

Tsunami Victims

Introduction

The Tsunami of December 2004 affected the lives of thousands of people, who lost their homes and families, and had to re-settle in a new, unfamiliar environment.

NGOs working in Tsunami affected areas, after the initial relief operations, had to deal with post- disaster trauma, as well as the care and management of infants/toddlers, and young adolescents still in school.

Several of these institutions approached Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF) to train their childcare workers, with the twin objectives of being empowered to run the large number of new crèches started after the disaster, and to handle the psychological trauma of young and older children.

In mid-2005, BMRF began training programmes for childcare workers in three Tsunami- affected areas, in partnership with selected NGOs.

Background

Facts

- The Indian Ocean Tsunami resulted in the death of approximately 9,000 people in India.
- Close to 1 million people's livelihoods were destroyed.
- Over 100,000 houses were damaged, and over 350 villages and fishing villages were affected/up-rooted in the disaster.

Impact on Children

- Physical - Death, minor and major injuries, physical disability, disease.
- Psychological - Trauma, fear, stress, agony, anxiety, depression.

Social Impact

- Education - School leavers, irregular attendance, loss of interest, academic failure.
- Infrastructure - ICDS and Primary Health Centres (PHCs), schools, playgrounds.
- Child Rights / Social Security - Right to food, clothing, shelter, health care.

Parenting in Disaster Situations

Parenting in itself is an art. In a disaster situation, it is even more challenging due to factors, such as:

- Lack of adequate monetary resources, infrastructural facilities, tools, materials, and resources compared to normal communities.
- Increased need for proper nutrition, and health care.

- Children recently orphaned due to the death of both parents, and single parent families.
- Child labour.
- Increased substance abuse.
- Significant disruption in the routines of daily living.

Project Implementation

Training was undertaken with identified NGO partners in three Tsunami affected areas as follows:

- Nagapattinam, Sirkali District - 25 childcare workers, 25 community volunteers, and 5 co-ordinators, in partnership with Avvai Village Society.
- Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District - 35 childcare workers from 14 NGOs running *Balwadis* in the area, in partnership with Suraksha.
- Pazhaverkadu, Thiruvallur District - 30 childcare workers from 5 NGOs, in partnership with Community Health Cell (CHC), Chennai.

Awareness and training programmes on parenting concepts were held for field level workers in the three areas, based on the Learning through Play Calendar (LTPC) - Birth to Three Years, and Three to Six Years. The LTPC is an ideal training tool for parents, and front-line community workers, on holistic child development, comprising physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional aspects. Key topics covered in the awareness/training programmes included brain development, child development, importance of play, SPRUC, and school readiness. The focus and approach of the training programmes varied based on the level of ECCD experience in each area.

All programmes were participatory, and interactive, involving discussions, group-work, role-plays, games, and songs, as well as parent interactions.

Observations

- Affected communities showed tremendous strength and resilience, in the face of calamity.
- Strong emphasis on child-related initiatives, resulting in an increased number of crèches, and day care centres.
- Increased emphasis on play/art therapy for children, to reduce psychological trauma.
- Evolvement of "community parenting".
- Increased support and inputs for teachers, as well as policy level changes.

Programme Evaluation

- The groups were fairly large, and heterogeneous, consisting of workers from different NGOs. This had both advantages and disadvantages.

- Training programmes for new recruits/volunteers need a stronger ECCD background component.
- Both men and women showed great enthusiasm and interest in the programmes, and were eager to learn.
- Parenting skills need to be taught at the community level, through strategic planning, and systematic training initiatives.
- Each community has different approaches to parenting, which need to be recognised and appreciated.