



NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

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Parent and Children Centers: A safe and natural environment for children and their families by Raed abu Hayyaneh

The development of Jordan's educational system can only be described as dramatic. Jordan has forged a comprehensive, high-quality system to develop the human capital of its citizens. Today there are 3,520 government schools, 2,313 private schools, 48 community colleges, and 30 universities. In Jordan, access to basic education has been emphasized in all of the country's development plans. The government has, as a matter of policy, provided every village and community with 10 or more school-going children with a school. As a result, the rapid spread of facilities has enabled citizens in poor and remote areas to gain access to education.

Save the Children, in cooperation with community-based organizations (CBOs) has developed more than 48 kindergarten classrooms (KGs at CBOs) and 39 classrooms at Ministry of Education schools in the last two years in both urban and remote areas to increase access to education. During the implementation of the program, we recognize that there are groups of children between ages 3 and 6 who still don't have access to early childhood education. The Ministry of Education has established kindergartens at two of their schools; most of the other kindergartens are at private schools. Unfortunately, most families don't have the financial resources necessary to send their children to these private KGs.

In considering alternative solutions for serving children ages 3-5, we established

the Parent and Children Centers (PCCs) at community-based organizations in areas of greatest need. The overarching goal of the PCCs is to improve child development outcomes and readiness for school among preschool children (3-6 years) and to increase parents' capacity to support their older children's development and education (children ages 0-9 years) by providing continuous opportunities for parents to gain awareness, knowledge, and skills in a variety of thematic areas. These areas include: protection and child rights, diversity and tolerance, child development and education, positive parenting and discipline, communication and conflict resolution within and between families, and connecting children with nature.

We provide preschool-aged children (3-6 years) with basic opportunities for learning, development, and acquiring psychosocial skills. Additionally, we work to build sustained capacity among local facilitators to support and communicate effectively with parents around the thematic areas listed above.

Before we begin programming in each area, we conduct a thorough situational analysis mapping and understanding

parental knowledge, attitudes, and practices around child development and education, as well as parenting. This analysis will help us develop effective parenting materials and plan the content of the workshops. The situational analysis will map out community resources and infra-

structure already available to families, which will support our work: parks, playgrounds, other community meeting areas, and other community groups that parents attend. We will also: create a stimulating and engaging environ-

ment in the centers for both young children and parents; renovate and equip the centers with appropriate furniture and materials; consider the space carefully to accommodate the variety of activities intended to be held there; aim for flexibility of space and furniture.

Each PCC will have two trained facilitators who will manage and implement activities for both children and parents. Training will include: management of resources, record keeping, leadership skills, community mobilization, skills, working with children, child development, parenting, connecting children with nature and outdoor activities, and recycling materials for use with children).

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PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

We hold workshops with parents on a regular basis on topics including child development, developmental milestones, activities to help children, health, nutrition, making toys from recycled materials, outdoor programming, and nature. We always suggest activities that parents can do at home with their children. For example, in a workshop on health/nutrition, we provide parents with a good recipe they can try at home and a list of nutritious foods they can incorporate into meals and snacks. In a workshop on nature conservation, we offer parents simple guidelines for responding to children's challenging behavior by spending more time outdoors as a family. Finally, we hold regular community events such as child exhibits, games, festivals, and educational events, e.g., health fairs, cooking demonstrations, toy-making days, and planting. We have already established five PCCs in three regions and will establish more this year.

On January 9, 2011, Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah visited Save the Children's early childhood development program 'Khatawat' or 'Steps' in Amman, as part of her continuous efforts to bring attention to the need for early learning opportunities for children in Jordan and the Middle East region.

"We are honored to have had Queen Rania as our guest at our Khatawat early childhood development program," said Paulette Hassell, co-country director of Save the Children in Jordan. "Her Majesty is an extraordinary champion of early childhood development, and her advocacy for investing in children's early years is critical for the success of these efforts."

While at the Parent Child Center, Her Majesty Queen Rania joined a group of mothers for a story-writing workshop, where mothers were taught how to write stories that help children learn. Through the program, mothers are also shown how to make interactive learning tools for their children using recycled materials from home.

Later, Her Majesty joined in the fun at the center's play area. Creative play is an important part of a young child's learning and development. In the play area, children ages 3 to 5 were painting, holding puppet shows, and role-playing. The play area is a key component of the Parent Child Center model. While

mothers are enjoying learning, children can interact with other children their age. The play area provides access to a protective, age-appropriate, interactive, and child-friendly space.

Raed abu Hayyaneh is a NACC Leadership Team member.

