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*Produced and compiled
by the Organization for
the Protection of*

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ISSN 1729-8997

(Online Edition)

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Children Speak

Vol 8, No.34/35, February - May 2009

A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

The Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights organized its Seventh International Conference on 'Sustainable Best Practices in Children and Youth Programs' from May 27 to 28, 2009 at the Holiday Inn Montreal Airport Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

The Conference invited specialists, lecturers, community workers, researchers and policy advisors who are involved with sustainable programs involving children and the youth from across Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America. The conference combined plenary sessions comprising of keynote lectures by the co-Presidents of the Scientific Committee of the Conference as well as Poster sessions summarizing sustainable best practices in existence by the expert presenters invited, as well as break-up sessions discussing barriers and opportunities for best practices in various parts of the world. The discussions provided meaningful insights into advocacy, training and skill-enhancement practices as well as means of dealing with the barriers in different countries – be it legal or financial. The nearly 30 poster presentations enriched participants and policy advisors and provided key strategies, methodologies and policies related to sustainable youth and children development programs. Participation of youth leaders, representatives of governments and



Riccardo Di Done, President, O.P.C.R. with co-Presidents of the Co-Presidents of the Scientific Committee, Mr. John Mould (left) and Dr. William Rowe (right)

the UNICEF were also key in making the conference successful.

This year marked the 25th Anniversary of the OPCR marking a milestone for not only the organization but also for its goals of representing the rights and welfare of children worldwide. After 25 years, we are in a position to appraise the results of our actions. However, much work is still required in order to maintain sustainable programs for children and youth.

In this issue of the Newsletter, we have presented the work of four such organizations, and the subsequent issues will continue to present these best practices along with a summary of the key recommendations from the conference. This will be circulated to government agencies, United Nations and academic as well as non-profit institutions. ■



– Participants of the Conference along with the Organizing Committee of O.P.C.R.

Kishori Abhijan

Empowerment of Adolescents, Bangladesh

By Aissa Sow, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF, Bangladesh



Facts:

- 28 million adolescents of total population of 140 million (22% of the population)
- 13.8 million adolescent girls
- 41.9% of women between 15-19 years are married

Project objectives:

- To empower adolescents to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives and to become active agents of social change.
- To create and sustain a supportive environment for adolescent girl development at the household and community levels.

Partners- Strengthening the dialogue between civil society and government :

- Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MoWCA), Department of Women's Affairs (DWA)
- Bangladesh Shishu Academy
- Ministry of Youth and Sports, BRAC – 2500 centres in 28/64 districts
- CMES (Center for Mass Education in Science) – 360 centres in 4/64 districts
- Save the Children Australia
- 3 additional NGOs as of 2009

Project activities:

- Issue-based life skills education & livelihoods to increase knowledge, awareness & to enhance adolescents' participation in the family & the community.



- Community support to change social behaviors and delay age of marriage
- Capacity building of secondary stakeholders in addressing and monitoring activities with and for adolescents
- Research & monitoring to enhance knowledge to strengthen interventions

Interventions areas

Adolescents centers in 28 districts, mainly in rural areas

Groups involved:

- Adolescent girls and boys (10-19) from centers belonging to BRAC and to CMES
- Adolescents of Bangladesh Shishu Academy in 64 districts and 128 high schools
- Parents & local support group: community influentials, community committees, etc.
- Secondary stakeholders: Govt. & NGO staff

Methods:

- Peer to peer approach - working with peers as educators, leaders, monitors
- LSBE and livelihoods - community mobilization, and capacity building of stakeholders
- Joint forum - working with boys and girls
- Parents and Community Influentials - support networks for adolescents
- Interactive popular Theater - young journalist & sports activities for more interaction among adolescents & adults

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Young Prosocial Animation

By Mayka Cirera Amores, Faculty of Psychology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), Laboratory of Applied Pro-social Research (LIPA), www.prosocialidad.org;

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Mayka Amores

SUMMARY:

- A program of dynamic activities designed for young people and evaluated by themselves
- Based on the construction and application of the positive thought and pro-social behaviours

- Analyzing and discussing them to extract personal experiences
- That help them to confront, enjoy, promote positive relationships on personal and collective level

OBJECTIVES:

- To promote cognitive changes in young people to increase their repertoire of attitudes to perform pro-social behaviours
- To reduce violence on streets

INTERVENTION ACTIVITIES:



SETTING:

