



Best Practices Database

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Safh Al Nuzha Urban Development Project, Jordan *Jordan*

Good Practice

New for 2002

Categories:

- Children and Youth:
 - 10 years to adult
 - children's participatory planning and leadership development
- Social Services:
 - health and welfare
 - recreation
- Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality:
 - community participation

Level of Activity: City/Town

Ecosystem: Arid/Semi-Arid

Summary

The purpose of the initiative was to recruit active participation of children (males, 12-18 years) in Safh AI-Nuzha neighborhood in Amman, in order to stimulate community members and civic authorities to champion their rights to be cared for and reconstruct a social environment where they would be important and appreciated collaborators. These "at risk" children belonged to aggressive street gangs, were abusers of volatile substances, subject to unprotected sexual experiences, often in trouble with the law, dropped out of school at an early age to work at menial tasks for minimal income, and came from broken or dysfunctional families.

Children participated in defining their circumstances and aspirations through community-based research, which led them to consider their roles in improving their lives and the kinds of support needed from the adults around them. At the Community Center in the site, improved services were made available: computer lab, reading library, group counseling and sports activities. A vocational training center adjusted its curriculum to train functionally illiterate youth in automotive repair. Local community volunteers served as liaisons linking children to the community in positive ways. Family counseling sessions gave mothers a role in supporting positive changes in the lives of their children. Local sports clubs opened their doors to these previously excluded children. A national Youth Leadership Program included these children as special participants providing yearlong activities that motivated them to further positive actions. The Mayor met with the children, and ultimately provided financial assistance for an income-generating micro-business that included an in-service educational component.

Narrative

THE SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

The neighborhood was physically deteriorated and socially hostile to these children. There was complete absence of inputs and interest from any civic organizations to care for their health, recreational, and educational needs. Children worked for income instead of attending school. Sniffing glue and belonging to street gangs alleviated their emotional poverty and social isolation.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

The first priority was to establish a listening environment in which children's participation became the dynamic that guided all subsequent actions. This was accomplished through community-based participatory research activities with children, volunteers and representatives from civic organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

The second priority was to cooperate with professional support in three primary areas: providing alternatives to alleviate financial pressures on children, establishing significant, helpful one-to-one relationships with caring adult volunteers, and restoring children to educational opportunities.

A further priority was to deliver the program through a local non-governmental organization, which involved institutional capacity building, and to link this initiative to national-level organizations, such as the Ministry of Social Development.

FORMULATION OF OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The goal of the pilot project was to build a model for sustainable intervention with "at risk" children: volunteer-based, child-responsive, and professionally appropriate.

Objective 1: To build experience of "at risk" children in roles focused on self-improvement and making meaningful contributions to their neighborhood that would bring about a reduction in violence, isolation and substance abuse.

Objective 2: To build experience of neighborhood adults and local organizations that would result in stimulating volunteerism, in enacting effective interventions and in renewed vision of cooperation with children.

Objective 3: To provide access to specialist services and opportunities for "at risk" children that would restore them to the mainstream of social, educational, and health offerings for all children.

MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES

Human resources: Questscope (British NGO) provided site workers as catalysts for ideas and interventions that would accomplish the vision of children improving themselves in a positive, responsive environment. HUDC local staff was urged to contribute to the initiative, they had key role in mobilizing local volunteers and had direct involvement in activities with children after they received the appropriate training. Children were attracted and kept in the program through activities that met their needs. They also took roles in formative evaluation and making adjustments to the program. Local volunteers in the community adopted liaison roles to ensure that children and community reinforced positive changes together. Local organizations provided staff for training and direct involvement of activities with children. Professionals and national organizations were invited to provide their contributions and when they observed the changes in children's lives, they increased their interest and inputs.

Technical resources: A wide variety of national-level organizations provided assistance: including: the University of Jordan; the Vocational Training Centers; the Hassan Youth Award-national leadership program; and the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC). Questscope provided overall programmatic guidance. All cooperating organizations were motivated to cooperate by observing positive results in the lives of children.

Financial resources: Questscope provided seed funds to initiate the pilot. UNICEF provided funds for research activities and for improvements in services. HUDC provided in-kind funds for the facility and local staffing, and Amman municipality provided in-kind project support for the micro-business.