Nuestro Hogar Children's Home

Pifo, Ecuador • AMI, Amigos de la Vida (Friends of Life Foundation)

by Etienne Moine and Laura Briley



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHORS

Eleven children live with their caregivers in the house known as Nuestro Hogar, which means 'Our Home' in Spanish. It opened in 2004 and is located in Pifo, Ecuador, 25 miles outside of the capital city of Ecuador, Quito. Maria del Carmen, who is Ecuadorian, and her husband, Etienne, who is French, have owned this organic farm for 20 years. Maria is a teacher. When her school closed, she and her husband worked together to realize their dream of creating a home in the natural, healing environment of their farm for children 0-4 years of age who are abandoned by their families but may return home after living at AMI or may become adopted. Etienne and Maria strongly feel that the farm work that goes on around the children is fundamental to their healing process. The children see and know that the adults care for the land, the animals, and the plants with

consistency, love, and devotion. They trained the caregivers who are with the children through the inspiration of Dr. Emmi Pikler, founder of an orphanage, the Pikler Institute, in Budapest, Hungary.

The road leading to Nuestro Hogar is adorned with

green fields and gardens and the distant peaks of the Andes are bathed in soft purple hues. Etienne and Maria built a beautiful two-story home of wood and natural materials. It was important for them to create an environment where the children would be in contact with nature day and night. The babies wake up with the sun and go to bed with the sunset.

Since the climate is temperate year-round, the children spend most of their time outdoors. Each day the babies spend 5-6 hours outside in the gardens that have been created with special places for them, so they are in contact with the outdoors and can hear and see the birds, dogs, cows, tractor, and workers on the organic farm. All of this is important in connecting the children with the life all around them.



The older children watch the gardener dig and rake the soil. They even help in planting and gathering food, which they help prepare for their meals. They pay attention to the growing plants. There is time to play on the mounds of sand and the jungle gym. They watch the changes of nature, look at insects, and see how the cows and dogs have their offspring.



The indoors is important as well, and special care has been taken so there are low wooden tables and stools for play and eating. The children's little wooden beds and cubbies are beautifully hand-crafted. Hardwood floors and wood ceiling beams invite you in. Sunlight streams in through the many windows.



It's a beautiful environment in which the children live and are loved.

The aesthetics of the environment, as well as the connection to nature, are important for the children who come to the "home" from situations that were high risk. This natural environment helps them to recover and to incorporate nature in their bodies and souls. It is a first step for them in learning about nature, their own bodies, and what feelings they can have through smells and sounds, and contact with each other and nature. The children learn to take care of themselves, the social environment, and their world. Etienne and Maria are helping these children in preparation for life.



www.fundacionami.org.ec and to learn more about the Pikler approach go to www.pikler.org. You may contact Etienne Moine: etimoine@yahoo.es or Laura Briley: lbriley@dayschoolsok.com.

Etienne and Maria are part of the World Forum's Working Group for Rights of Children Without Families. Their goal is to ensure that all children have the right to live in an environment that is safe, healthy, and supports the growth and development for all children, regardless of their circumstance. They are working tirelessly to help and be a part of the world effort. If you would like to be a part of their effort or would like to help in some way, please contact them. In order to learn more about their work please go to their website:



Early Childcare and Nature Education 2nd European meeting September 2011

Organized by Veldwerk Nederland, the Dutch partner in the worldwide Nature Action Collaborative for young Children (NACC), in collaboration with the European leaders from Scotland (Claire Warden), Denmark (Helle Nebelong), and The Netherlands (Marc Veekamp).



Speakers will include:

- Gjalte Jellesma, president of Boink, Dutch organisations for parents
- Elly Singer, author of the Dutch pedagogic framework for early childcare
- Helle Nebelong, landscape architect, president Danish Playground Association, Vice President of IPA Denmark, member of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team
- Alfred Cybulska, Waldkindergarten Waldmaüse, Berlin

Site visits in The Netherlands

Participants will visit Amersfoort, an old Dutch city that is growing fast; a nature kindergarden; a primary school with a natural playground; and a community-based natural playground. These visits will give participants an overview of current developments in the Netherlands with reflection sessions on the site visits in the nearby forest.

Optional excursion to Germany

Halfway through the week an optional excursion will take participants on a six-hour journey to Berlin, Germany, by train. In Berlin, there is a long tradition of forest groups (day care, schools, and after-school programs). A brief history of "Waldkindergärten," including research on the effect of "Waldkindergärten" on children (playing, learning, health, etc.). Information about and site visits to three different models of "Waldkindergärten" in Berlin:

- The model with a solid base (house) and visits to the wood/nature
- The model with a solid base in the city center, travelling by bus each day to a place in the woods/nature
- The model without its own base or house, and time always spent outdoors.



There will also be visits to some Waldschulen (schools in nature) and projects for young children in dialogue with nature.

For more information, e-mail
info@veldwerk nederland.nl.

Wonder Vitals

Wonder, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members.

Please join us at:

www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature.

The NACC Leadership Team is a core group of early childhood educators, designers, and landscape architects who came together in 2006 with a dream to change the world for young children. They represent six continents across the globe, and serve as key contact points for others around the world who have a desire to improve the lives of young children.

The Leadership Team meets periodically to discuss strategies for increasing NACC's outreach and membership, and to find new ways for all of us to work together to further our common mission.

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The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world's children.