

Mentor–Mentee Program

Child Protection

The Mentor-Mentee Program is a pre-emptive program targeting those children (10-16 years old, both boys and girls) in camps who, without further support and guidance from seniors or guardians or ‘mentors’, are on the verge of plunging into extreme vulnerability. In our camp setting, these ‘children at risk’ include (but are not limited to) those children who skip school, are school dropouts (or prone to drop out of school), are involved in substance abuse, and/or display delinquent behaviors.



UNHCR/ Pukar Ghimire

Background

In 2010-2011 a child protection mapping exercise was conducted, which identified major child protection issues in the camps. The issues identified included inadequate care arrangements, experiences of and/or exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), irregular/ no school attendance, child labor, high rate of substance abuse, changing family dynamics due to parents’ re-marriage and polygamous relationships.

To address these protection concerns, one of the several programs that were conducted was the Mentor-Mentee program.

Location Beldangi-I, Beldangi II and Extension Beldangi II extension and Sanischare camps

Time & Duration Each mentor-mentee program lasts 6 months
Sanischare camp: Since 2012

Population Groups Refugees and asylum-seekers

Actors UNHCR, Youth Friendly Center (YFC), CARITAS,



Description

As the name suggests – the at-risk child selected for the program is considered a ‘Mentee’ and is assigned an adult ‘Mentor’ (aged 18-25 years) of same sex. In some exceptional cases, male mentees may have a female mentor. The mentor supports the child in bringing about positive changes in their behaviour. The ‘Mentor’ is either a Youth Friendly Centre (YFC) elected member or selected from other interested youth in the refugee camp.

In the initial stage (first month) of the program, the Mentor and Mentee build up rapport and trust to understand each other better. After about a month of the program, each Mentor-Mentee pair set goals in terms of positive changes they will seek to achieve in a six-month period. Mid-term and final evaluations are conducted for each period to assess the effectiveness of the program and to make recommendations for improved implementation in the future.

Each Mentor-Mentee program lasts 6 months and accommodates as many as 40 to 60 pairs of Mentors and Mentees. Each Mentee meets with his/her Mentor for at least four hours a week, during which the Mentor provides moral support and guidance, provides tutorials on weak subjects, helps with school enrolment and refers their Mentee to different stakeholders to address their protection concerns.

Some of the activities take place only between the pair, whereas in other activities all Mentors and Mentees participate.

Steps to Implementation

- **YFC** and refugee youth interested in mentoring implements the program at the camp level. Interested YFC core members and refugee youth with good moral backgrounds expressing interest in mentoring may be Mentors. Throughout the Mentor-Mentee Program the Mentors consult with Mentor Advisors when necessary. At the camp level, the YFC main coordinators (one male and one female) are the focal persons for the program in each camp.

- **CARITAS** directly supports YFC and refugee youths with the implementation of the program at the camp level. CARITAS, in collaboration with UNHCR, conducts Mentor Program Orientation Training; mobilizes school counselors to work in the capacity of ‘Mentor Advisors’ and ensures proper implementation of the program in camps through monitoring and supervision. A YFC Coordinator and a YFC Program Assistant are focal persons for the program from CARITAS.
- **UNHCR** carries out overall supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the project, which is directly implemented by YFC and refugee youths in camps under the umbrella of CARITAS. Necessary funds for the implementation of the program are provided by UNHCR. One staff member from UNHCR’s Child Protection Unit is the focal person for the program.

Impact & Results

- A total of 57 Mentees in 2011 (July-December) and 40 Mentees in 2012 (February-July) benefitted from the program. Notable results include significant positive change in mentees’ behaviour such as regular school attendance, re-enrolment in school, improved socialization with colleagues, teachers and family members, and improvement in studies.
- The implementation of the program (leadership, monitoring, supervision and evaluation) is gradually being handed over from UNHCR to CARITAS. This year (2012), some crucial program activities have been delegated to CARITAS. For instance, the ‘Mentor-Mentee Program orientation training’, which was conducted jointly with UNHCR last year, was undertaken this year upon initiation of CARITAS with minimal involvement by UNHCR. Moreover, in contrast to last year’s program, CARITAS has been involved in the mid-term and final evaluation of the first cycle (February-July).



Constraints

- Mentors are adult youths aged 18 to 25 years who work as volunteers. They do not receive any monetary remuneration for their involvement in the program and this may sometimes pose a challenge in terms of identification and retention of mentors.
- Mentors accompany Mentees for only a limited number of hours (i.e. four hours per week). Extended hours could enhance the impact of the program.
- Mentors have limited knowledge and skills to deal specifically with their Mentees. Continued capacity building and provision of support/coaching is necessary to ensure a positive impact.

Lessons Learned/Keys to Success

- The program has been effective for Mentees/children with moderate vulnerabilities. However, the program does not seem to be as effective for Mentees/children with multiple vulnerabilities. For instance, it has proven quite difficult to mentor a child who dropped out of school, engaged in substance abuse whilst working as a laborer and whose parents were and disabled. Issues such as these are quite complex and may be more appropriately addressed through other mechanisms.
- The program is a low cost project with a proven positive impact for its participants, both mentors and mentees.

