



The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development

EX-YUGOSLAVIA EMERGENCY EDUCATION: SAVE THE CHILDREN/US (SC) EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM IN EX-YUGOSLAVIA

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I have a little girl named Alma in my group. When she first came to the playroom she would take as many toys as she could to herself and hit or kick other children who wanted to share the toys with her. I felt very frustrated because she hurt other children and disturbed the group. After several of the children cried because of Alma, I decided to ask her mother for some help. She said she would work with me and that she thought the playroom experience would be very helpful to Alma.

After several days Alma participated briefly in a drawing activity. I also noticed that she was watching how the other children played. I asked her if she would like to play with us. She nodded and joined the rest of the children. She became interested in the puzzles and overcame her impatience with not finding the correct pieces after a few attempts. I continued to give her

positive encouragement, She also joined with the other children in clean up time. When the playroom was closed briefly for shelling and Alma was then absent because of illness, I was concerned that when she returned she might have some difficulties. She arrived with her sister and was smiling. Her sister told me that Alma had told her on the way to the playroom that she would kiss her teacher. She kissed me and told me that she had missed the puzzles. She went to the puzzles and began to play happily.

Alma's mother was pleased and so was I that she had made the adjustment to our playroom. Alma needed acceptance and consistency. When she received that her behavior and attitude improved and she began to enjoy herself and the other children. Preschool Teacher, Travnik

Aid agencies and the military have developed rapid replication models for hospitals, feeding centers, shelters, and other emergency services. However there has been little experimentation with delivery of community-based early childhood programs to respond to the nation-wide psycho-social needs of war-affected families and children like Alma, who attends a Save the Children/US (SC) Preschool in Bosnia. Recent wars, including the one in ex-Yugoslavia, have underlined the crucial necessity of this type of humanitarian response. During the war over 4 million people became refugees, including 2.8 million Bosnians. The lives of hundreds of thousands of young children have been negatively and grossly affected since the war started in 1991-92. Even today many of these children anchor their entire life experience around daily traumatic events.

Within what was Yugoslavia the fracturing of the federal army and the state in 1991 led to skirmishes over land and resources, then disintegrated rapidly into ethnic conflicts and eventually ethnic 'cleansing'. Panicked survivors became refugees abroad or were displaced within the country. By 1992 refugees arriving from central Bosnia were trying to flee up the Dalmatian coast and out of Croatia, as inland Croatian citizens fled south to the coastal areas, creating massive gridlock. This was compounded by Serb armies that were cutting off all routes north. As a result, many people were forced into a 4-5 kilometer stretch of the country along the coast which was being shelled on a daily basis. Since at that time the focus of the UN was on Sarajevo and Central Bosnia, Save the Children/US was asked to try to address the needs of the refugees along the coast.

Bosnian refugees and displaced Croats were being housed in collective centers along the coast. Tensions within these centers were rising, primarily because people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds were being forced to live together, sometimes as many as 12 to a room. While SC's original project goal was to improve the lives of young children in an emergency context, the agency found bitter tensions among adults in the collective centers which needed to be addressed simultaneously. These adults were, after all, the children's parents. The question was, how could this be done effectively?

Staff observed that children were showing signs of being deeply disturbed by their mothers' distress and in some cases, trauma. Many mothers were now single parents because their

husbands were missing or had been killed. During flight mothers had been 'shock absorbers' for the family, and they were now exhausted emotionally. Often aware that they set the emotional tone for the family, they were struggling to meet their own needs as well as those of their children. Particularly difficult were mothers' feelings of powerlessness because they were unable to protect their children. Staff felt that it would be healthier for the children and the mothers if it were possible to separate them for a portion of the day. So SC began looking for a way to provide a space for structured activity and play for the children. The creation or re-establishment of preschools or playrooms—operated by trained teachers and paraprofessionals—seemed to be the solution. For some children this meant a resumption of activities that they were engaged in before the conflict, but for the majority, refugees from very rural, isolated villages and hamlets, the playroom provided an exhilarating encounter with toys, crayons, and clay as well as with many other children their age.

Within Yugoslavia there had been a tradition of preschools, though participation tended to be limited to the urban elite and workers in state-owned factories. Pre-war kindergartens were full-day child care programs and served approximately 4% of children 3-6 years of age in Bosnia Herzegovina (8% in Sarajevo) and 21% in Croatia. There were, and still are, teacher training institutes and a large cadre of trained teachers. However, during the emergency centrally-organized, formal institutions found themselves unable to operate. Nonetheless the concept of center-based programs for children 3-6 existed.

