Children Listening to the World With Their Eyes

Summary

Turkish Red Crescent (TRCS) Community Centres have been providing services to help migrants live with dignity and in harmony with host communities. The activities carried out by the Community Centres also cater specifically to children, who are among the most vulnerable, and who are key in facilitating social cohesion and development among communities. These efforts aim at reducing vulnerabilities through understanding their needs and taking necessary actions, and strengthening their individual and social well-being. As one of these efforts, the Kızılay Community Centre in Şanlıurfa, brought refugee children with hearing impairments together with students of the School for Impaired Children in a four-week social cohesion workshop carried out between March-April 2019.

Participants: Şanlıurfa Community Centres beneficiary children with hearing impairments, students of School for Impaired Children
Number of participants: 5 Syrian, 5 Turkish children
Time: 4 weeks Age: 6-14 years

Background

Since 2011, the conflict in Syria has resulted in thousands of people dying, and thousands more leaving their homes to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. More than 5.6 million people have now left the country and a further 13.1 million have been internally displaced and in need of humanitarian aid. Consequently, vulnerable people escaping from the war have presented specific and complex needs. As the country with the most refugees worldwide, Turkey currently hosts some 3.9 million refugees, of whom more than 3.6 million are Syrian nationals registered under temporary protection. As there is currently no sign of the conflict in Syria abating, previous response projects for refugee communities in Turkey have now evolved into programmes to address longer-term needs.

In order to provide the long-term community support to the migrants and host communities, and to strengthen resilience, the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) collaboratively conduct programmes with the support of different actors.
Community Centres at a Glance

The TRCS Community Centre was first formed as a public model with both local level and state level collaborations with public institutions and civil society organizations.

Under TRCS’s Community-Based Migration Programmes, the Community Centres (CCs) provide health and psychosocial support, protection, livelihood and social cohesion services to refugee and host communities. There are currently 16 CCs of which 14 are supported by EU funding through International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; one by Norwegian Red Cross and one by Qatar Charity. The CCs open their doors to all, including women, men, children, youth, elderly and disabled people, and in this way, continue to give hope to vulnerable people. At the CCs, almost 800,000 people have been served as of June 2019. Including services through Restoring Family Links (RFL), the child protection centre, in-kind relief projects, as well as the health education centres, the TRCS Community-Based Migration Programme has reached more than 1.5 million. 

The opening of first community centre in Şanlıurfa in January 2015 was followed by the establishment of new centres in different provinces, namely Istanbul (Sultanbeyli), Konya, Ankara, Kilis, Bursa, Izmir, Istanbul (Bağcılar), Adana, Mersin, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kayseri, Mardin, Kahramanmaraş and Kocaeli.

Social cohesion, Protection, Psychosocial Support in practice for disabled children

TRCS Community Centres have been providing services in order to enable migrant people to live with dignity and in harmony with host communities with different activities. For children, psychosocial support (PSS) helps in mitigating negative and destructive effects of experienced conflicts. PSS can be conducted through individual sessions or collectively in small groups. One advantage of PSS in groups is having individuals, who have similar problems or experiences, to empower and support one another during the process.

Protection activities for children seek to enhance their knowledge and allow them to spend time with their peers in educational activities in a safe environment. The objective is to help children handle the effects of past conflict and difficulties of migration in Turkey, as well as to reduce the effects of trauma they have experienced. In addition, household visits are carried out to ensure children are attending school or are assisted if they require support to attend.

Social cohesion aims at bringing people from different backgrounds together and enabling them to be collectively more resilient. The CCs arrange sports, art and cultural activities for both refugee and host communities, and encourage greater interactive dialogue in a bid to increase empathy among community members.

Psychosocial support, protection and social cohesion activities for children provided the base of the We Listen to The World with Our Eyes Workshop, organized by TRCS’s Community Centre in Şanlıurfa.

“We Listen to the World with Our Eyes” Workshop in Şanlıurfa

Goal

The 4-week workshop called “We Listen to the World with Our Eyes” aimed at supporting the personal development of children with hearing impairments in their daily and social lives. This was held between 15 March and 16 April. In the workshop, children with hearing impairments learnt, among other things, how to recycle, paint toys, make wooden paintings, and design jewellery. The lack of hearing did nothing to impede the children participating in the workshop; through the smiles on their faces and their happy laughter, the success of the workshop was confirmed in bringing different cultures together and gaining a win for social cohesion.

Objective

1) To enable children with hearing impairments to access social and development services which they cannot reach in their daily lives.

2) To enable participants with different backgrounds to interact, and strengthen their positive social exchanges by providing them an environment without prejudice.
The Workshop proper

This four-week workshop was attended by 10 children; five of whom are CC service users and are encountered in the field visits, and five who are students of the School for Impaired Children. Each session of the workshop was carried out one day of the week, and lasted 5 hours.

In the first session of the workshop, introductions, drama techniques and icebreaker activities were carried out. Here, participants who had not met before got to know each other.

In the second and third sessions, the children were matched to make ceramic paintings together as well as toys from polar fleece. Subsequently they presented these paintings and toys to each other as a gift. In this way, teamwork, one-to-one interaction and dialogue among the children were supported.

In the last session, outdoor activities included a picnic, horse riding, skipping rope and ball games.

Outcomes

✓ Refugee children with hearing disabilities and who have had traumatizing experiences were able to spend time with friends and teachers, and to interact with children from the host community in a safe environment.

✓ Children from the host community were also able to interact with their migrant peers, and establish new friendships in a different social context.

✓ The children’s families were satisfied because their children were able to participate in the activities organized, created and shared not only for them but also with them.

✓ The workshop organizers gained positive feedback and requests to organize more such workshops for different groups.
Lessons learned

Before starting the project, the possibility of encountering biases among participants should be considered. The staff/volunteer who conducts these activities should be aware and plan accordingly. Small workshops dealing with or mitigating prejudice can be conducted, if necessary. In this particular workshop, one of the Turkish children participating was uncomfortable playing with his Syrian peer in the first session. Nonetheless, the icebreaker activities, and especially making toys together, enabled the children to get to know each other and played a role in decreasing biases through joint activity. At the end of the workshop, this particular child became the one who was upset most.

More activities should be carried out for children to provide them an environment to improve their personal and social development. This workshop and the dialogue with the families of participant children have proved the necessity for further workshops planned for children.

Cultures may have different perceptions on what cohesion is; therefore, particular attention to cultural perception should be paid, with studies done as necessary.

Do not forget to click on link (🔗) to see the video of the workshop.

The above mentioned information about the project was provided by Şanlıurfa Community Centre Social Cohesion Activity Officer Gülşen Gergerli Şimşek, and carried out with the full efforts the community centre staff.

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