

Community day care centres managed by refugee women

Self-reliance – Child Protection – Local Integration

UNHCR supported the establishment of three community day care centres with funds from the local US Embassy in 2008. Since then, the centres have become self-sufficient with little extra financial support.



UNHCR/M. Quesada

Background

While refugees have the right to work, it is still a challenge for them to find a job, mainly due to discrimination and obstacles to the recognition of foreign degrees in Costa Rica. The situation is worse for asylum seekers who do not have the right to work and asylum procedures may take up to one year. Moreover, access to loans and other services from financial institutions is limited. Consequently, most asylum-seekers and recently recognized refugees work in the informal sector. Under such circumstances, refugees and asylum seekers, particularly women, are often exploited and exposed to SGBV. Children are at risk when left home alone while their parents are out either working or looking for a job. This is especially common for single female-headed households. This situation led UNHCR to develop the programme of community day-care centres managed by refugee women.

Location Sabanilla and Desamparados, San José Province, and Heredia, Heredia Province – Costa Rica

Time & Duration 2008 - present

Population Groups Refugees

Actors UNHCR, Asociación de Consultores y Asesores Internacionales (International Association of Consultants and Advisers)



Description

- The community day-care centres seek to support both refugee and local women with low incomes (often single and head of household) who are in need of someone to take care of their children while they work or look for a job during the day. Day-care centres both allow refugee women to work while their children are taken care of and also form an income-generating opportunity in itself since they are exclusively managed by refugee women. In this way, many women managed to improve their livelihood. Children receive similar education to that imparted in other pre-school institutions: early stimulation, feeding habits and diet, play and other educational programmes. Additionally, as the Day-care centres take care of refugee and non-refugee children, this allows for a multi-cultural interaction of children at early ages.

Steps to Implementation

- Geographical areas (Desamparados, Heredia and Sabanilla) were decided considering the high presence of refugees there.
- A project proposal was drafted and submitted for consideration to the local US Embassy. The proposal for a one-year funding was approved (USD 14,000) to improve houses to sue for the centres, purchase materials for children and offer a few “scholarships”.
- Refugee women were selected following a series of interviews and evaluations by social workers. Some of the refugee women had previous experience working with children in their countries of origin as pre-school teachers.
- Certification from the local Social Welfare Institute (IMAS) and the Ministry of Health was obtained. Both institutions conduct periodic field visits to check if the day care centres are being run properly.
- The project started and the first children were identified. As the project has developed, many mothers have used the services of the day care centres to safely leave their children while working.
- Refugee women who lead the centres have been trained by the Social Welfare Institute and the Ministry of Health on child legislation and rights, and first-aid.
- As a result of the IMAS certification, some Costa Rican children have also been referred to the day care centres.

Impact and results

- Since the start of the project, 3 day-care centres have been established.
- 50 children are being taken care of in these centres from 2 to 7 years old. Exceptionally older children up to 10 years have been accepted.
- 20 refugee women have benefited from the project.
- IMAS certification has enabled the referral of children by this institution and poor families have received small grants.
- Women in charge of day-care centres were trained to work with children.
- Interaction of refugee and non-refugee children allow for an early development of cultural sensitivity.
- The project resulted in a win-win situation: refugee women working in the centres receive an income for their services while other women have an opportunity to safely leave their children when working.

Constraints

Due to limited resources, it has not been possible to train more refugee women in child care. Consequently, day-care centres have resorted to the support of university students who conduct their internships at the Day-care houses.

Lessons Learned/Keys to Success

- The fact that the day-care service is provided by refugee to local women may facilitate integration as they are seen as valuable community members.
- Support and partnerships with local institutions such IMAS is necessary for success. Their certification allowed for their opening and for the referral of other children, who could also receive a grant for children in living in poverty.
- Women who are in charge of the centres need to be carefully selected. It is important also to identify women who have a more stable situation as refugees in the country. Some for whom this was not the case required further assistance and support from UNHCR programmes.