Diverse cities of the world - Porto (Portugal), Praia Grande, Santos (Brazil), Florencia (Colombia), San José de la Fragua (Colombia), Mar del Plata (Argentina), Rio Cuarto (Argentina), Barcelona (España), Valencia (España), Buenos Aires (Argentina)

In this first phase:

SAMPLE:

- Groups of 10 or 12 young people
- That starting from their own experience in quality relationships
- They project their experience outward in order to improve their social environment

- First session: Seeing the film (full length): Play it forward
- Following sessions: reviewing it progressively - 2 scenes of the film across specifically elaborated protocols
- Debating freely

INTERVENTION (18 sessions):

- A series of sessions or encounters, March to August 2008
- In the free time
- Using visual facts (a film)

INTERVENTION LEADERSHIP:

Each group is animated and coordinated by a young coordinator as well as by a partner chosen by the group itself.

GENERAL METHODOLOGY:

- Participation Action Research that proposes the Participant Investigation-adventure
- On the basis of the suggestions and proposals made by the coordinator, the members of the group constitute a real and live laboratory

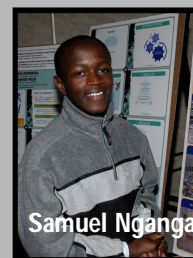


Tools (Film: Pay It Forward) used for Pro-social Animation

Continued on Page 8

Young Carers' Program - Kenya

By Samuel Mbugua Nganga (a Young Carer), Kenya



Who are the Young Carers?

- Children aged 21 years and below with a caring responsibility.
- They give care, assistance and support to other family members.
- They assume a level of responsibility which would be associated with an adult.
- They are found in all social and economic classes.
- They are often excluded from personal and social opportunities associated with the life of a growing child.
- Their development and future potential is often curtailed.

- Often they face economic and health difficulties.
- Their childhood has been deprived by circumstances.

What has the young carers program achieved so far?

- Over 500 young carers have managed to come together at different times.
- We have articulated the key issues affecting us.

What are the factors that push young people into these caring roles?

- Death of parents;
- Abandonment or desertion by parents;
- Separation with the parent(s);
- Parental irresponsibility – alcoholism, drug abuse;
- Mental sickness of the parent(s);
- Role allocation as a result of the nuclear or extended family set up;
- Aged parents as a result of late marriage;
- Sickness;
- Disability.

What are the challenges faced by Young Carers?

- Often ignored, misunderstood and neglected.
- They face psychological, social and economic stress.
- They face social stigma and lack emotional and moral support.
- Lack parental care.
- They are prone to sexual harassment, deprivation, and serious exposure to drug and social morality.



(CW from top left) In Africa, caring for the orphaned was a community affair but is changing with modern lifestyle; Aged mothers are left to take care of their grandchildren; Social groupwork is used to integrate newly orphaned children especially those with low esteem; Poverty is rampant among Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC)

- Have formed networks national, regional and global.
- Have held and continued to hold workshops and conferences.

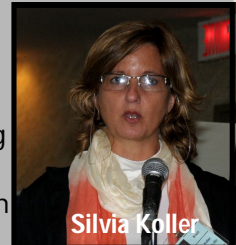
How would governments and policy makers alleviate the problems faced by Young Carers?

- Listen to them; understand them as a unique group with special needs.
- Help them to form strong networks.
- Develop policies which would address both their felt and expressed needs.
- Support and allocate funds to Young Carers' projects.
- Provide them with skills and opportunities for employment as a special group. ■

Conducting Research with Children and Adolescents in Street Settings in Brazil

By Silvia Helena Koller

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SETTING:

Members of CEP-RUA self-identify as “street psychologists” with an ecological approach and a dual role as academic researchers who produce scientific knowledge and social change agents on health and education. They work to improve the psycho-social development of ‘at-risk’ people.

The Program is located at the University, however its members work on the street, schools, community centres, health services, hospitals, juvenile institutions, shelters, prisons, government agencies and other communities of interest.

INTERVENTION:

Research findings have been used to inform practice and policy. The Center is strongly committed to reach out to “communities of interest” and to advocate for the rights of people. Our communities struggle for capacity building and strengths enhancing. The main focus is youth employability, children’s health, street gangs, family and community violence (physical, emotional and sexual abuse), poverty, drug use, child labor and sexual exploitation, trafficking and the institutionalization.

Dissemination of findings - One mechanism for involving the community is through seminar, trainings, and courses sponsored by the Center at which research and interventions projects are presented and discussed.