While most of the SC playrooms have been started in areas which did not have pre-war kindergartens, in a few cases, mostly in Croatia, SC has built upon or helped to restore the existing preschool infrastructure. By 1993 SC had expanded the refugee-oriented program on the Croatian coast into Bosnia Herzegovina and was working almost exclusively in communities that had been seriously affected and damaged by war.

Rationale: The SC Emergency Education Model

At a time when a disintegrating community needs urgently to repair the social fabric, restoration of some degree of normalcy through programs for children can be both a potent therapeutic force and an important symbol for fractured communities and traumatized individuals. The SC program goal is to improve the social and psychological well-being of a significant number of the children affected by the war through the creation of community-owned, sustainable institutions. With a desire to meet the needs of young children and their families, SC selected preschools and playrooms as its core intervention in ex-Yugoslavia for the following reasons:

- Preschools and playrooms are inherently valuable for children (cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically), and even more so in times of war;
- Children benefit from socializing with their peers and adults outside the family;
- Children benefit from getting out of their homes; the playrooms provide a relief from family tensions;

- Preschools are supportive of family economic opportunity and well-being, particularly for mothers who are trained to work in the play rooms and earn a small income or who are freed to pursue other opportunities;
- Like children's education in general, preschools are of great and immediate psychological value during war, providing a safe space for children to gather, and offering structure and hope in chaotic and otherwise seemingly hopeless situations;
- Preschools require the widest community participation, cooperation and support, and have a certain leveling value in places where political activities, military operations and economic forces create and deepen distinctions and divisions;
- A preschool program is of virtually no value to criminal elements and political forces in lawless and war-torn societies in which the theft or control of humanitarian aid is a serious operations and security problem. The SC program has been allowed to develop and test its methodology as well as deliver a valuable community service *off the radar screen* on which other agencies have to operate.

For the first two months in the playroom Adnan told everything about himself with his silence. He didn't talk and he refused to draw and play. His story was like many other stories of refugee children. He had to leave his home, his toys, and his friends. His father is missing and he lives with his grandfather, mother and several cousins. When some of the cousins left, he stopped talking and seemed to create his own world of silence. As the leader of the playroom, I tried to show him love and understanding. Gradually he began to join in the activities; he now talks a lot and enjoys playing. His grandfather thanked me and said he thought the playroom helped Adnan find his childhood which had been lost for a while because of the war. Leader, SC Playroom

Thus the daily three-hour programs in the SC model provide the structure and security in which children are free to be children for at least part of their day. One indicator of the importance of this play experience is the fact that there is no problem in terms of attendance; children are there whenever it is physically possible.

To reach the desired number of children SC created a high-quality, low-cost model designed for broad-scale rapid replication within which community ownership leads to institutionalization. There are at least four essential elements in Save the Children's simultaneously modest and ambitious program for ex-Yugoslavia:

1. Rapid replication of projects in a geographically coherent manner and through standardization of inputs to minimize SC set-up costs and longterm community operating costs. This challenges the notion that community service delivery is expensive and unsustainable.

Standardization exists in relation to most aspects of the program (exceptions include community 'fit' and individual monitoring needs). In terms of space, a simple system has been developed which consists of basic site repairs and a heating allowance, electric radiator or wood-burning stove, packaged preschool start-up and operational kits (including consumable school supplies, simple furniture, hygiene materials, and a carpet). These inputs facilitate the rapid transformation of any safe usable space into a special place for young children. There is also standardization in recruitment activities, and teacher training seminars to maximize project starts and minimize unnecessary individual decision-making. An early childhood curriculum teacher's manual and monthly newsletter have been developed, along with an ongoing training and mentoring methodology for putting the program in place. An incentive system pays teachers on the basis of child hours of activity and attendance records, but it is not a salary, and there is a limit of nine months of support to any one program. This limitation is made clear to the community from the beginning.

