

Child Friendly Space — where Children can be Children again

Child Friendly Space (CFS) is an integral part of many of World Vision's disaster relief around the world, providing emotional first aid for children through counseling and structured activities like art, music and play. When children's normal lives are shattered, feeling safe again is an important step in their recovery.

Children are especially vulnerable to violence, forced labour, and trafficking in the wake of disasters and conflicts. World Vision considers emotional support to be just as critical as physical assistance for these children. Even simple activities that involve interacting with other children, processing their feelings, and experiencing structure can be an effective path to healing.

A Safe Haven in Times of Natural Disasters

Last year, central Philippines was devastated by Super Typhoon Haiyan. Disasters of this scale regularly rob children of their childhood. The healing process could take years so it is crucial that it begins as soon as possible.

World Vision launched its first CFS for Typhoon Haiyan survivors on 20 November, 2013 in northern Cebu. Creative activities in CFS filled in what would have otherwise been long, empty days for children who were out of school or still living in temporary shelters. About 45 CFSs were established in the hardest hit communities throughout central Philippines, benefiting nearly 15,000 children.

"CFS is great for parents as well," says Child Protection Specialist Patrick Sooma. "Parents have a chance to relax while their children are playing... they worry that their kids are not safe playing at home where there's debris and construction going on. CFS also gives them a chance to get some work done knowing that their children are safe."

"Children are the most vulnerable groups during conflict and in the aftermath of disasters... and we know the long-term impact of their exposure to traumatic events can be huge if not addressed."

Heather Macleod,
World Vision's Director of
Global Humanitarian Operations



Crislyn Joy A. Felisida/World Vision

Having survived typhoon Bopha, children in Compostela Valley throw paper airplanes in the air as a symbol of their hopes and dreams for the new year.

Women and Young Children Space

Women and Young Children Space (WAYCS) is a special resource World Vision created for lactating mothers and their children under 5 who were affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

Currently, 15 such spaces are in operation and their locations are strategically selected to make sure the spaces are safe, quiet, and capable of providing easy access to water and food for mothers. Trained volunteer health workers are available to provide mothers with necessary training, knowledge and support.

“Where so many have lost their homes, WAYCS is a safe place for mothers and children to live side by side, or for children who have lost their parents to remain within the reassuring environment of teachers, mothers and friends.” says Dr. Yvonne Duque, Child Wellbeing Programme Manager, World Vision Philippines.



“The space helps me take my mind off other worries and focus on my baby and my other children,” says Rowena, “I’ve learnt much about breastfeeding and nutrition at the WAYCS.”



Children draw pictures that show their homes before and after Typhoon Haiyan. Drawing is a good way to help children make sense of what happened to them.



Younger children participate in games and exercise with World Vision staff at a CFS in Tabogon, northern Cebu.

An Escape in War and Conflict Zones

Staring at his plastic toy truck, 4-year-old Saad seems to have forgotten how to play. This poor little boy is among the millions of children in Syria who have been forced out of their homes due to the ongoing civil war. The price of war is high, especially for Syria, as the country faces the risk of a lost generation of Syrian children.

Sadly, all these children have experienced many losses. They have lost homes and loved ones; and many have lost the opportunity to get an education. Most, if not all, have lost their sense of safety. Only a few are able to hold on to the hope for a brighter future.

To protect these children from further harm, and restore a sense of normalcy and routine they lack being away from home, World Vision is providing different activities and support in the region. At the CFS, refugee children can engage in fun activities and receive healing from emotional scars. Those struggling to catch up with school, can attend remedial classes which also aim at preparing new arrivals for their enrolment in local schools.



In Jordan, World Vision funds a remedial school attended by Syrian refugee children and poor Jordanians. The organisation also pays for transportation.



This Syrian refugee child received a new pair of glasses at World Vision’s remedial school, where children are also given a meal before they are released for the day.

A Safety Net against Child Trafficking

As one of World Vision's most well-known innovations, CFS is not limited to disaster or conflict zones. In Bangladesh, World Vision provides a refuge for children trapped with their mothers in the sex-trade environment. Many of these women were tricked by friends into joining brothels. The madams of these brothels have much power and also target children.

A child's life in a brothel is unimaginable. They are often left unattended. "Most of the children of sex workers are different from normal children. They experience great stress," says Provash Chandra Biswas, Director for World Vision Bangladesh's Child Protection Programme, "They see everything."

At the CFS, teacher Dipshikha makes sure that children who arrive in the morning are tidily dressed. Their day is filled with singing, exercising, learning and playing. The day winds down around 5pm and the kids go back to their moms, who see Dipshikha as a wonderful sister that treats their children like her own.

Dipshikha tells the children a story during nap time. Children at the CFS see her as their second mom.



Every day, children who live with their mothers in a brothel, walk across the street to learn, sing and play at the CFS. Here the children sing the national anthem with gusto.



Research Shows Effectiveness of CFS

Little research was done on CFS until last year when World Vision and Columbia University worked together on more structured evaluations of CFS programmes. The study looked at the impact of CFS among Congolese refugees in a refugee camp in western Uganda. Significantly, regular CFS attendees were found to be able to sustain their psychosocial well-being, while children who did not attend CFS showed a marked deterioration.



One key aim of CFS is to teach children about their rights so that they can participate in protecting themselves.

Other key findings:

1. CFS were widely utilised by children (Over 73% of children aged 6-12 have attended CFS)
2. Parents and caregivers of CFS attendees were found to be under less stress
3. Knowledge of community support and referral mechanisms improved over time
4. Attendance at CFS strengthened internal assets (e.g. positive values and social skills) and/or external assets (e.g. support and empowerment) of children