

Case Study 2 - Learning to Live Together

This Learning to Live Together Program in El Salvador helped children improve their ethical decision making, nurtured their spirituality, and made positive contributions to transform their communities.

Context on the area of implementation

Following decades of political instability, El Salvador has positively increased its ranking on the human development index recently. However, recent years have also shown increasing difficulty dealing with gang-related violence in its territory, along with other issues.

On April 2018, Special Rapporteur Cecilia Jimenez-Damary visited El Salvador to study the human rights of internally displaced people. She referred to the situation as an⁹ “epidemic of generalized, gang-related violence, with homicide levels above most conflict-affected countries.”

This issue is being dealt with by the government with the adoption of the “Safe El Salvador Plan” in 2015. This is seen as a positive aspect of the country’s observation, as shown in the seventh periodic report in May 2018¹⁰. However, the issue of gang-related violence remains unsolved and continues to affect the population deeply, especially its youth.

The Project

The Learning to Live Together (LTLT) program implemented in El Salvador is a systematic implementation of the international program of LTLT lunched by Arigatou International in 2008. This implementation in El Salvador by the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) through the leadership of Centro Bartolomé de las Casas and technical support from Arigatou International engaged with 636 children in public and private schools, and from a diverse set of religious affiliations.

According to Arigatou¹¹ Learning to Live Together “is an intercultural and interfaith programme for ethics education, designed to contribute to the realisation of the right of the child to full and healthy physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, and to education as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in the World Declaration on Education for All and in the Millennium Development Goals. It is a resource for educators and youth leaders.”

The project consisted of a capacity building training of facilitators who then implemented several learning modules and activities. Furthermore, Communities of Practice were put in place to facilitate interaction between the facilitators, which allowed the exchange of insights and successful adaptations. Special notice was given by the facilitators when considering the context of violence in the country and the need to deal with the normalization of the issue.

Results

Quick-Facts

Area of Implementation: El Salvador

- Human Development Index: 0.680
- HDI Rank: 117
- Population: 6.1 million
- Expected years of schooling: 13.2
- Mean years of schooling: 6.5
- Government expenditure on education (%GDP): 3.4
- Homicide rate (per 100,000 people): 64.2

Organization: Arigatou International and Global Network of Religions for Children

Implementation: Global Network of Religions for Children and Centro Bartolomé de las Casas

Specific location of implementation: Apopa, Mejicanos and Soyapango – all municipalities of El Salvador

Timeline: March 2014 to January 2015

Scale: 636 children from 9 to 17 years old.

⁹Report of the Special rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on her visit to El Salvador

¹⁰Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of El Salvador

¹¹ Learning to Live Together – An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education

The program used three methods as instruments for the evaluation of impact: focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and significant change stories. Important factors influenced the limitations of the assessment of the impact of the program, especially violence in communities. This violence resulted in children dropping out of school because of gang recruitment and families moving to safer areas to live. Moreover, the lack of baselines also contributed negatively to the assessment of the project's impact.

However, the project presented good results in all three areas of measurement. Considering the “development of children’s critical thinking” area, the implementation of LTLT provided spaces where children not only could review their perspective, but also could understand other perspectives through nurturing openness of opinion sharing and thoughtful process of understanding different views. In the “children’s relations with others” area facilitators pointed out better integration between boys and girls, improving their team works skills – one of the children in the project commented ¹² “I learned the importance of putting myself in another’s shoes. For instance, before I remember, I used to fight a lot with my sister, but after the sessions, it was different because we were not fighting as much as before”. In the last area, “Nurturing children’s spirituality,” the space provided by the project allowed children to connect to their beliefs with the support of moments of reflection.

Conclusion

The teachers from schools where the program was implemented highlighted the importance of the framework provided with the LTLT program. Regardless of formal training in teaching methods, superior education did not provide the knowledge required to deal with the situation that would arise from the violent context of the communities.

Also, the short period of implementation led to a limitation in the further development of one of the possible outcomes of LTLT implementation: the development of initiatives by the children themselves. Considering this outcome, security reasons also represented a negative factor to further initiatives.

Nonetheless, all the principals of the school implementing LTLT shared a positive view of the impact of the program. A special mention was made for the need to establish a broader connection to the community beyond school. Particularly due to violence lived by the country’s population and the lack of safe public spaces.

Documents consulted:

Arigatou International – Report on the Systematic Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Learning to Live Together Programme in El Salvador – 2015¹³

Arigatou Foundation and Interfaith Council on Ethics Education for Children - Learning to Live Together – An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education - 2008¹⁴

General Assembly – United Nations, Human Rights Council – report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on her visit to El Salvador – April 2018

Human Rights Committee – Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of El Salvador – May 2018

Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights – Compilación de Recomendaciones de Derechos Humanos Emitidas a El Salvador por los Mecanismos de Naciones Unidas 2006 - 2014

UNDP – Human Development Profiles 2016–El Salvador

¹²Arigatou International – Report on Systematic Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the LTLT in El Salvador - 2015

¹³ <https://jilifc.com/resources/report-on-the-systematic-implementation-of-the-learning-to-live-together-programme-in-el-salvador/>

¹⁴ <https://jilifc.com/resources/learning-to-live-together-an-intercultural-and-interfaith-programme-for-ethics-education/>

Case Study 6 - Claves Christian Organisation

Claves is a Christian organisation based in Uruguay. It partners with local organizations, such as religious communities, educative centres, and civil society organizations that work directly with children and adolescents. Their child-centred methodology is entitled "we strengthen ourselves through play to face adverse situations."