Resources and referrals -The Center also serves as a resource and referral mechanism for schools, community organizations, and institutions. In some cases, members of the Center respond directly to requests for

assistance (e.g., by developing workshops or training programs for teachers), and in others referrals are made to other network members.

Community demand as stimulus for research - Another opportunity is presented when some kind of community demand serves as a stimulus for a research study; in these cases, research findings can be directly applied to intervention development.

MOVING FROM DEVELOPMENTAL RESEARCH TO POLICY

Improved Shelter Retention

One simple (yet dramatic) example of how research findings can help identify solutions to specific problems involved a situation where youth were refusing to remain in a shelter.

An early study of street youths’ well-being revealed that youngsters felt a strong need for privacy (e.g., their own bedroom, closet, etc.; Koller, Hutz, & Silva, 1996). When the director of the shelter told the researchers that many youth were running away from the shelter, the researchers suggested that the shelter provide individual lockers with keys for each youth. The shelter implemented this simple change, which proved to be highly successful in retaining youth, who came to feel a sense of belonging and identity which they had previously lacked. Keeping youngsters off the street helps protect them from the adversities of the street, ultimately contributing to their well-being.

Unintended Consequences of Targeted Services

Another study with implications for policy (Santana, Doninelli, Frosi, & Koller, 2004) revealed that in order to receive services from institutions serving “street youth”, some impoverished youngsters who were living at home would pretend to be living on the street. This finding has clear implications for policies regarding the creation and implementation of services for different categories of impoverished youth.

A research was designed to understand the reasons for children and adolescent’s commercial sexual exploitation (ESCCA) by listening to the perception of truck drivers, both clients and non-clients. The main reasons were social and economic inequality, a strong male chauvinist culture and the drivers’ ideas about adulthood. In addition, the tendency to feel not responsible for this situation, and the poor knowledge of and respect for

Developmental research, with its explicit focus on change and adjustment across time, can be used to design interventions and policies to improve the situation of ‘at-risk’ population around the world



judicial processes of the public prosecution service. The analysis of files detailing the victims’ profile and the characterization of the perpetrators and victim’s families showed that unemployment, reconstituted families, alcohol and drug abuse, economical difficulties and other kinds of violence, constituted the main risk factors associated with sexual abuse. Such results are guiding preventive and therapeutic actions against children and adolescents.

RESULTS

- The examples may show that it is possible to move from research to action.
- The developmental theory offers rich opportunities for improving the situation of ‘at-risk populations’.
- Close collaboration with “communities of interest” is necessary in this endeavor
- Partnerships with community members, allied

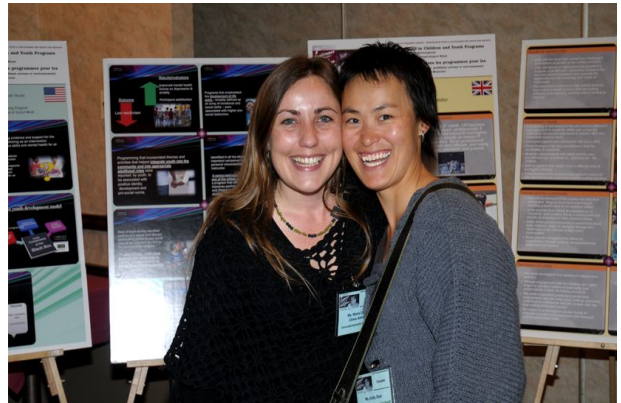
Sustainable Best Practices in Children & Youth Programs

children’s rights and children’s development, was found to be prevalent. In conclusion, this study highlighted the importance of obtaining the point of view of the abuser, to better understand the economic, social, cultural and political reality involved in children’s commercial sexual exploitation. Based on this information, a national campaign to confront this problem was launched www.namaocerta.org.br. This was successfully supported by more than 200 transport related companies.

The sexual abuse of children is a public health issue, due to the high epidemic incidence and to the serious damages for the victims’ development. A study mapped risk factors for intra-familial sexual abuse identified in the

professionals, and para-professional staff from institutions serving the population are an integral key to success

- Permanent capacity building and empowerment of the Center’s members, through courses, interchange, participation in workshop, congresses, is significant.
- Moreover, it helps warranty high levels of motivation and competence inside the group
- Mobilization to entire communities, governments, and even nations may be required to change the situation of ‘at- risk society’
- The experience of researchers at the Center illustrates how small steps can lead to big changes. In the last 15 years, the scope of the Center has widened.