Cost-effectiveness is sought in order to reach the largest number of children possible who could benefit from the program. Economies of scale minimize per child costs: the bigger the program, the lower the unit costs, allowing limited donor funds to be stretched effectively to help a nation of needy children. In addition, the program must be sufficiently low-cost to make community support of the preschool possible (e.g., through fees, barter, integration with local schools, sponsorship by religious bodies). To keep the costs low the SC program functions effectively in basement shelters, refugee centers, retrofitted cafe bars, homes, as well as former kindergarten facilities. Developing additional preschool and playroom programs in geographically contiguous areas enables the rapid establishment of additional playrooms through informal advance advertising.

2. Maximizing the use of resources to enhance quality. Providing curriculum development, ongoing teacher training and mentoring, and building on other projects and services to improve impact.

Training. SC staff have developed a series of training and mentoring interventions that extend over the entire nine months of support and link with local pedagogical resources for the long term. An initial intensive eight-day training seminar for potential playroom leaders and preschool teachers is based on active learning methodologies for adults and focuses on such topics as communicating with children, the importance of play, child development, working with parents, first aid, appropriate cognitive, physical, social-emotional and creative activities, needs of traumatized children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, playroom operation and administration, local publicity and fund-raising, and sustainability. The training process itself has been found to be highly valuable for participants, providing a place where people can gather to share their own stress and experiences. In addition to developing professional skills, the training helps participants move beyond their own trauma by providing a focus on an activity that builds for the future.

Follow-up training and mentoring. SC provides support for nine months to teachers and playroom leaders in the form of mini-training, refresher courses, parent meetings on early childhood topics, ECE traveling mentors and specialized field staff visits.

Curriculum development. Some ideas from the traditional pre-war kindergartens have been replicated where appropriate, but with some revisions and significant additions that address issues of trauma and introduce conflict-resolution and problem-solving skills as well as topics in playroom hygiene and emergency first aid. An early childhood curriculum manual, *Activities for preschool/Learners*, has been developed and distributed. In an easily accessible notebook format, the manual contains hundreds of activities which do not demand unavailable supplies or equipment and are a valuable resource for professional preschool teachers and paraprofessional playroom leaders alike. Staff have also designed a curriculum for parent volunteers, with an accompanying manual, and instituted regular parent volunteering in playrooms.

Other teacher resources. In addition to the manuals, SC produces and distributes *Sparks*, a monthly newsletter for teachers and playroom leaders. Focusing solely on children aged 3-7, the newsletter keeps ECE practitioners, both professionals and paraprofessionals, abreast of what is happening in other preschools and in touch with research in early childhood development, and provides practical curriculum suggestions and opportunities for teachers to express their opinions on different topics. Regular features include 'Spotlight on Quality', hygiene and nutrition issues, and a parent page at the back which is removed and posted on Parent Boards at every playroom entrance.

Capacity building. Program and program quality sustainability is as much a concern as financial sustainability. Staff are working to achieve recognition of the training by the local pedagogical academies and institutes and incorporation of the training into their offerings. For example, the East Mostar Pedagogical Institute has waived entrance requirements for successful participants in a SC training seminar. The Institute is also facilitating the work and study of playroom leaders by offering classes on a part-time schedule. SC continues to explore the creation of a recognized early childhood paraprofessional cadre through accreditation, institutional affiliation and association building.

Building on other projects. By carefully assessing needs and resources in local communities and partnering with other agencies, SC husbands its own resources and enhances other community projects. These include working with both the agency's own projects (e.g., study sessions for older schoolchildren) and those of cooperating agencies (e.g., intensive counseling for traumatized children, rape counseling for mothers, vaccination campaigns, and site repairs in war-damaged communities). The valuable complementary work of Red Barnet (Danish Save the Children) in supporting the government preschool system and training professionals allows the SC program to focus more on capacity building in areas where no preschool system existed before the war.

3. Flexibility in program delivery in anticipation of rapid changes in the security situation.

Changes in the security situation. In order to reach as many children as possible during a conflict, SC deploys teams to move into a territory and service it intensively. Rapid intervention addresses the problem of rapid changes in the security situation, with some areas where preschools were established becoming war zones overnight. The type of intervention varies according to the situation, ranging from making school supply drops in bomb shelters to setting up fully

functioning facilities with a high-quality program in stable refugee centers and in war-torn areas where families remained during the war.

4. Sustainability based on community ownership.

The first steps toward sustainability. The participation, cooperation and support of each local community are requisite factors before a playroom is opened. Community ownership begins with an accurate reading of the community's interest in the project. Staff emphasize throughout the nine month program intervention that the playrooms belong to the community and not to SC, whose job is one of technical assistance to the community to help them to establish and ultimately to support their playrooms.