PROCESS

Problems: Increasing the visibility of children "at risk" in low-income communities was a primary problem. There were no advocates for their rights as children. Traditional solutions were either to enter the juvenile system (as offenders) or to enter the "charity system" (as victims). A "top down" approach was taken to these kinds of children, whereby authorities and institutions decided what was needed and what would be done. Isolation from educational, social and economic opportunities created alienated individuals, which led to alienating behaviors increasing potential for farther exclusion. One result was a "gang culture" that provided support as a surrogate to family and neighbors. This was destructive to children and made them vulnerable to more abusive behavior (either by the child, eg. substance abuse, or towards the child, eg. physical and emotional violence).

Organizations with responsibility for children generally had mandates that did not include a holistic view of children, and their staff required re-orientation to the issues of marginalized children and training to prepare them for interventions that were responsive to the child as a partner and not an "object."

Solutions: Children were involved at all strategic points in the initiative: research, setting priorities, planning activities, evaluation and redesign of interventions. Staff of cooperating institutions modified their behaviors and approaches to children, creating new opportunities and roles for children to improve themselves. Volunteers were a rich source of insight and support through which children and community members grew in cooperation with each other. Access to improved services for children was a tangible indicator of increased awareness of the rights of children. Policies were adjusted to lower thresholds to training and opportunity. Participation was continually monitored and assessed for inclusivity and "bottom up" contributions to the social development process according to the methodology of Robert Chambers (University of Sussex, UK).

To be solved: This approach is labor intensive in early stages in any site, and it requires a serious commitment of time and resources until children and adults (volunteers and experts) gain experience in a new paradigm of cooperation. Institutional commitment is difficult to recruit and sustain for problems whose roots are embedded (and hence invisible) in an existing social fabric of neglect and abuse. Two arenas of specialist intervention must be developed to ensure that "at risk" children will be adequately served in a holistic manner: prevention and treatment of the results of unprotected sexual experiences and of volatile substance abuse. Closer linkages between educators, schools and families to improve parenting skills will be vital to restore children's rights to care and personal development.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Children began to act as partners with institutions that provided services. They requested more assistance and gave valuable inputs to guide program planning. 200 children benefited directly from being referred for help within improved institutional environments. A local charitable society focused on children's rights was established as the first non-governmental organization to serve the original urban community at this site.

National and local institutions changed some of their policies to become more inclusive -increasing opportunities and roles for previously excluded children. Institutional capacity was increased in 7 organizations to serve 200 more children over the next 2 years. Community volunteers were oriented towards issues of children's rights and trained in skills to enact helpful, supportive roles as mentors to children and liaisons to the community. This program component was linked to a national institution, the University of Jordan, through its community service division. This resulted in the involvement of

300 adult mentor volunteers and 200 community liaisons from 1998 to 2001.

Specific models were developed for informal education ("street education") and economic opportunities (supervised "earning and learning" projects) that would become part of government policy (through the Ministry of Social Development) and NGO practice in local communities. The models were expanded in 2001 to include the more sensitive target group of young females in low-income urban areas through formal partnerships with the Ministries of Awqaf and Social Development and a local NGO.

SUSTAINABILITY

The key to sustainability of social initiatives was that individuals perceived that their efforts produced the return they expected on the investment of their time, effort and resources. This was true for "at risk" children, volunteer adults and staff of cooperating institutions. Financial inputs were not the primary constraint to sustainability. Inputs of time and effort from children and volunteers were the most important determinants of sustainable action.

"At risk" children were under severe pressures to provide a livelihood for their families, which curtailed their educational, personal and social benefits as children. Sustainability of initiatives hinged on at least 5 components:

- (1) trust of provider/adults was rebuilt through experiencing definite, helpful responses to their needs;
- (2) they were permitted leadership roles in their own improvements and they received financial and moral support as they enacted these roles;
- (3) they devolved career paths that reintegrated them into social, educational and financial opportunities as they matured;
- (4) they had mentors to assist them to break out of destructive, unhelpful life patterns;
- (5) their achievements were recognized. Volunteers had a limited amount of time to invest, which became valuable to them and others as: (1) they received training in skills and guided experience in mentoring; (2) they received ongoing improvement opportunities as they gained experience; (3) their had roles "in expanding coverage through encouraging others to mentor; (4) their contributions and achievements were formally recognized and appreciated.

