistance, what will stop you from reaching a conclusion. Taking responsibility for how I feel and not accusing the other, created more peace within me and helped to create the environment to come to a peaceful solution.

Do you believe it is important that more people learn about nonviolence and “peace power”? And if so, why?

Yes, it's important because there is so much violence in the things we do that make our lives more complicated and difficult and that could be so easily fixed when people are just aware of them. So this kind of information is vital! Like when we are communicating, we say words, but we don't know what they do, how people hear the words we say. I believe it is crucial people realize that many of their own actions are felt, many times, differently from how they mean them. So after the training this is one of the things I could immediately apply. And I think that if many more people on the planet would become aware, we can change the way we deal with conflict. Then we'd solve so many problems! It is so often people react with violence and it's not very productive. This is only about us, the way we say things. So I think that this kind of education, information, exercises, are really important.

Everybody experiences violence, because it is in so many places. Verbal and physical violence. And we perpetrate it by our actions. There is so much violence that is unnecessary, that we only perpetuate because we are unconscious. So, when we become aware of it, we can stop this endless cycle. We can take things into our own hands, through small actions. Bringing these positive changes. So, by raising awareness of the consequences of violent actions, others become more conscious and we create the ground for healing to happen. If this education became more common, then people could become actors of change, huge change. It could create big consequences. The first step is being aware and then acting responsibly. Stopping your own action is already a huge thing, because you are a multiplier. **Act consciously so you are not a multiplier of unconscious actions.**

“ If this education became more common, then people could become actors of change, huge change.”