The community takes primary responsibility for locating and repairing space for the preschools as well as space for the training seminar. Involvement continues through organization of community boards, field trips in the community and publicity leading to expansion of enrollment. Members of the community are instrumental in forming linkages with municipal officials, pedagogical academies and institutes, ministries of education, ministries of social welfare and the media. The opening of a preschool is usually celebrated in a community with wide participation of the area residents.

After a playroom is opened and functioning, parent and community education events are staged as well as applicable local celebrations and festivals. Information on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, landmine precautions, and other appropriate materials are made available. Governing boards and local coordinators are trained by SC staff to further enhance community ownership.

The emphasis on community involvement has enabled the program to act as a bridge between emergency relief and long-term community development. In some locales where political activities, religious identities, military operations and economic forces have created divisions, unification around a playroom has been a positive catalyst for cooperation. Measuring tangible results in community reconciliation may take as long as a generation, however it is felt that initial steps have been prompted through the preschool program. Just as the children in the preschools have experiences in working together to create a mural or dramatize a story, solving a problem such as how to share one apple among four children, valuing the uniqueness of each child in the preschool by constructing graphs on different colors of hair and eyes; the community practices cooperation through focusing on the needs of children and through implementing positive strategies in which all adults can participate in responding to those needs.

Strategies for sustainability. Staff are developing a set of strategies for sustainability. There are a wide range of community constraints to and options for assuming complete ownership of preschools and playrooms. Sustainability training is undertaken from the outset and requires the participation of a range of community figures as well as parents. Local strategies for support are critical, but so too is a regional or even national component. While a minimum of 60% of preschools and playrooms are targeted for self-sustainability, the absence of speedy resolution of political and administrative issues (e.g., What are the roles of the federal and cantonal

governments in relation to ECD? What are the roles of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare?) compels SC to explore solutions at many levels.

Lessons Learned

■ CHILDREN

Many children attending the Save the Children preschools and playrooms exhibit no outward signs of being traumatized. In most cases the children show the expected normal behaviors around separation from their parents in the early adaptation period during the first two to three weeks of the preschool's operation. Preschool teachers have noted some behaviors, however, which go beyond initial adaptation problems and are very likely linked to the children's and their family's war-related experiences. These behaviors include: overly-aggressive play, subdued emotional affect, lack of concentration and attention, strong reactions to noise, speech problems, and spontaneous dramatizations of fighting and being injured. In addition, some parents report that children have difficulty with sleeping, bedwetting, being left alone in a room, and low energy and appetite.

Even though a section of the training seminar is devoted to children suffering from war trauma, teachers and parents sometimes need sustained specialist interventions to recognize and understand children's behavior and to develop strategies to help children. To provide this support, several psychologists are on staff and practical interventions are featured in the monthly newsletter. But more is needed. During the SC project, teachers and parents have requested professional resources which usually are not available in most war-affected areas. Additional resources need to be developed on a nation-wide basis—not just locally.

When the playroom near the refugee camp opened, the children who came at first were quiet, scared and in some cases aggressive. They acted as if they thought no one knew or understood how they felt. The playroom leader worked very hard to rebuild the children's trust and faith in people. She showed patience, understanding, and steady energy as she introduced games, stories, songs and poems to which the children responded. The parents are very grateful to her for all the good things she has done for their children and they say that their children are becoming happy. Trainer, SC Program

Most teachers and playroom leaders are female. However, there are a small number of males who work in the centers. The preschool teachers have commented on the eagerness with which many of the young children greet SC male staff members when they enter the preschools. This may indicate the children's desire and need for positive male role models. Given the shortage of males, their presence might be more valuable to more children if they were to serve as traveling resource teachers.

■ PRESCHOOL TEACHERS/ PLAYROOM LEADERS

In almost every new community in which the preschools are established there are many more applications for the positions of preschool teacher and playroom leader than are needed. After an interview, participants are selected to attend an eight-day training seminar. The philosophy and practice of the professional early childhood trainers who conduct the seminar ensure that it is a positive experience for all participants. Evaluation of performance is ongoing throughout the eight days and is based on the participant's activities, written work, oral communication, knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Most of the seminar participants have also been gravely affected by the war. It is common for them to state that the seminar is the best experience they have had in the last five years—some even say in their lives!