The Project

The model was developed in Uruguay and has been rolled out in 19 countries in Latin America through networks that work with children and adolescents. Forty training courses have been carried out throughout the region in the last five years, training a total of 1,300 educators. It is estimated that each educator trained will reach 15 children or adolescents, for a total of 19,500 children and adolescents, and the model takes four months to implement. The primary beneficiaries are educators who work in daily contact with children and adolescents in institutions, schools, churches, etc. The secondary beneficiaries are children and adolescents, with whom these educators work. The beneficiaries may or may not have religious affiliation. The project has been implemented with evangelicals, Catholics, and mainline protestant groups, as well as non-religious groups.

Claves' vision is that every child and adolescent enjoy a full life and be respected as a human being with dignity and rights. We seek to prevent violence against children and adolescents through the development of capacities and factors that empower and protect in the face of violence. We focus on promoting fair and caring treatment of children and adolescents and equipping their immediate environment (families and communities) for protection. Claves perspective focuses on faith-based, gender and generations, resilience, spiritual dimension, children's rights, community approaches, and youth participation.

Their methodology of "We strengthen ourselves through play to face adverse situations" seeks to prevent the mistreatment, sexual abuse, trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents through developing capacities and factors that empower and protect in the face of violence, especially sexual and gender violence. The educators participate in a theoretical, methodological, and experiential training of 24 hours. After the training, the educators carry out a series of 8 to 10 play-based workshops in their home institution, with the group of children and adolescents with whom they work habitually. The workshops follow a sequence with a progressive approach to the subject and are carried out with a weekly frequency. They are supported with a toolkit of didactic materials that includes the manual "Hands at work" with theoretical and methodological aspects, posters and puzzles, story, pictures, dominoes, board games, CDs of songs and stories. The institution will incorporate periodic workshops.

Results

Adult educators state that the training allowed them to increase their knowledge about maltreatment, sexual abuse, trafficking and sexual exploitation, the dynamic, and consequences of violence, and intervention modalities. This made it possible for them to visualize and understand different situations of violence that children and adolescents experience. At the same time, they affirmed that their knowledge in the area of prevention increased. They affirm that the course allowed them to have a hopeful vision on the subject, to playfully work from the perspective of resilience, and the development of strengths. They feel strengthened with a new positive way of intervening, which can be applied not only in structured workshops but in everyday situations. The course provided educators with a concrete prevention tool that promotes the generation of strengths in the face of violence against children, an aspect that they consider important and equips them to feel encouraged to apply it. Many adults report that participating in the training allowed them to better understand personal histories of violence, place responsibilities where appropriate and go on to heal wounds. The children and adolescents who participated in the workshops show an overall increase in capacities and strengthening factors in the face of violence. They enjoy participating with songs and games. They state that they know their body, recognize it as their own and are aware of its importance, and of the need to take care of it, as well as that of others. They express that they learned the

correct name of their private parts, and the changes that occur in their body during the development process. Increased awareness of rights and ability to defend them. They learn to identify emotions that occur in contact with other people, and which can alert them about a risk. They identify situations of abuse and can tell a trusted adult about them. They know how to resolve risk situations and ask for help. They incorporate basic security rules. They identify different ways of relating in different contexts. They can identify trustworthy people and networks; they know how to handle the issue of secrets. Identify responsibilities. Some are able for the first time, to report a situation of abuse, which allows adults to intervene.

Local faith communities, as well as faith-based civil society organizations, have implemented the "We strengthen ourselves through play to face adverse situations" methodology. The format is compatible with once-weekly encounters, such as Sunday school or other meeting spaces in the church that work with children and adolescents, such as Bible schools or club meetings. The approach's distinctive of "We strengthen ourselves through play to face adverse situations" lies in being a preventive tool both primary, as well as secondary, allowing early detection:

Lessons learned

A number of lessons learned:

- The implementation approach makes it easily compatible with other educational actions and the promotion of rights that then take place in the organizations that develop it.
- The recreational character of the program facilitates approach of the subject, generating a space for learning, and favouring the development of protective factors.
- The flexibility of the materials allows for a variety of applications, easily adapted to different contexts, and attractive for children and adolescents.
- The training provided to the educators enables them to better understand the problems of maltreatment, sexual abuse, trafficking, and sexual exploitation in particular. It is essential to work with prejudices and personal barriers in this regard.
- The training and implementation mobilise educators and has a personal impact on their educational task, as it provides a complete tool to strengthen protective factors in children and adolescents.
- Evaluations show that the project contributes significantly to strengthen factors in children and adolescents, reducing their vulnerability in the face of maltreatment, sexual abuse, trafficking, and sexual exploitation, and promoting the effective exercise of their rights.
- Institutional commitment and the motivation of the educators to carry out the workshops are necessary. Educators must experiment and use the material fluently before conducting workshops with the children. It helps to have supervision in the regular application and evaluations that allow learning and adjustments.

Challenges of local faith community work/partnerships in VAC response in this case

According to educators, difficulties encountered relate to lack of institutional support, some resistances that arise when addressing the issue, fear of the educators to address the topic. Another difficulty is that children and adolescents respect the agreements of coexistence created in the groups, and the limited time they find in institutional contexts to work on the issues.

What role did faith and religion play in this program/project?

The inspiration of this project comes from a focus on the Christian worldview that drives the team to have hope in positively affecting the quality of life of children and their families and offering spiritual dimensions to this task.

Please list reasons why you think LFC are particularly well or poorly placed to address the specific child protection/violence issue that your intervention focused on (value add by faith approach)

Communities of faith often have a high level of direct contact with children and adolescents. They build trusting relationships, where difficult subjects can be dealt with and which permit adult figures to accompany children through difficult situations. Faith communities should recognize the value of children made in God's image and therefore have the inherent motivation to deal with issues that deeply affect children and adolescents.