

## **YOUTH FORUM AT THE 1ST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CHILD PROTECTION**

48 university students were volunteered to take part in the “youth forum” during the “1st International Congress on Child Protection” which was held in Istanbul Turkey on October 2014.

The students were divided into 5 groups to work on different topics determined beforehand. The topics that worked on in the forum were kept parallel to the topics discussed in the congress. Topics included the following:

- 1- Child-focused media
- 2- Children under government protection
- 3- Children who were involved in criminal activities
- 4- Children in disasters
- 5- Children in emergencies

Each group had a topic to work on. They were expected to work on the particular topic and prepare a presentation about this. The aim was to make participants brainstorm about the particular topic, to come up with a strategy and present views in a creative way.

### **Questions**

How could our media be more children focused?

What are the problems of children under government protection and what can young volunteers do about that?

What are the risk factors of children while engaging in criminal activities? What can young volunteers do about that?

What are the needs of children in disasters? What can young volunteers do about that?

What are the needs of children in emergencies? What can young volunteers do about that?

On the second day, the groups worked with their supervisors and came up with proposals for projects and they prepared their presentation for the next day. On the third day, group presentations took place which were open to all participants of the congress.

### **1- Child-focused media**

This group started a TV channel. They run daily programs on this channel. They decided on the content of television programs and came up with their own programs:

- Cartoon
- Ads
- Serial, film
- News

By using this method, students questioned what programs they did not want to see, what the content of the advertisements and the news should be and what should and/or should not be in the content of the cartoons. While discussing them, they also criticized the current practices. They concluded that in the children's channels, no advertisement should take place, the duration of the programs should be shorter and the content of the programs should take into account the children's needs.

## **2- Children under government protection**

Students came up with 5 projects:

*Volunteer Support Groups for foster parents:* The aim of this project was to support the relationship between the child and foster parents.

*Alternatives to Social Rehabilitation Centre, BAKIM (BSRM; BAKIM Sosyal Rehabilitasyon Merkezi):* This project aimed to create a new model for the children who were abused and/ or neglected. These children were put at homes quite far away from the city center so that they were isolated from social life and they were not able to get education. With the help of this project, it was envisaged that young volunteers might support these children by providing them with some opportunities to lead more active social lives and to pursue their education.

*Mini Shows at Hospitals:* The project was based on the idea that the volunteer students could raise awareness on the importance of prevention and early detection of abuse with a musical, a mini theatre and/or a mini dance show lasting 10-15 minutes that would be played at hospitals by medical professionals.

*Kids and Cats:* The aims of this project included giving the responsibility of a cat (or another pet) to the children at `Love Homes` (Sevgi Evleri) and at `Children Homes` (Çocuk Evleri), and encouraging these children develop a loving and caring relationship with these pets. This project was based on an example at Indiana State Prison in U.S. where all prisoners were encouraged to take the responsibility of a cat which resulted in an improvement in these prisoners' behaviours.

*Arranging meetings with the children and the neighbor residents:* As the `Sevgi Evleri` and `Çocuk Evleri` were opened in new neighborhoods, the children might have experienced difficulties in adapting to their new social lives and their new schools. So this project aimed to arrange meetings with the neighbors in order to inform them about the characteristics and needs of children raised in child protection services by the government, for example how they lived, their possible psychological and family problems, the best way to communicate with them and so on. During the process the young volunteers distributed brochures about child protection, child abuse and importance of having protected children integrated with the community.

## **3- Children who were involved in criminal activities**

First they undertook a literature search for the risk factors. They found out that there were many factors involved in child criminality. So they tried to narrow them down and proposed the following projects:

Take the hand of the future: In this project, the target group was chosen from low socioeconomic neighborhoods. This was because coming from a low socioeconomic environment is a risk factor in juvenile delinquency and these neighborhoods are difficult to reach. Another risk factor was low self-esteem of children who were involved in crimes. The volunteer group wanted to work on these risk factors. A primary school was chosen. Young volunteers were paired with the children to offer help to them for their courses. It was envisaged that this would help them increase their grades which in turn increase their motivation. With this method, their likelihood of staying at school would increase and of wandering in streets would decrease. In addition to helping them with their courses, young volunteers organized some activities to increase children's self-esteem and self-worth through the experience of success and care and support from others.

#### **4- Children after disasters:**

The main aim of the project was to help children cope with the trauma that they experienced by using art, music or other creative ways. Therefore, some projects were developed:

Game with Felts: It was envisaged that felts might be a good material to use. First, children cut them into whatever they like and they creatively designed the felts. Second, children had materials where they can attach their felts. Third, the children engaged in a collaborative work named as "Forest" in order to give them the messages that they were not alone, they were part of a group and they were important.

Creative Drama: During the discussions, there were concerns in relation to how to play with children to help them process their emotions. Then, this was turned into a project. Therefore, children were given a number of instructions such as "okay who wants to be a tree now?" Children who wanted to be a tree came together and created a tree. Like the game with felts, the aim was to give the messages that they were not alone, they were part of a group and they were important.

"Touring" Support Team: Following disasters, children are one of the most neglected group since their families are also in shock, and they may not spend enough time to play with them as before. It may also be difficult to find an office or a safe area. Therefore, it was decided to have a caravan which contained all materials that were needed for playing, everything that the touring support team needs (felts, color books, pencils...). The team would go to wherever the disaster occurs and find a suitable place for playing with children.

"I came" team: Sometimes, going to the disaster area would be very hard for people, who were coming from other cities. For example, going to Hakkari for a year from Istanbul is really difficult. Therefore, it was envisaged that creating a team from the locals who would receive training from the Project team would be a good alternative. These teams would be created from neighbor towns and cities. Here the aim was to reach children as soon as possible. These youths would be able to go in a short time. Additionally, they would be able to know culture, nature, social communications, and local traditions which were considered as important factors during plays with children.

## **5- Children in emergencies:**

This group was based their project on the idea that all children, whoever they were and wherever they were, had a right to be protected from harm and to have their welfare promoted. Children are especially vulnerable to natural disasters and lessons learned from the past have shown that too often organizations do not prioritise the needs of children during emergencies. Yet children suffer the consequences in the absence of such measures. Abuse is most likely to occur when an emergency occurs.

The group highlighted the situation of the Syrian refugee children who were living out of the camps in unsafe conditions, under the threat of child trafficking, child prostitutions, organ trafficking, forced child labor etc. Unfortunately lack of citizenship rights and their unclear refugee positions, these children are not able to benefit from education, nutrition, health, hygiene facilities etc.

For these reasons, this Project group focused on creating a child friendly mobile shelter-center for these children to provide basic education, psycho-social support, food and basic health services to keep them out from the streets.

At the end of the presentations, all youth forum participants came to the stage and they sang the children song that they wrote as a project in the “Youth Disseminating Life Skills Project”. The content of the song was about what to do when a disturbing situation occurs. Its aim was to teach children how to protect themselves.

The song was liked a lot and Prof. E. Tolga Dagli asked them to sing that song at the closure ceremony of the congress. After the closure speeches, young volunteers were invited on the stage and they sang their song. The spectators stood up and applauded them for a long time.

## ***VISUALS FROM THE YOUTH FORUM***













