
SITE VISIT: Colombia—Homes of Well-being

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The Colombian programme "Homes of Well-being" is a large-scale, community-based response to the problems of malnourishment and delayed development that plague many of the country's 5 million children under the age of seven. In this programme, children from ages one to seven are cared for in groups of about 15 children in homes located within their own neighborhoods. While meeting directly the care and development needs of the children, the programme also seeks to improve a community's economic base by providing paid employment to neighborhood care-givers, by freeing other women to seek (or upgrade) their employment, and by directing funds to local businesses for economic activities related to the home day care (e.g., improving homes, supplying food).

The programme is rapidly approaching large scale. Since its start (1986) the programme has expanded to cover about 800,000 children (1989).

This is a community-based programme. Community members participate in an initial analysis of the communities' needs for services, taking into account children's ages, family income and employment, and physical and environmental variables. (If services are needed that the programme cannot provide, links are made to other organizations that can assist.) The community also determines the number of "Homes of Well-being" that will be necessary to meet children's needs and selects local women to become home day care mothers. Local management is the responsibility of a board consisting of parents who are responsible for purchases and payments to the community mothers. A major share of the funding and the coordination of the programme falls to the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), with additional responsibilities shared with the Ministry of Public Health, the National Apprenticeship Service, the Institute of Territorial Credit (which provides loan funds for the up-grading of the homes), and other government and private organizations. Children are assigned "scholarships" which are used to pay the home day care mother.

Day care mothers receive training in the care and development of children as well as in family and community relationships, and in nutrition and health. Once trained, each woman cares for approximately 15 children between the ages of 1 and 7 years—in her own home during approximately 8 hours per day. Each day she is assisted by one of the women whose children are in the home—on a rotating basis. Care consists of providing children with the conditions necessary to foster their health and their physical, psychological and social development.

An extensive evaluation of the programme undertaken in 1991 (ICBF, 1992) suggests that the programme has been effective in meeting child care needs of parents at low cost and in enhancing child development.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
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