Organizations and staff received training and hands-on experience to re-orient them to children's issues. Quality of intervention was approached through improvements of inputs (manuals were developed over time) and through building a data base of information for assessment of impact in the lives of children. For the NGO in the community, a governing Board was developed with the capacity to recruit new funds for accomplishing priorities for children. It was important to ensure that interventions with children were linked (referred) to existing providers as much as possible, to reduce costs and avoid duplication of services.

LESSONS LEARNED

Local communities (families, neighbors, schools, and children themselves) have the ability to comprehend and articulate issues facing their "at risk" children. They can generate priorities for action, implement those actions, and assess the impact of intervention for ongoing improvements and changes in direction. All of this can occur through participation catalyzed by coloration focused around their children, listening to them and following an emerging strategy that recognizes that improvement of the circumstances of the child results in improvement of the community. In this site, family members and neighbors became strong proponents of sequences of steps that changed the lives of their children, often in the face of institutional reluctance to change the role of the local social center. At the same time, other organizations and expert specialists outside the community were recruited to involvement with children that opened up new opportunities and options for addressing the risks in spite of which children had learned to survive.

Establishment of linkage relationships (referral networks) between "at risk" children and service-provider organizations was a vital factor in restoring children to the benefits of mainstream society. Most organizations that had something to offer to children did not know how to reach into

marginalized communities. The children themselves had their own "survival competencies" at the street level and they did not need or trust outside interference.

Bringing children and providers together was a vital intervention, undertaken at first by an international NGO as a catalyst, and later by the local NGO at the site. Once national-level organizations became aware of how to deliver benefit to "at risk" children through their programs, they adopted policies that included children in innovative activities, sustained by the organizations themselves. The initial "start up" funds required to reach this response were no longer required, as the organizations themselves incorporated these children into their programs.

Recognizing the leadership potential of "at risk" children was a serendipitous outcome of the project. As children progressed through stages of involvement, they developed the desire and capacity to help others. At age 18, many of them were ready to act as mentors and "street educators" themselves, thus becoming a new cadre of experienced "experts" as a resource to future programs with "at risk" children. This resource will continue to grow, providing a low-cost alternative to high-quality intervention at the street level.

TRANSFERABILITY

Cooperators in the initiation of this project included staff from the Juvenile Division of the Ministry of Social Development, 3 university professors (sociology, psychology and physical education), 2 sports trainers, an officer in the Jordanian Army Special Forces, staff from the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, community volunteers from the site, and Questscope staff. This level of interdisciplinary cooperation has characterized work with "at risk" children. Numerous seminars/workshops to share results and experiences in Jordan have also included the Family Protection and Anti-Drugs Units of Public Security, the Hassan Youth Award (national leadership program), the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Charities) and local and regional NGO's. Volunteer adult mentors and liaisons in project sites across the country have met together to share experiences and provide cross-training. Each of the cooperator-participants has brought a unique viewpoint to the development of models for approaching young males and females at risk in marginalized communities.

Questscope presented a critical analysis of its project design at a conference in Switzerland sponsored by Harvard and Princeton Universities in 1988, and they have published it in a volume entitled *Comparative Perspectives of Urban Youth: Challenges for Normative Development*. The expansion of the component for volunteer mentoring benefited greatly from work done in Washington, DC, by MatchPoint, an initiative sponsored by Prison Fellowship, USA. Consultation with an emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Maryland formed the basis of the pro-social philosophy underlying development of communities around their children. The publication of manuals describing how to replicate this project with "at risk" children has been funded by the Japanese government, and will be disseminated in the Arabic language early in 2002, with later publication of the English version.

An overriding lesson has been that an organization or group of individuals that seek to affect the quality of life of an "at risk" child must consider that participation is not a method to reach a goal. Participation is the goal: with the child, with the community, and with all others who offer their efforts and services.

Key Dates

- 1995, June - Community Research Phase and Establishment of Partnership between HUDC & Questscope at local Carter site in Nuzha.

- 1997, December - Program relocated in homes of community members, and increased local liaison

involvement.

- 1998, December - One-to-one Mentormg formalized as a program in the site, with supportive programs (economic "earn and learn" project started).

- 2000, January - Additional components to Pro-Social Mentormg program launched: street education, professional referral systems, and institutional capacity development for civil society organizations development.

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Type of Organization: Central Government

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Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

Financial Profile

YEAR	TOTAL USD
1996 - 1997	96,825

1997 - 1998	22,682
1998 - 1999	83,017
1999 - 2000	50,223
2000 - 2001	73,430
Â	326,177



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