

## 2. Training teachers in areas of armed conflict: basic principles

This manual describes a psychosocial program for teachers in areas of armed conflict. It was developed within the framework of Slovene Philanthropy and carried out in Slovenia with Bosnian refugee teachers. During the war I also worked with teachers in Bosnia. Later, CARE International implemented the program in Kosovo, and in North Caucasus. After the creation of the Foundation 'Together', the program was adapted to post conflict circumstances to be implemented in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Kosovo, North Osetia and Iraq. These programs proved to be an efficient method to both educate and motivate teachers. They, in turn, then created an effective instrument to facilitate capacity building and sustainable school based activities.

Teachers were, in spite of their bad economic and uncertain social position, very enthusiastic about attending training courses. After the training, the level of implementation of acquired knowledge and new ideas was very high. International experts were surprised again and again by teachers' good will, readiness, and capacity to apply a diversity of models of good practice to assist children in distress.

The program is based on the concept that the school and the teachers have important psychosocially protective influence on the present well being, mental health condition and psychosocial functioning of children. They can also positively influence future development for all children in school. These protective factors are even more important for children affected by armed conflict, as they must cope with the nega-

tive and ongoing consequences of the conflict.

The program has four important characteristics. First, the program is *comprehensive*. It is aimed at stimulating a wide range of factors within the normal development of children. It does not narrowly focus only on the consequences of trauma, and strategies for dealing with those consequences.

Therefore, the program is aimed at mobilising all possible protective factors that can be provided by a school and benefits not only children at risk, but all children.

Second, the program is aimed at *mutual support*. It achieves this by promoting contact between the teachers and encourages support of each other. The combination of lectures and group work, as well as the interactive nature of the training, were designed with this goal in mind. The contents of the lectures are close to the knowledge and experiences of the teachers. The lectures are presented in every day language without professional jargon or unnecessary psychological gibberish. Therefore, they also function by providing a common language in which the teachers can discuss, and reflect upon their experiences. The group work is a platform for exchanging experiences between teachers and is where the real work takes place. Teachers learn a lot, if not most, from the experiences of other teachers and it is essential trainers should facilitate this process in order to be successful. Trainers should continuously strive to connect with the teachers.

Third, the program is *interactive*. Teachers play an important part in the construction of the program of seminars. The trainer has

a prepared program, but one that remains open to changes. Often, by the end of the first module, the teachers participating in training are invited to express their aims and goals for the program. In this way, the program becomes easily adapted to both the local needs and the conditions of the teachers.

Fourth, the program is *community based* and encourages schools to cooperate with organisations that can be of assistance, or start new Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's). The program includes the introduction of voluntary work into the school.

This manual describes in detail the philosophy of the program, the training of the trainers, and the training seminars for teachers. It includes descriptions of the content of lectures and suggestions for group work. It describes difficulties, and problematic situations that may occur during the training. It also gives thought to methods for testing the impact of the training, and it describes the potential impact of the program on the community.

### ***The development of this manual***

This book is the result of thirteen years of practical experience in training local professionals and teachers, in times of armed conflicts, and post conflict in former Yugoslavia, Caucasus and Iraq. The programs were well accepted and fruitful in all mentioned regions.

The main lessons learned during these years are:

- programs should be adapted to the local context: the social, economic situation, present circumstances, state of mind of the target groups (teachers, children, parents, etc), the prevailing beliefs, religious, ethnic and cultural traditions;
- the implementers and main actors of the

program should be local persons, who should be prepared for their role; this means that local capacity building should be the leading principle of the program;

- the program should be run in the spirit of mutual respect and awareness that all parties involved contribute with their own: philosophy, knowledge, experience and know how to the developed body of knowledge, towards the dynamic and impact of the program;
- in addition to cognitive and experiential learning, the program should empower the participants and encourage enthusiasm.

### ***The use of the manual***

This manual is intended for people who are interested in developing school and community based programs for the protection of the mental health and psychosocial well being of children. The applicability and usefulness of the described program is not limited to regions affected by armed conflict and post conflict circumstances. It is also appropriate for regions suffering serious social adversities stemming from other causes.

This manual contains two types of information: information that could help aid organisations and trainers to develop and prepare training programs, and information that could be handed out to participants in training courses. The contents presented in this manual can (and should) be adapted to the specific needs of the beneficiaries.

The quality and impact of the program described in this manual depends primarily on how it is brought to life. The design should be conceived and finalised along with local partners. The programme should be flexible and adapted to local circumstances.