It is not unusual for there to be more trained and qualified preschool teachers and/or playroom leaders than spaces available in classrooms, especially in heavily damaged communities. Some volunteer in one of the new playrooms with the hope that a space will become available. In a number of cases, however, this community asset cannot be used. Ways need to be sought to make use of these trained early childhood workers.

■ PARENTS

Almost all parents have responded very positively to the opportunity of enrolling their children in the preschool program. They frequently view this structure for their child as a first step in resuming and rebuilding their lives. Parents show their support by repairing and cleaning sites, helping in the preschools, serving on parents' committees, making learning materials and contributing snacks for children. They play a myriad of roles in helping the community preschool to become self-sustaining following the nine months of support by Save the Children. Because of the value of parent involvement, parents should be required to participate in the classroom on a monthly basis—with exceptions based on need.

Those parents without the support of an extended family often seek continuing connections with other preschool parents and teachers as the program progresses. Many parents need a regularly-scheduled forum for discussing their children and other parenting issues. These discussion groups, which can be parent-run, need to be created and made available.

■ THE PRESCHOOL ESTABLISHMENT

Before the war only professionals taught in early childhood programs. The need for personnel who could work in preschools and playrooms during the war led to the introduction of paraprofessionals into the system in order to provide services for as many children as possible. Post war, there is a need to work carefully with the professionals in order to validate continuing paraprofessional involvement in early childhood programs. In developing a system for accreditation and inclusion of paraprofessionals, legitimate issues such as standards and quality need to be addressed. There needs to be a sensitivity to the threat that paraprofessionals present to the status of professionals. This is complex given the postwar environment where education authorities are re-asserting their authority and re-defining their mandate. There is also a desire to

return immediately to pre-war conditions-in terms of services and training. This is not feasible given the increased need for a variety of early childhood interventions.

■ SUSTAINABILITY

Although the program has already achieved significant success, sustainability is the most problematic of the project components. Midway through the program it became clear that more expertise was needed in the areas of strategic planning and sustainability.

During 1997, the final phase of SC involvement, major efforts will be directed toward helping to redefine early childhood education in Bosnia Herzegovina as the country develops its national early childhood policy and strategy. Specifically in the coming year SC needs: to work on integrating playrooms into the municipal system when it exists and has the means to provide on-going support; to establish strong links with pedagogical institutions and ministries; to work with education officials, including preschool professionals, on the concept of capacity building in order to serve more than the 4% pre-war figure of children enrolled in kindergartens without burdening municipal budgets; and to explore with the education authority the creation of a national, independent playroom association.

■ THE NUMBERS

After three years of activity by SC, the cumulative numbers as of October, 1996, are as follows:

Total playroom/preschool sites opened486

Total preschool groups

(approximately 25 children in each)700

Total children enrolled.....18,410

Total groups currently self-sustained at

SC's 9 month phaseout175

Total child hours generated5,250,000

Total hours of community training37,000

Economies of scale and constant monitoring of the entire project delivery system and refinement of field operations, educational inputs, teacher compensation, logistics and other program support activities, combined with rapid site replication, provide assistance to the maximum number of children at minimum cost. At present the per child per month direct cost over twelve months is \$4. The current average direct cost for setting up a playroom is \$1,172, while the total nine-month cost of direct support to a teacher with an average group of 25 children is \$823.72.

Funding sources for the program include grants from USAID, UNHCR, European Union, Stickting Vluchteling, Save the Children Norway, Sweden and Japan, and numerous private donors.

The end of the war has brought the opening of kindergartens and playrooms for the children from 3 to 6 years old. These special programs for children are a big thing which we can do for our children. My three-year-old son has been attending one of these playrooms and it has an important role in his life and in the lives of the other children, I believe.

As a mother, I'm very satisfied with him and the children who are around him, and of course with the teacher. My child and the rest of the children find in their playroom everything which they enjoy such as toys, puzzles and interesting picture books. They also enjoy singing, drawing and playing with the other children. Their teacher has done many things to make their days interesting.

The most important thing is that my son and the other children are looking forward to going to the playroom every day. I say thanks to the organizers and to the teachers who work so hard for our children. Best regards to all parents and teachers. Parent, SC Program

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