GLIMPSES OF THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2009

(Clockwise from top left): Members of the Scientific Committee of the Conference; Participants of the Conference at the Montreal City Hall with City Councilor (to the extreme left); Participants from different part of the world bond together (Mayka Amores, Spain & Emily Chan, Canada); Riccardo Di Done, Founder President, O.P.C.R. & Chairperson of the International Conference 2009, presents the GAIA plaque to Charles Mbuga, President, Africa Region, International Federation of Social Workers

- Some on-going projects involve collaboration with other universities, schools, and social agencies in 10 cities around the country. Those projects involve both data-collection on risk and protective factors and events among children and youth, and are aimed at training community workers to implement programs to improve their situation.

NOTES & OBSERVATIONS:

- Even being an active program, Brazilian resources are not enough to economically support the Center's activities.
- Funding is needed to better install the Center as well as to improve and maintain the infrastructure.
- More physical space and equipment would allow the offer of more training programs and therapeutic treatment to the populations.
- More grants and fellowships would allow the students and professionals to enhance their own training and to improve their performance at work.

FUTURE RESEARCH:

Developmental research, with its explicit focus on change and adjustment across time, has the potential to illuminate the long-term impact of risk and protective factors. The overarching goal of the Center is to build up an agenda for developmental research, practice, and policy with this population. Although we drew on our experiences in Brazil, many of the issues we identified are relevant to other populations of impoverished people around the world. There is a clear need to ensure that research is sensitive to the specific context, respects the dignity and rights of human beings, and generates high-quality information that is of value to other researchers, practitioners and policy makers. Careful attention to conceptual, methodological, and ethical issues in developmental research can yield accurate information about how people who are surviving on city streets exposed to sexual abuse, institutionalization, juvenile problems, prisons, and so on, fare over time. Such research can yield critical information that can be used to design interventions and policies and ultimately improve the situation of at-risk population around the world. ■

Kishori Abhijan: Empowerment of Adolescents - Bangladesh

- Adolescents participation in emergency preparedness and response

Results achieved:

- 100,000 adolescents (60% girls) around 3000 adolescent centers across 28 districts; 128 secondary schools in 64 districts reached
- 700 adolescents (+14 years) equipped with technical & non-technical livelihood options (300 linked with export-oriented enterprises)
- Community based committees in 2,580 rural communities across 28 districts
- Social actions against child marriage and dowry
- Government officials and NGO staff skilled in addressing and monitoring activities for adolescents
- Joint monitoring tools and mechanisms : baseline findings, behavioural monitoring

system in place to track social and behavioral change among project participants

- Society understanding on adolescent issues: anthropological study on Adolescents and on adolescent-friendly services
- Model developed for potential expansion/ replication

Limitations:

- Scaling up - sustainable social change
- Girls and Boys joint forum
- Sustainable livelihood options- build upon the 2007/08 experience
- National Adolescent Policy- Ensuring commitment of all relevant stakeholders

Future research:

- Case Studies on Adolescents girls and boys
- End line study

Young Pro-Social Animation in Spain

- The group designs, applies, modifies, improves and controls its goals and the results it has achieved.

METHODS TO EVALUATE:

- EMPA Scale for Measure of Pro-sociality in Adolescents and adults (*Caprara, Steca, Zelli, Capanna 2005*)
- IRI Interpersonal Reactivity Index (*Davis, 1980*)
- PROM-R Pro-social Reasoning Objective Measure (*Carlo, Eisenberg and Knight (1992)*)

Methods Concerning the Consequences:

- AIP (Evaluation of Pro-social Impact) Roche (2000)
- (IGPP) Individual and Group Promoting Projects

FORESEEABLE RESULTS:

- The young participants will change favourably their social perceptions and thoughts concerning violence and pro-sociality,

- They will be more predisposed to act in a pro-social manner.
- They will project some individual or collective pro-social action in their environments.

NOTES AND LIMITATIONS:

- Ways to CONVOKE young people in the street
- Continuity of PARTICIPATION
- Degree of MOTIVATION and maintaining it

FUTURE RESEARCH:

- Homogenization of the samples: Reducing number of sessions to the minimum without losing efficacy.
- Different films or stories
- Include activities desired by young people
- Generate more forms of evaluation by the same participants
- Searching economic resources to moderately remunerate specialists and young coordinators.
- Wondering about symbolic remuneration of the same participants (in kind) ■